

# MERCURY-REGISTER

## Policy to remove levee vegetation targeted by suit

By Staff Reports

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SACRAMENTO -- A lawsuit has been filed against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, challenging that removal of trees and shrubs along levees in California harms wildlife.

The suit was filed Monday in federal court by Friends of the River, the Center for Biological Diversity and Defenders of Wildlife.

After Hurricane Katrina, the corps set standards in 2009 banning vegetation within 15 feet of levees, a press release from the plaintiffs states.

However, many levees include streamside vegetation to enhance habitat lost by re-engineering rivers.

The latest rules did not evaluate how clearing levees affects endangered species and other habitat, the suit states. In some cases, habitat can stabilize levees, the press release continues.

"The corps ignored its legal obligation to analyze the impacts of this new program under the National Environmental Policy Act by failing to prepare an environmental impact statement before adopting the decision.

"It also ignored its requirement, under the Endangered Species Act, to consult with federal wildlife agencies for the impacts on threatened and endangered species," the release states.

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