

# Feds failed to protect habitat of endangered bee found in Illinois, lawsuit says

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Image credit: Wikipedia.

Federal agencies failed to follow the law in protecting the habitat of an endangered bumblebee that continues to be found in Illinois despite major population loss nationwide, according to a lawsuit filed Tuesday in Washington, D.C., by an environmentalist group.

The [lawsuit](#) brought by the Natural Resources Defense Council accused the Interior Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of violating parts of the Endangered Species Act. The act requires the agencies to identify and preserve habitats supporting species that are at risk.

The departments were supposed to do this within a year of listing the rusty patched bumblebee as an endangered species on Jan. 11, 2017, but

they have not, according to the lawsuit.

"Habitat loss is a serious threat to the rusty patched bumblebee," the lawsuit said. "The species is predominantly dependent on grassland [habitat](#), which has declined by 99.9 percent since European settlement of North America."

When the government declares certain habitats critical for an [endangered species](#), it can implement stricter processes to review any action, such as construction, that could harm the lands, said Rebecca Riley, a legal director at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

"If we are going to save these species from extinction, we need to save their habitats," Riley said Tuesday.

The Justice Department, which handles lawsuits filed against [federal agencies](#), did not respond Tuesday to a request for comment.

Rusty patched bumblebees used to be a common sight in 28 states in the Midwest and Northeast, but their numbers have plummeted by 87 percent over the last two decades, according to the lawsuit and wildlife experts. Now, the bee lives in only 8 percent of its historical range, which includes parts of Illinois.

The species, known for a distinctive reddish line on the backside of workers and males, has been spotted mostly in the northern part of the state, along the Fox River corridor and in suburban areas around Chicago, at Illinois Beach State Park and in Cook County forest preserves.

Students at Loyola University's ecological campus in McHenry County found the bee feeding on flowers in the summer of 2017, an exciting discovery that inspired greater efforts to document different [species](#) on

the land.

Students did not see the bee again this summer, but that doesn't necessarily mean the pollinator had left, said Roberta Lammers-Campbell, a lecturer emerita at the campus.

"I know people spotted it in the areas around us. We just didn't have people spending a lot of time watching for it. We didn't really monitor for it real strongly," Lammers-Campbell said.

The Fish and Wildlife Service reported an increase in overall sightings in 2018, including new locations in Virginia and Iowa. The agency attributed the rise to increased awareness and efforts to find it. Last year, reports were made identifying more than 300 rusty patched bumblebees.

The government has 60 days to respond to the lawsuit, Riley said.

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