

Longfin smelt not endangered in California, regulators say

April 9 2009, By Mike Taugher

Longfin smelt in the San Francisco Bay-Delta do not warrant protection under the federal endangered species law, regulators said Wednesday.

The fish are already protected under California state law, but the decision to reject another layer of environmental protection angered environmentalists who said the fish is disappearing in California and could be in similarly bad shape in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska.

"I don't think their conclusion is credible," said Tina Swanson, executive director of the Bay Institute, one of three environmental groups that asked for the listing in 2007. "It's a tragedy."

A similar attempt to add the fish to the list of [endangered species](#) was rejected in 1994 when federal biologists determined that the fish was doing fine in parts of a range that extends from the Bay Area to Alaska. In 2007, environmentalists asked the U.S. Fish and [Wildlife Service](#) to determine that the Bay Area population was distinct from the rest of the population and should be protected.

If it were listed, Swanson said state and federal water managers could be forced to allow more water to flow into the bay instead of through pumps that deliver water to parts of the Bay Area, San Joaquin Valley, the Central Coast and Southern California.

Longfin smelt, a cousin to the more severely threatened Delta smelt, is protected under California's endangered species law. New state rules that

went into effect in recent months limit Delta water pumping somewhat to protect the longfin, but Swanson said the federal law could force water managers to allow more water to flow into the bay.

Despite its decision to not protect the Bay Area population under the federal law, the [Fish and Wildlife Service](#) said it would open a broader look at the status of species from California to Alaska, a review that could end with the agency adding a layer of protection for the fish throughout its range.

"They look at the species in the state of California," Fish and Wildlife Service spokesman Al Donner said. "We don't have the luxury of looking just at the state."

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