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Conservation organization WildEarth Guardians and six other environmental and animal protection groups filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration over changes it made to the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The nonprofit law firm Earthjustice filed the lawsuit on behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, National Parks Conservation Association, WildEarth Guardians and the Humane Society of the United States.

“Nothing in these new rules helps wildlife, period,” EarthJustice attorney Kristen Boyles said in a statement. “Instead, these regulatory changes seek to make protection and recovery of threatened and endangered species harder and less predictable.”

The lawsuit alleges the administration “failed to publicly disclose and analyze the harms and impacts of these rules,” in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). It argues the administration inserted changes into the final rules that “were never made public and not subject to public comment, cutting the American people out of the decision-making process.”

The groups also argue the administration violated the ESA by “unreasonably changing requirements” for compliance with Section 7, a provision of the ESA that requires federal agencies to ensure that actions they authorize do not jeopardize the existence of any species listed, or destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat of any listed species.

The groups said the lawsuit is the first in a series of legal attacks planned against the rule changes. They also filed an intent to sue this week aimed at challenging the Trump administration’s new rules to Section 4 of the ESA, which enables regulators to include economic considerations - and potential revenue losses - when deciding whether or not to list a new species. The groups will also target a provision of the new ESA rules that eliminates automatic protections for newly-listed threatened species.

“The new rules move the Endangered Species Act dangerously away from its grounding in sound science that has made the Act so effective - opening the door to political decisions couched as claims that threats to species are too uncertain to address,” Sierra Club staff attorney Karimah Schoenhut said. “In the face of the climate crisis, the result of this abandonment of responsibility will be extinction.”

The U.S. Department of the Interior’s Fish and Wildlife Services Department and the Commerce Department’s National Marine Fisheries Service unveiled the revisions to the ESA the week of Aug. 12, drawing rebukes from environmentalists and conservationists from across the country.

“The revisions finalized with this rulemaking fit squarely within the President’s mandate of easing the regulatory burden on the American public, without sacrificing our species’ protection and recovery goals,” U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross said in a statement. “These changes were subject to a robust, transparent public process, during which we received significant public input that helped us finalize these rules.”

The rule changes were first announced in July 2018, and drew some 800,000 public comments against the proposed changes, according to data from the Sierra Club . Over a hundred members of Congress
and
34 U.S. senators
, including U.S. Sens. Tom Udall (D-N.M.) and Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.), voiced opposition to

the rule changes in letters to the Department of the Interior. Ten state Attorneys General and the District of Columbia also
expressed opposition
to the rule changes.

At least two states - California and Massachusetts - have pledged to sue the administration over the finalized rules.

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