

Effort to help Amargosa toad habitat praised

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Several years ago, David Spicer said his motivation for protecting habitat for the Amargosa toad was not only to keep the amphibian off the endangered species list but to do his part to keep the planet peaceful.

"The world is full of chaos, and I like to have a little bit of peace, so if what I do here adds peace, then we've really won the battle," he told the Las Vegas Review-Journal in 1999 on the outskirts of Beatty.

That's where he spearheaded the effort to keep spring water flowing for the survival of the rare toad and other wildlife.

Wednesday night at Red Rock Canyon, state and federal wildlife officials recognized Spicer's effort as a private landowner by presenting him with a Service Citizen's Award for leadership in restoring the Amargosa toad's habitat in rural Nye County, 120 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

The Nevada Department of Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also recognized nine groups and entities and two other citizens - Ed Ringle and Shirley Harlan - for their roles that led to the federal agency's decision in 2010 not to list the Amargosa toad as threatened or endangered.

Others recognized are the Beatty Habitat Committee; the town of Beatty; The Nature Conservancy's Southern Nevada office; Nevada Natural Heritage Program; the Bureau of Land Management's Tonopah field office; Natural Resources Conservation Service, Las Vegas Service Center; Nye County; Amargosa Conservancy; and Saving Toads through Off-Road Racing, Ranching and Mining in the Oasis Valley, or STORM-OV.

Wildlife officials said the partnership groups, citizens and private landowners is a model for protecting sage grouse habitat to keep the chicken-size bird off the list as well.

"We hope this will be an example of cooperation that will be used to protect other species and their habitat and prevent the need for federal action," said Ren Lohofener, the Fish and Wildlife Service's Pacific Southwest regional director.

In 2010, the Fish and Wildlife Service decided populations of greater sage grouse in Nevada and other Western states warranted protection under the Endangered Species Act but precluded putting it on the list because of priorities with other species that are closer to extinction.

The decision means the sage grouse will be only a candidate species. This allows development of renewable energy such as wind and solar power with scrutiny aimed at placing those facilities and transmission lines on public lands where sage grouse will be least affected.

One sage grouse population in the Mono Basin of Northern Nevada and California was given a higher priority for eventual listing, however, because the magnitude and immediacy of threats it faces are more severe than those in the general Western states' populations.

In 2008, biologists estimated there were 70,000 to 80,000 sage grouse thriving in Nevada. Their numbers were down from 100,000 in 2005.

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