



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Protection Sought for Snail Near Nevada Lithium Mine

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Activists are seeking Endangered Species Act protection for an extremely small snail. The tiny, shelled animal is only known to exist in water sources along the Nevada-Oregon border in the western United States.

The snail species is called the Kings River pyrg. The Western Watersheds Project sent in the request for protection to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service last week.

The Kings River pyrg is a springsnail found in 13 distant springs around 321 kilometers northeast of Reno, Nevada. There are plans to open a huge mine in the area for processing the metal lithium.

The Western Watersheds Project says the biggest threat to the snail's survival is changes to groundwater flows caused by the 113-meter open-air mine.

The Bureau of Land Management approved the mine plan last year, but it is currently being disputed in U.S. District Court in Reno.

Erik Molvar is a wildlife biologist and executive director of the Western Watersheds Project. He said federal officials put the snail at risk of **extinction** by quickly approving the large lithium mine.

Increased U.S. production of lithium is central to President Joe Biden's plan for a more environmentally friendly future. Lithium is an important element in the production of electric vehicles. Worldwide demand for lithium is estimated to increase by six times by the year 2030.

Molvar said he agrees the U.S. must make the change to renewable energy -- but not by mining in **sensitive** environments.

The group's request says that groundwater **pumping** used by the mining project will reduce or stop flows to the springs that support the snails.

The legal case against Lithium Americas' project was sent in by a Nevada animal farmer on February 11, 2021. It was later joined by area tribes and other groups, including Western Watersheds Project. The case claims the mining would violate federal protections of many kinds of animals.

Lithium Americas and the Bureau of Land Management say that none of the springs would suffer effects that would hurt the snails. They add that claims saying otherwise were based on an incorrect use of groundwater models. Those models were sent in after the government's environmental examination was completed.

Tim Crowley is a Reno spokesman for the Canada-based Lithium Americas. He said, "Lithium Nevada has done extensive work to design a project that avoids **impacts** to the springs..."

He added that the springs are more than 1.6 kilometers away from the mining **location** and that the location was chosen after extensive research.

Molvar said the snails were at risk even before any new mining was thought about.

He said, "We're down to a very few, tiny little habitats in only 13 springs, so we can't **afford** to lose a single population."

I'm Andrew Smith.

Scott Sonner reported this story for The Associated Press. Gregory Stachel adapted it for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

extinction – *n.* the state or situation that results when something (such as a plant or animal species) has died out completely

sensitive – *adj.* easily affected by something in a way that is not pleasant or good

pump – *v.* to remove water or air from (something) with a pump

impact – *v.* to have a strong and often bad effect on (something or someone)

location – *n.* a place or position

afford – *v.* to be able to do (something) without having problems or being seriously harmed

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