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Contacts:

Kimberly Baker, EPIC, (707) 822-7711, kimberly@wildcalifornia.org

Quinn Read, Center for Biological Diversity, (206) 979-3074, QRead@biologicaldiversity.org

Humboldt Martens Receive Long-awaited Endangered Species Act Protection

PORTLAND, *Ore.*— The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that the Humboldt marten will receive protection as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The decision comes after two conservation groups sued the Trump administration for its long delay in finalizing protections for this rare species.

Humboldt martens are an elusive, cat-sized member of the weasel family. Once common in coastal forests in northern California and southern Oregon, the population was decimated by unchecked trapping and logging of its habitat. Today, fewer than 400 of these fascinating carnivores remain in four highly isolated fragments of the species' historic habitat.

"It's about time Humboldt martens got the protections they so desperately need," said Quinn Read, Oregon policy director of the Center for Biological Diversity. "We are perilously close to losing this incredible species forever. These protections provide a pathway to recovery, and we'll do everything we can to hold the Trump administration accountable to its responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act."

The protections announced this week come 10 years after the Center and the Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC) petitioned to list the Humboldt marten as a protected species under the Endangered Species Act. In its final determination, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognized that Humboldt martens remain at grave risk from ongoing habitat loss and fragmentation due to unchecked logging and the increased frequency of wildfires.

"It is unfortunate that critical habitat for these rare forest denizens will be delayed. Protecting landscape connectivity and intact mature forests should be a priority," said Kimberly Baker, EPIC's public land advocate. "It is especially frustrating knowing that a great amount of time and money has been spent on research, which has already determined vital habitat areas needed to help ensure their survival."

Unfortunately the Fish and Wildlife Service undercut some of the protections for Humboldt martens in today's designation by including an array of broad and vague exemptions for forest management activities. The Service also stopped short of designating critical habitat for the species, opting instead to conduct an economic analysis on an undetermined timeline.

Background

The Center and the EPIC petitioned to list the Humboldt marten as a protected species under the Endangered Species Act in 2010, but the Service caved to pressure from the

timber industry and issued a negative decision in 2015. The groups successfully challenged that decision, and a federal judge ordered the agency to reevaluate the marten's status.

The Service subsequently announced its proposal to list the marten as a threatened species in October 2018. That decision triggered a deadline for a final listing by October 2019, but after failing to act, the Center and EPIC filed suit to require the agency to finalize protections.

Martens are threatened by the ongoing logging of mature forests, loss of closed-canopy habitat to wildfires, rodent poison used in marijuana cultivation, and vehicle strikes. California banned trapping of Humboldt martens in the 1940s, but Oregon did not follow suit until 2019 after a petition and lawsuit from conservation groups. The animals have been wiped out from 93% of their historic range.

Martens have triangular ears and a bushy tail, and are related to minks and otters. They grow up to 2 feet long but weigh less than 3 pounds and must eat a quarter of their body weight daily to keep up with their high metabolism. Martens eat small mammals, birds, berries, reptiles and insects, and are eaten by larger mammals and raptors.

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.

The Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC) advocates for the protection and restoration of Northwest California's forests, using an integrated, science-based approach, combining public education, citizen advocacy, and strategic litigation.