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News digest



Environmentalists sue over proposed timber sale

1 TUCSON, Ariz. — Environmentalists want the federal courts to block a proposed timber sale that could harvest 31 million board-feet of timber on the Mogollon Rim.

The Center for Biological Diversity filed a lawsuit Wednesday in U.S. District Court after having lost an administrative appeal

filed in November with the U.S. Forest Service's regional supervisor in Albuquerque, N.M.

The suit seeks to block the proposed 8,000-acre Baca timber sale in the Sitgreaves National Forest. Opponents say the Forest Service has proposed logging thousands of mature and old-growth trees within the Black Mesa Ranger District.

The center contends that as much as 60 percent of the volume logged is to come from trees over 16 inches in diameter.

Environmentalists believe that doing so would harm habitat for the Northern goshawk, which is not listed as endangered or threatened. The area also provides habitat for the Mexican spotted owl, which is endangered.

NAACP boycott to continue despite flag compromise

2 COLUMBIA, S.C. — A bill to remove the Confederate flag from the Capitol dome gained final House approval Thursday over opposition from an unlikely alliance of blacks and ardently pro-flag whites.

Under the measure, approved, 62-48, the flag would be moved to a Confederate soldier monument on the Capitol grounds. The measure now goes back to the Senate to consider changes made by the House.

Black legislators and the NAACP argued the flag is still being given too prominent a place. The NAACP refused to call off its tourism boycott of South Carolina.

"This issue has not been completely resolved," said James

Gallman, state president of the NAACP. "We accept partial victory."

Pro-flag groups were unhappy, too. Keep It Flying said: "The House leadership has just finished a two-day lap dance for the Chamber of Commerce," which also wanted the flag lowered. And the Southern Legal Resource Center said legislators had bowed to "anti-flag bigots."

Judges question both sides in Elian hearing

3 ATLANTA — Three federal appeals judges listened skeptically to both sides in the Elian Gonzalez case Thursday, questioning whether a 6-year-old boy can comprehend an asylum application and whether it's in his best interest to be raised in a communist country.

With the chants of sidewalk demonstrators audible in the packed courtroom, the judges' persistent questioning of lawyers for the government, Elian's Miami relatives and his father pushed the hearing to an hour and 20 minutes, double its scheduled length.

The panel of the 11th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, one step below the Supreme Court, said it would take weeks to decide whether Elian is mature enough to seek asylum despite the father's wishes to take him back to Cuba.

Circuit Judge Charles Wilson, the panel's only Clinton appointee, peppered lawyers for the Miami relatives about the boy's ability to understand complex questions on an asylum application they filed for him.

"I'm sure Elian Gonzalez is a very bright and intelligent 6-year-old, but he didn't even have the ability to sign his last name on the asylum petition," Wilson said.

Filipino computer student surfaces in 'Love Bug' case

4 MANILA, Philippines — A computer student sought by investigators in the "Love Bug" virus case emerged from hiding Thursday to say he may have accidentally released the malicious program that disrupted computer systems around the world.

Onel A. de Guzman wore dark glasses and covered his face with a handkerchief as he met reporters, declining to say whether he wrote the virus but conceding "youthful exuberance" may have been to blame.

The program released last week sent a flood of e-mails with the subject line "ILOVE YOU" speeding through computer systems worldwide. Opening the attachment destroyed saved files, and sent the virus along to other addresses in the user's e-mail file. Experts say the rogue program may cost up to \$10 billion, mostly from lost productivity.

College officials have said de Guzman helped develop programs that may have been combined to produce the e-mail virus. De Guzman's lawyer, Rolando Quimbo, said his client had no intention of meeting with investigators, and if de Guzman is subpoenaed, he would exercise his right against self-incrimination and keep quiet.

The Associated Press

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