

Environmentalists sue USFS to not log Angora burn area

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Environmentalists are suing the U.S. Forest Service to try to block logging at Lake Tahoe that the agency says is needed to help guard against another wildfire like the one that destroyed 254 homes three years ago.

In addition to removing downed logs that hamper firefighting efforts, the Forest Service says the Angora project will help speed regeneration of the forest and restore wildlife habitat across about half of the 3,000 acres that burned on the southwest edge of South Lake Tahoe in June 2007.

But the Earth Island Institute and Center for Biological Diversity say the logging would do more harm than good.

They say the project would do little to reduce fire threats but would disrupt the natural regeneration of the forest and eliminate about 70 percent of the last suitable habitat for the rare black-backed woodpecker across the entire 230 square miles of the national forest surrounding Lake Tahoe.



The burn area from Angora Ridge on Feb. 13.

Photo/Kathryn

Reed

The Forest Service's own research shows the woodpecker is highly dependent on burned forest where beetles and other insects are plentiful, especially where the fire burned intensely, as was the case across about a third of the Angora site, the lawsuit said.

The agency designated the bird the "management indicator species" for post-fire habitat throughout the Sierra Nevada in 2007. Last September, the Center for Biological Diversity and the institute's John Muir Project petitioned the California Fish and Game Commission to declare it threatened or endangered under the state's Endangered Species Act.

"If the black-backed woodpecker is going to survive here in California, we can't keep logging its habitat. And this is exactly the kind of habitat it needs," said Justin Augustine, a staff attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity who helped prepare the lawsuit filed on Friday in U.S. District Court in Sacramento.

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