

Protection for Sierra's 3-toed woodpecker sought

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

The black-backed woodpecker, a native of the Sierra Nevada, has just three toes, a yen for burned trees, and tremendous potential to shake up California logging rules.

Environmental groups recently filed a petition to protect the woodpecker under the state Endangered Species Act. The Center for Biological Diversity and the John Muir Project at Earth Island Institute say the species may go extinct because California doesn't have enough burned forests, the bird's preferred habitat.

If the petition succeeds, private forest owners who experience a fire could have a harder time harvesting burned trees to produce lumber, a practice known as salvage logging.

California currently allows salvage logging under streamlined regulations so property owners can harvest the wood before it rots.

The environmental groups argue this deprives the black-backed woodpecker of essential habitat. The bird prefers to nest in burned trees, and feeds on insects that attack trees after a fire.

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