



## Federal Agency to Consider Protecting "Boulder Bunny"

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SAN FRANCISCO (BCN) -- Two Bay Area conservation groups are announcing that a small mammal found in the Sierra and imperiled by global warming will be considered by a federal agency for endangered species protection.

The animal is the American pika, a small relative of the rabbit that is sometimes known as the "boulder bunny" because it lives in boulder fields near mountain peaks in the western United States.

The Center for Biological Diversity and Earthjustice said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has agreed to determine whether the pika should be listed as threatened or endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

The two groups said the pika will be the first mammal in the continental United States outside of Alaska to be considered for protection because of harm from global warming.

Last year, the Fish and Wildlife Service designated Alaskan polar bears as threatened because of a decline in sea ice.

Shaye Wolf, a biologist with the Center for Biological Diversity's San Francisco office, said the pika is in "urgent need of protection."

She said the pika has adapted to cold alpine conditions and can die when exposed to temperatures as low as 78 degrees Fahrenheit for just a few hours.

Wolf said, "As temperatures rise, pika populations at lower elevations are being driven to extinction and pikas are pushed further upslope until they have nowhere left to go."

The wildlife service's action was announced in a notice that will be published in the Federal Register on Thursday. The agency will now have until Feb. 1, 2010, to issue a determination on whether the species should be listed as threatened or endangered.

The agency's action stems from a petition filed by the center in 2007 and a related lawsuit filed against the service in 2008 for failing to respond.

Lawyers from Oakland-based Earthjustice represented the center in the lawsuit.

The agency said in the notice that the center had presented substantial information indicating the pika's habitat or range may be being destroyed or modified "as a result of effects related to global climate change."

An endangered or threatened species listing triggers a series of protections, including a ban on killing the animals without a permit; a ban on federal agency actions that would harm the species; and a requirement that the wildlife service designate critical habitat.

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