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Action Alert: Help Save the Black-Backed Woodpecker - July 23, 2013



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*The following message from our friends at the John Muir Project and Center for Biological Diversity

Urge the California Fish & Wildlife Commission to List the Black-backed Woodpecker as Threatened under the California Endangered Species Act



The Black-backed Woodpecker depends upon post-fire habitat created by higher-intensity fire in dense, mature conifer forests, and it is one of the rarest and most imperiled native bird species in California. Due to decades of fire suppression, post-fire logging, and forest “thinning” (logging) policies, the suitable habitat for this species has declined dramatically over the last several decades, and now only about 600 pairs remain in California’s forests—almost all in the Sierra Nevada region. Currently, no meaningful protections exist for this species on public or private lands in California, and high quality habitat is being clear-cut—even in the middle of nesting season when chicks are in the nest, before they can fly away. For example, the U.S. Forest Service is currently proposing to clear-cut over one-third of the highest quality nesting habitat on national forest lands in the Sierra Nevada region, selling the public timber to logging companies in order to enhance the Forest Service’s budget.

What you can do to help:

Please write an email message to the California Fish & Wildlife Commission urging the Commissioners to list the Black-backed Woodpecker as “Threatened” under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). Email messages must be sent to the Commission before 5 p.m., Friday, July 26, 2013, and must be sent to: fgc@fgc.ca.gov.

Come to the August 7, 2013 (Wednesday) meeting of the Commission, where they plan to make the final vote on whether to list the Black-backed Woodpecker under the California ESA, and let the Commissioners know what you think. The meeting begins at 8:30 a.m., and will be held at Embassy Suites, 333 Madonna Road in San Luis Obispo. We will have “Protect the Black-backed Woodpecker” t-shirts available, and each person will be allowed to speak for up to 3 minutes.

Here are some talking points for your emails to the Commission and for comments on Aug. 7th:

The Commission should list the Black-backed Woodpecker as “threatened” under the California Endangered Species Act. This species is one of the rarest and most imperiled birds in the state.

- The Black-backed Woodpecker is one of the rarest birds in California, and there are no meaningful protections for its suitable habitat currently on public or private lands. Due to

fire suppression, post-fire logging, and large-scale “mechanical thinning” logging operations, suitable habitat for this species has declined dramatically since the early 20th century.

- The Black-backed Woodpecker is a “management indicator species”, or bellwether, for an entire group of other wildlife species that depends upon post-fire habitat created by higher-intensity wildland fire in conifer forests in California. This habitat, known as “snag forest habitat”, is more than four times rarer than old-growth forest, and supports levels of native biodiversity and species richness similar to, or higher than, old-growth.
- The higher-intensity fire areas, upon which Black-backed Woodpeckers depend, have always been a natural part of the fire regimes in conifer forests of California, along with low/moderate-intensity fire areas. Currently, most fires are predominantly low/moderate-intensity, so the higher-intensity fire areas needed by Black-backed Woodpeckers are extremely rare and important for their survival.
- The Black-backed Woodpecker is one of only two woodpecker species in North America that has only three toes, instead of four. This adaptation, along with unique body proportions, gives this species the ability to strike the wood of fire-killed trees much harder than other species, allowing the woodpecker to feed upon the larvae of its primary prey: wood-boring beetles, which are deep in the wood of recently killed trees. The Black-backed Woodpecker has also evolved to be camouflaged against the charred bark of recently fire-killed trees—giving it an advantage it does not have in unburned forest.
- Most woodpecker species cannot excavate a nest cavity in recently fire-killed trees because the wood is too hard, but the Black-backed Woodpecker can. And, the Black-backed Woodpecker creates a new nest cavity every year, leaving the old nest cavities for other woodpecker species, as well as other cavity-nesting species that cannot create their own homes, such as mountain bluebirds, wrens, nuthatches, as well as flying squirrels. In this way, the Black-backed Woodpecker is an ecologically-vital “keystone species”, creating essential habitat for many other wildlife species in the forest.

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