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Endangered Species Protections Sought for Three Rare Oregon, California Fish

PORTLAND, Ore.— The Center for Biological Diversity today [petitioned](#) the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect three dwindling fish species in Goose Lake under the Endangered Species Act.

Petitions were submitted for the Goose Lake sucker, Goose Lake lamprey and Goose Lake tui chub — freshwater fish who live only in the Goose Lake Basin in south central Oregon and northeastern California.

“These remarkable Goose Lake fish have adapted to a challenging environment and periodic droughts, but without protections they can’t survive the ravages of climate change, cattle grazing, and irrigation pumps,” said Jeff Miller, a senior conservation advocate at the Center. “With increasing competition for water from livestock and agriculture, Endangered Species Act protections are critical to making sure these native Goose Lake fish survive.”

Goose Lake is a large, slightly alkaline lake. There are eight native fish species in the basin, four of which are endemic and spend at least part of their life cycles in the lake. Goose Lake fish have suffered severe declines since 2007 because of drought conditions worsened by water withdrawals for livestock grazing and agriculture, as well as climate change.

The main threats to Goose Lake fish are water diversions, habitat damage from livestock, and dams, roads and culverts that block spawning migration into tributaries. Goose Lake fish are also declining because of predation and competition from invasive fish.

The Goose Lake lamprey has a round oral disk, lacks jaws, scales or paired fins, and reaches up to 1 foot in length. Adult lampreys live for a year or two in the lake preying on other fish. They migrate up the lake’s tributaries during spring for spawning in clean gravel riffles. Young lampreys require muddy backwater habitats and spend four to six years rearing in tributaries.

The Goose Lake sucker is an isolated subspecies of the Sacramento sucker, living only in the Goose Lake basin. Suckers feed mostly on algae and diatoms. Adults reach a little over 1 foot in length and spawn during the spring in tributary streams. Goose Lake suckers were once fairly common but declined catastrophically from 2007 to 2022.

The Goose Lake tui chub is an isolated subspecies who lives only in the Goose Lake basin and possibly the upper Pit River. Tui chubs feed on a variety of aquatic invertebrates. Adults can reach about 9 inches in length. Goose Lake tui chubs were historically numerous in the lake but declined severely from 2007 to 2022 and weren’t found in tributaries where they had previously been abundant.

Under a 1995 conservation plan, landowners, state and federal agencies, conservation organizations and universities have worked to improve conditions for native fish and conduct fisheries, habitat and genetic analyses in the Goose Lake basin. Restoration projects such as fish passage, livestock fencing, and road and habitat improvements — mostly to benefit another imperiled fish species — haven’t been enough to overcome the growing threats to native fish.

Most of Goose Lake’s tributaries used by native fish for spawning flow through private lands in their lower reaches, where agricultural and cattle grazing uses divert water and harm stream and riparian habitat. Public lands management in Fremont National Forest in southern Oregon and Modoc National Forest in northern California hasn’t completely addressed harms to fish habitat.

Freshwater ecosystems across the United States are highly imperiled, and one in three freshwater fish species face extinction globally. Learn more [here](#).

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.7 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

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