

Plight of imperiled Montana insect draws lawsuit

April 16 2015, by Matthew Brown

Wildlife advocates asked a judge Wednesday to force federal officials to decide if a rare aquatic insect that's found only in Montana's Glacier National Park should be protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Western glacier stoneflies were first identified by scientists in 1963. They live in streams fed by cold water from glaciers in northwest Montana.

Those glaciers are predicted to vanish by 2030—in part because of warmer temperatures due to climate change—and researchers say the stoneflies also could disappear.

In a Wednesday lawsuit, the Center for Biological Diversity said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service failed to follow through on a 2011 finding that protections might be needed for the insects.

The group asked U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan in Washington, D.C., to declare the agency violated federal law by not issuing a final determination on whether the species should be listed as threatened or endangered.

Even if the group prevails, it's uncertain what can be done to preserve the insects.

"The difficult thing about listing a species based on climate change is we don't really know what to do about it," said Joe Giersch, a U.S.

Geological Survey scientist.

When Giersch and other researchers recently looked for the insects in six streams that stoneflies historically occupied, they found them in only one.

There have been preliminary discussions among biologists about raising glacier [stoneflies](#) in laboratories and seeding different streams with the species. Giersch said it's unclear if the insects could survive because the new streams likely would be warmer than those with native glacier stonefly populations.

Center for Biological Diversity scientist Tierra Curry said wildlife officials have a chance to raise the profile of [climate change](#)'s impact on species around the globe with their decision on the stonefly.

"This stonefly is a story people can wrap their heads around," she said. "It's a specific species in a specific park that tells the story of what's happening around the globe right now."

Fish and Wildlife Service spokesman Ryan Moehring said the agency does not comment on pending litigation.

The lawsuit also seeks a decision on several fish species in the southeastern U.S. that Curry says are threatened largely by water pollution.

© 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Plight of imperiled Montana insect draws lawsuit (2015, April 16) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-04-plight-imperiled-montana-insect-lawsuit.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.