



**TRAVIS
AUDUBON**
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Legal Action Taken to Save Tiny Texas Songbird

AUSTIN, Texas— Four conservation groups filed a motion yesterday to intervene in a lawsuit that has challenged [Endangered Species Act](#) protection for the golden-cheeked warbler, a tiny Texas songbird severely threatened by urban sprawl.

The federal district court lawsuit against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service comes from the General Land Office of the state of Texas represented by attorneys at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a right-wing think tank. The groups intervening in the lawsuit are the Travis Audubon Society, the Texas Ornithological Society, the Center for Biological Diversity, and the Defenders of Wildlife.

“We’re not going to let rich developers collude with the Trump administration to push these beautiful little birds toward extinction,” said Ryan Shannon, a staff attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. “Warblers belong in the Hill Country. Fish and Wildlife experts rightly found the birds are still at risk from reckless development, so we’re intervening to make sure the administration doesn’t settle this case and tamper with the agency’s science-based decision.”

The golden-cheeked warbler is a small songbird endemic to the Hill Country of central Texas, with striking yellow markings on its cheeks. Clearing of the warbler’s habitat for ranching and urban sprawl has long endangered the songbird, which was protected under the Endangered Species Act in 1990. In fact Austin and central Texas — home to the mature Ashe-juniper woodlands that are the only place in the world where the warbler breeds — are some of the fastest-growing regions in the country. Between 1999 and 2011, 29 percent of the warbler’s habitat was destroyed.

“It’s simply too soon to remove protections for the warbler, which continues to lose habitat to urban sprawl,” said Joan Marshall, executive director of Travis Audubon. “The golden-cheeked warbler only breeds in the Hill Country of central Texas and as more land is lost, its survival hangs in the balance. If we manage nature and the golden-

cheeked warbler with an eye towards only shortsighted, short-term gains, nothing will be left for future generations.”

Like so much imperiled wildlife, the warbler has greatly benefited from Endangered Species Act protection. Although the bird’s numbers are difficult to estimate, surveys show the warbler’s population has persisted under the protection provided by the Endangered Species Act. This success is typical of the Endangered Species Act: A recent [study](#) by the Center found that 85 percent of bird populations in the continental United States that have received endangered species protection increased or stabilized while protected by the Act.

“Even with the protections of the Endangered Species Act, there is still much work to be done and we have worked tirelessly to protect the habitat the warbler needs to survive,” said Shelia Hargis, president of the Texas Ornithological Society. “Even within places like the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, we are still working to increase protected golden-cheeked warbler habitat.”

“The Endangered Species Act has a strong record of success, but this bird still faces threats and cannot lose protection now,” said Bryan Bird, Southwest program director for Defenders of Wildlife. “We support the U.S. Fish and Wildlife’s Service science-based decision not to take this bird off the endangered species list, and we will ensure that Texas’ beautiful wildlife and rich natural heritage isn’t lost to special interests.”

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.3 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities. With nearly 1.2 million members and activists, Defenders of Wildlife is a leading advocate for innovative solutions to safeguard our wildlife heritage for generations to come. For more information, visit Newsroom.Defenders.org and follow us on Twitter @DefendersNews.