

THE SACRAMENTO BEE



American pika could be listed as an endangered species

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State wildlife officials will reconsider whether the American pika, a tiny rabbit-like resident of the Sierra Nevada, needs protection as an endangered species.

At its meeting Thursday, the state Fish and Game Commission responded to a court decision that found the Department of Fish and Game failed to consider new information about the species in a review completed last fall.

This action came in response to a lawsuit filed by the Center for Biological Diversity, which first petitioned the state to protect the pika in 2007.

If the pika is ultimately protected, it would become the first California species to be listed under the state Endangered Species Act as a result of effects caused by climate change.

The pika lives only in high-elevation mountainous boulder fields. In parts of

its habitat in other Western states, evidence has emerged that climate change has shrunk this unique habitat into ever-smaller islands, resulting in smaller pika populations.

Until recently, evidence of a similar effect in California has been lacking. But the Center for Biological Diversity last summer submitted new findings of pika population losses near Bodie and in the Lassen region.

In a subsequent lawsuit, the center claimed state officials failed to consider this information, and the court agreed, said Greg Loarie, an attorney at Earthjustice who represented the center.

The Department of Fish and Game now has 90 days to complete a status review of the pika using the new information.