

Feds nominate Ohlone tiger beetle for endangered species protections

By **ROBIN MUSITELLI**
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — A tiny but fierce beetle found only in Santa Cruz County was proposed for federal endangered species protections Friday, a victory beetle fans say is long overdue.

The Ohlone tiger beetle was nominated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as endangered, meaning it is likely to become extinct in the foreseeable future.

The nomination makes it a near certainty the beetle will be listed later this year.

"Among scientists, the agreement is unanimous," said Grey Hayes, an ecologist who spearheaded the push to list the beetle.

The proposed listing took seven years, two petitions and a lawsuit. In the meantime, the beetle starred in a battle over a housing development in Scotts Valley.

Santa Cruz biologist Randall Morgan discovered the beetle in 1987. Scientists estimate there are only five populations. Each, in native grassland on coastal terraces in Santa Cruz County, occupies less than five acres.

The half-inch-long, metallic-

green colored beetle is a ferocious and agile predator that stalks insect prey along trails, seizing its prey with powerful sickle-shaped jaws. Even their larvae are predatory, lunging and seizing passing invertebrate prey from slanting burrows along trails.

The tiger beetle evolved along pathways made by other animals. The species may have once extended from southwestern San Mateo County to northwestern Monterey

County, scientists say.

But development and the invasion of non-native vegetation have reduced the species to the five known sites and somewhere between 2,000 to 10,000 adult beetles, according to Peter Galvin of the Center for Biological Diversity.

The tiger beetle moved into the headlines last year during the fight over a proposed housing development at Glenwood Meadow in Scotts Valley. Developer Chop Keenan denounced the beetle as nothing more than a "common bug" while Hayes and opponents of the

housing plan worked to get the beetle added to the endangered species list.

Even after Keenan's plan was defeated at the polls, fans of the tiger

beetle continued their fight.

The first petition filed in 1993 to protect the beetle was rejected by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service because not enough was known about its habitat. After two more years of study, Hayes submitted a new proposal in 1997.

Fish and Wildlife officials did not act within the one-year time requirement, so the Berkeley-based Center for Biological Diversity and the Sierra Club filed suit last September to compel the government to list the beetle under the U.S. Endan-

gered Species Act.

The lawsuit prompted the proposed listing, Galvin said Friday. "It's unfortunate but the reality of natural resource management is that often times these kinds of actions are needed to move things forward."

Written comments on the proposal to list the tiger beetle as endangered will be accepted until April 11 and can be sent to the field supervisor, Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office, 2493 Portola Road, Suite B, Ventura, CA 93003.

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