

FRIENDS of BLACKWATER

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has just announced their intent to remove all federal protection from the endangered West Virginia Northern flying squirrel. Twenty-nine environmental protection groups in the "SOS -- Save Our Squirrel" Coalition, and several world- renowned scientists, have challenged the Service's science and conclusions. Their comments state that the Service has not measured the population of the flying squirrel, and has not analyzed major threats to the species' high mountain habitat -- especially climate change. The environmental groups say they will go to court to protect the squirrel from extinction.

The groups say that the Fish and Wildlife Service is lying in claiming that the squirrel population has gone from 10 individuals to 1,200. Comments to Fish and Wildlife from environmental groups documented that one third of the captured squirrels are recaptures, reducing the list to 650 squirrels captured over 23 years. With a life span of 3 to 4 years, in fact most of the captured squirrels are now dead. The Fish and Wildlife Service has no idea what the squirrel population is now, stated West Virginia University Professor Emeritus Robert Leo Smith in March of 2008, in a paper titled "A Critique of the Proposed Delisting of the West Virginia Northern Flying squirrel." All climate change models show decline for the northern hardwood/ red spruce forest that the West Virginia northern flying squirrel calls home. In a report in May 2008, the General Accountability Office's review of the proposed rule stated that the Fish and Wildlife failed to follow their own recovery plan for the squirrel.

"The delisting of the West Virginia northern flying squirrel appears to be part of the Bush administration's plan to gut the Endangered Species Act by keeping rare species off the list, undercutting protections for some on the list, and removing others from the list altogether," said Judy Rodd, Director of Friends of Blackwater. "In addition, the Bush administration is moving to change the ESA regulations so that that Fish and Wildlife scientists will no longer advise federal agencies on endangered species impacts of their projects and climate change will not be considered," Rodd added.

Groups which sent comments to the Fish and Wildlife Service objecting to the delisting of the flying squirrel under the umbrella of the Save Our Squirrel Campaign are: Friends of Blackwater, Center for Biological Diversity, Heartwood, The Wilderness Society, the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, the West Virginia E-Council, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, Appalachian Voices, the Southern Appalachian Biodiversity Project, the Southern Environmental Law Center, the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition, WildLaw, the Sierra Club Appalachian Region, Virginia Forest Watch, National Wildlife Federation, Blue Heron Environmental Network, Endangered Species Coalition, American Lands, Potomac Valley Audubon Society, Sustainable Living for West Virginia, Missouri Forest Alliance, Stewards of the Potomac Highlands, Kentucky Heartwood, the Maryland Conservation Council, the West Virginia Rivers Coalition, La Paix Herb Farm , Friends of the Lower Greenbrier River, Plateau Action Network, and the WV Citizens Action Group.

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