

Charges of neglectful oversight of logging on private lands

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

California's regulation of logging on private land has run afoul of state law as a result of recent budget cuts, a coalition of environmental groups claims.

In a letter last week to John Laird, secretary of the state Natural Resources Agency, the groups charge that a \$1.5 million cut to the Department of Fish and Game put the state in violation of laws intended to protect wildlife and habitat.

The budget cut was imposed by former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger shortly before he left office, and continued by Gov. Jerry Brown. It slashed a Fish and Game program set up to determine whether logging harms sensitive wildlife, including salmon, owls and other species.

Logging on private forestland is regulated by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. The agency is required to consult with Fish and Game biologists on the impact of logging on wildlife. But because of budget cuts, Fish and Game has fewer people, and these consultations aren't happening in many cases.

"We need Fish and Game oversight," said Justin Augustine, an attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. "It's required by law, and it's not happening."

The state has 30 days to respond to the complaint, he said, and a lawsuit may follow. Eleven other groups joined the letter, including the Sierra Club, Federation of Fly Fishers and Defenders of Wildlife. The budget cuts hit hard in the

Sierra Nevada and Cascade ranges, where clear-cutting remains common and has the potential to damage wildlife and water quality.

Read the whole story