

## Fish and Game reject pika plea

Warmer climate reportedly to blame for the critter's decline

**By Dylan Darling**  
*Record Searchlight Reporter*

A pint-sized fuzz ball conservationists call a sentinel of climate change shouldn't be listed for endangered species protection just yet, state scientists said.

State Department of Fish and Game biologists are recommending that the state Fish and Game commission reject a petition for pika protection filed by the Center for Biological Diversity.

"The data for California is just not there," said Eric Loft, branch chief for wildlife in DFG's Sacramento office.

The commission is expected to review the report at a meeting next month in Stockton and later take public comment before making a decision, he said.

Pikas have thick fur and slow metabolisms and can overheat and die at temperatures above 77 degrees, according to the DFG report.

Found living on rocky slopes above timberline, pikas have been forced to higher elevations because of rising temperatures, said Kassie Siegel, the center's climate, air and energy program director.

Some don't have anywhere left to climb.

"Pika populations are disappearing around the West as temperatures warm," she said. "They are obviously a sentinel of climate change."

She said the pika's plight is akin to polar bears running out of ice in the Arctic and refers to the pika as "California's polar bear."

While populations of the high-altitude living, hamster-like critters have dropped in recent years in Nevada and Utah, Loft said there's no data showing a drop of pika numbers in California.

He said the petition was the first to call for state protection of a species because of climate change.

Siegel said the center plans to comment on the DFG report and keep trying to get the pika listed.

"We were actually quite shocked by the report," she said.

The center also petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the pika in October, but hasn't heard back.

Siegel said the center recently warned the federal government that a lawsuit is in the works.



Source: Calif. Dept. of Fish and Game. Photo by John C. Howarth. Sacramento Bee