

Wildlife officials review protected areas

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will amend decisions regarding the habitat of seven endangered species made by a disgraced California official. Wildlife regulators notified the House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Nick J. Rahall II, D-W.Va., it may reinstate the federal protection status for several endangered species, the Los Angeles Times reported Wednesday. Former Deputy Assistant Interior Secretary Julie MacDonald made the controversial decisions during her tenure despite her lack of training in natural sciences. Rahall issued a statement Tuesday saying MacDonald "should never have been allowed near the endangered species program." The allegations are part of a larger examination of alleged "incompetence at the highest levels of management within the Interior Department," Rahall's statement said. MacDonald decreased the protected habitat of one species, the arroyo toad, by 93 percent and reduced protected land from 4.1 million acres to 450,000 acres for the threatened California red-legged frog, the Times said. Federal wildlife officials said decisions regarding protected habitat areas would be made within a year.

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