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Conservation Group seeks protection for Virgin River spinedace

Environment » Lack of water endangers small fish in southwest Utah.

The Salt Lake Tribune
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A national nonprofit conservation organization is seeking protection for the Virgin River spinedace, a small fish native to the waterway that slices through Utah, Arizona and Nevada.

A spokesman for The Center for Biological Diversity said Thursday the organization has filed a petition seeking Endangered Species Act protection for the spinedace. The fish has lost more than half of its range due to dropping river levels caused by increased withdrawals of water for human consumption, said Tierra Curry.

"Fish need water. Sadly, so much water is taken out of the Virgin River and its tributaries that the Virgin River spinedace and other native fish are perpetually threatened with extinction," Curry, said.

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In 1994, the spinedace was proposed for protection under the Endangered Species Act. But the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service withdrew the proposed listing in 1996 in response

to the development of the Virgin River Spinedace Conservation Agreement and Strategy.

"Seventeen years later, the spinedace conservation agreement has not met its goals," Curry said. "It's clear that the Virgin River spinedace now needs Endangered Species Act protection to have a long-term shot at survival."

Two other Virgin River fish species, the woundfin and Virgin River chub, were previously added to the Endangered Species list, along with a bird called the southwestern willow flycatcher.

Christopher Smart

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