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ENDANGERED SPECIES

FWS delivers split decision on small West Coast mammal

Michael Doyle, E&E News reporter

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Sierra Nevada fisher. Photo credit: FWS

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The Sierra Nevada fisher will received Endangered Species Act protections. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Fish and Wildlife Service today extended full Endangered Species Act protections to the southern Sierra Nevada population of fisher, a weasel-like mammal that's long stirred debate.

In a new approach, the federal agency designated the fisher's southern Sierra Nevada population in California as endangered, while distinguishing it from a Northern California/southern Oregon population.

(I use
she/her/hers
pronouns)

"Of particular significance regarding implications for the [fisher's] status were loss and fragmentation of habitat resulting from high-severity wildfire and wildfire suppression, ... climate change, and tree mortality from drought, disease, and insect infestations," FWS stated.

*"Outside is
the best side"*

In 2014, the agency had proposed to list as threatened all the fisher subpopulations in Washington state, Oregon and California known at that time. The proposal was later withdrawn.

Following a lawsuit brought by the Center for Biological Diversity, FWS last year proposed listing as threatened the extant subpopulations with unique genetic characteristics in California and southern Oregon ([Greenwire](#), Nov. 6, 2019).

Citing the "numerous comments received during multiple comment periods over the last 5 years," FWS now says it has "again reevaluated" its approach.

The final rule to be published tomorrow in the *Federal Register* carves out the Southern Sierra Nevada population for protection, and as endangered rather than threatened. The Northern California/Southern Oregon fisher is now deemed a distinct population segment (DPS) that FWS says "does not warrant listing."

"The concept of the possible need for different management between the two [segments] was further strengthened, in part, by the recent limited introduction of non-California/Oregon fisher genes into the [Northern California/southern Oregon] subpopulation via interbreeding," FWS stated.

The fisher is a medium-sized, light brown to dark blackish-brown animal from the same family that also includes weasels, mink and martens.

"While the magnitude of the threats ... have not changed substantially from our consideration of them in the 2019 [proposal]," FWS said, "what has changed in this analysis is the consideration of their distribution across the ranges of the two separate DPSs."