

Conservationists appeal president's forest plan

WASHINGTON (AP) — Environmentalists today appealed a federal court ruling that upheld President Clinton's Northwest forest plan, saying the logging strategy would cause as many as 20 old-growth-dependent species to go extinct.

The northern spotted owl has a one-in-six chance of going extinct under the president's plan, the Native Forest Council said in the legal briefs filed today in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco.

Twenty other vertebrate species "more likely than not" would disappear as a result of continued logging, the court papers allege in the case against the Clinton administration.

The appeal does not specify which species would die off, but government scientists in preparing the plan identified several mollusk and salamander species as the most at risk.

"The central issue in this case is whether defendants may lawfully manage the nation's forest resources so as to drive the spotted owl and many other species to extinction," said the group, which is based in Eugene.

"It is ... beyond dispute that the plan knowingly causes or allows the extinction of vertebrate species Using the government's own species' survival assumptions, it is certain that some vertebrate species will be eradicated," the appeal said.

Several timber industry groups earlier filed an appeal in the same court challenging Clinton's plan on the basis it doesn't allow enough logging.

David Shilton, a lawyer han-

dling the case for the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division, said he had not yet reviewed the brief and had no immediate comment.

The conservationists said the forest plan is flawed further because it fails to consider another circuit's ruling under review by the U.S. Supreme Court that weakens federal protection of threatened species on private lands.

The narrower interpretation of the Endangered Species Act adopted by the Washington, D.C.-based 10th Circuit makes it necessary to impose more stringent protection on national forests, the appeal said.

U.S. District Judge William Dwyer of Seattle upheld Clinton's plan late last year and lifted a nearly 4-year-old injunction blocking logging on millions of acres of national forests in Oregon, Washington and northern California.

The appeal says the administration violated the National Environmental Policy Act by failing to consider the "full range" of options, which the conservationists say should have included a "no-cut alternative," effectively banning commercial logging on all national forests in the region.

The council said government scientists ignored a new population study in 1992 showing the owl's population in a steeper rate of decline than earlier feared. But more importantly, the council said the scientists set a survival standard too low to ensure the recovery of the owl or continued existence of more than 100 species.

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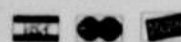
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