

Environmentalists vow to continue occupation of caves

Group wants U.S. protection for 5 species

By Joe Vargo

American-Statesman Staff

Members of the environmental group Earth First! vowed Wednesday to continue occupying three caves in Northwest Travis County until federal authorities declare as endangered species five kinds of tiny creatures found inside them.

"We are still waiting for some commitment from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service," said Earth First! coordinator Barbara Dugelby. "We are prepared to stay in the caves another week if necessary."

Also on Wednesday, Dugelby said she spoke to cave expert Dr. James Reddell, who criticized the group's actions as potentially hazardous to the species Earth First! is trying to protect.

"We are very closely aligned in our beliefs that the cave invertebrates need to be on the list of endangered species," Dugelby said. "I feel we are trying to achieve the same goals, even though our methods may be different. If you paint us as radicals, that's OK — that's what we are."

Earth First! members occupied at least three caves near RR 2222 and RR 620 Monday, saying the actions were prompted because the caves were in "imminent" danger from nearby development. At the time, the group said it planned to occupy the caves — known as Tooth, Amber and Kretschmarr caves — only three days, long enough for federal authorities to place the five species on its list of endangered species under "emergency" circumstances.

A meeting is scheduled for this morning between Fish and Wildlife Service officials, Earth First! representatives and Reddell. Dugelby

'We are still waiting for some commitment from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We are prepared to stay in the caves another week if necessary.'

**— Barbara Dugelby,
Earth First! coordinator**

said Earth First! is urging environmentalists around the country to pressure the federal government into declaring the two species of beetles, one spider, one "pseudo" scorpion and one "cave-adapted daddy longlegs" found in the caves as endangered.

Reddell, a University of Texas entomologist, said that although "we are together in our goals of saving the caves," he still believes the presence of Earth First! activists in the caves may be harmful.

"They could possibly be harming the caves," he said. "I have no proof one way or the other. I believe they are sincere, but I don't think they are going about things the right way."

In an earlier interview, Reddell, who discovered the caves in 1963 and has conducted extensive research in them, said the actions of Earth First! could sour future relations between scientists and landowners whose property contains biologically valuable caves.

Travis County sheriff's deputies said a woman arrested Tuesday night at one cave was released Wednesday after being charged with trespassing.