

Los Angeles Times: Until Court Rules, U.S. Wildlife Unit Won't Allow Killing of Endangered Species in Land Exchanges

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Until Court Rules, U.S. Wildlife Unit Won't Allow Killing of Endangered Species in Land Exchanges

From a Times Staff Writer

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Pending a final court decision, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has stopped issuing controversial permits that allow landowners to kill endangered species or destroy their habitat in exchange for setting aside land elsewhere.

U.S. District Court Judge Emmett Sullivan issued a one-page court order Sept. 30 granting a motion by Spirit of the Sage Council and other environmental groups challenging the permits. But he gave no details on exactly what the groups had won, instead saying a final memorandum would follow.

"I'm elated, and of course I'm waiting to hear more," said Leeona Klippstein, founder and director of Spirit of the Sage Council.

Michelle Morgan, the biologist who heads the exchange program, declined to comment until the final memorandum.

The Fish and Wildlife Service stopped approving the permits Oct. 9. "It's difficult to know how to proceed," said Morgan.

There are several exchange applications pending in California, including a 75-year plan in Riverside County that is linked to massive highway and development plans. Riverside County's plan could create a 500,000-acre preserve but would eliminate protections for species on 500,000 to 700,000 acres elsewhere.

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