



California looks at endangered status for American pika

By Matt Weiser

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State wildlife officials are considering whether the American pika needs protection as an endangered species. The tiny member of the rabbit family, a high-mountain resident, is thought to be threatened by climate change.

In 2009, the state Fish and Game Commission rejected protecting the pika under the California Endangered Species Act. At the time, there was little evidence that pika numbers in the Sierra Nevada and elsewhere were shrinking.

Subsequent research provided clues that pika habitat was shrinking upward as lower reaches of its range warmed, resulting in population losses in the Bodie and Lassen regions. The environmental group Center for Biological Diversity argued the state should conduct a new status review, then filed suit when it did not.



A mountain-dwelling American pika is shown in this undated photo provided by the U.S. Geological Survey

A San Francisco Superior Court judge agreed in February 2011, leading to the review now under way. The Department of Fish and Game seeks comments from the public and experts on pika.

Comments must be submitted by March 15 to Department of Fish and Game, Nongame Wildlife Program, Attn: Scott Osborn, 1812 Ninth St., Sacramento 95811; or by email to pika@dfg.ca.gov