

FWS checking on pikas as temperatures rise

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considering conducting a full review on whether to extend Endangered Species Act protections to the American pika.

The pika, a smaller relative of the rabbit that inhabits Western mountains, depends on cool temperatures to survive. As temperatures have increased, the pika has migrated upslope in search of cooler climes, but environmental groups and scientists say that in some places, pikas are running out of room.

“In the Great Basin, pikas now are at such high elevations, there’s not any place for them to go any higher,” said Donald Grayson, a University of Washington archaeologist. “I actually think that pikas in the Great Basin are probably doomed.”

FWS in February agreed to review the pika for ESA protection, settling a lawsuit from the Center for Biological Diversity, which sued the agency in August 2008 for its failure to respond to a petition to list the pika that was submitted in October 2007 (E&ENews PM, Feb. 12).

If FWS determines that the pika merits a spot on the endangered species list, it could reopen the debate over using endangered species legislation to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, as the listing petition cites climate change as the principal threat to the pika’s survival.

Dan Ashe, science adviser to the head of FWS, said he expected more petitions to name global warming as a case of species decline in coming years (AP/MSNBC.com, April 9). -- PR