

## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**

**Mountain-Prairie Region**

**134 Union Boulevard**

**Lakewood, Colorado 80228**

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#### **Fish and Wildlife Service to Conduct Status Review of the American Pika**

Following an initial review of a petition seeking to protect the American pika under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that the American pika may warrant federal protection as a threatened or endangered species.

The Service will undertake an in-depth, scientific review of the American pika to determine whether to propose adding the species to the federal list of threatened and endangered wildlife and plants.

The petition provides information suggesting that climate change may have effects resulting in individual mortality, population extirpations, and reduced species range for the pika.

Today's decision, commonly known as a 90-day finding, is based on scientific information about the American pika provided in the petition requesting that the species be placed on the federal list of threatened and endangered wildlife and plants protected under the ESA. The initial petition finding does not mean that the Service has decided it is appropriate to give the American pika federal protection under the ESA. Rather, this finding is the first step in a process that triggers a more thorough review of all the biological information available.

To ensure this review is comprehensive, the Service is soliciting information from state and federal natural resource agencies and all interested parties regarding the American pika and its habitat.

The Service is seeking scientific information regarding the American pika's historical and current status and distribution; its population size and trend; its biology and ecology; its taxonomy (especially genetics of the species); ongoing conservation measures for the species and its habitat; and threats to the long-term persistence of the species. If listing the American pika is warranted, the Service intends to propose critical habitat and therefore requests information on what may constitute physical and biological features essential to the conservation of the species; where these features are currently found; whether any of these features may require special management considerations or protection; and whether there are areas outside the geographical area occupied by the species that are essential to the conservation of the species.

Scientific information will be accepted until July 7, 2009 and can be submitted electronically via the Federal eRulemaking Portal at: <http://www.regulations.gov>, or can be mailed or hand delivered to Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R6-ES-2009-0021; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

The Service will evaluate all information regarding the status and distribution of the American pika, including the impacts or potential impacts to the species resulting from either human activities or natural causes.

The American pika is a small mammal that inhabits fields fringed by suitable vegetation in alpine and subalpine mountain areas extending south from central British Columbia and Alberta into the Rocky Mountains of New Mexico and the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. The historical range of the species includes California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico.

A key characteristic of the American pika is its temperature sensitivity; death can occur after brief exposures to ambient temperatures greater than 77.9 °F. Therefore, the range of the species progressively increases with elevation in the southern extents of its distribution. In Canada, populations occur from sea level to 9,842 feet, but in New Mexico, Nevada, and southern California, populations rarely exist below 8,202 feet.

In October 2007, the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) petitioned the Service to list the American pika and conduct a status review of each of the 36 recognized subspecies of American pika. The Service advised CBD that the petition could not be addressed at that time because existing court orders and settlement agreements for other listing actions required nearly all of the listing funding. Subsequently, the CBD filed a notice of intent to sue over the Service's failure to publish a petition finding, and the Service entered into a settlement agreement requiring the Service to submit a petition finding to the Federal Register by May 1, 2009, and to submit a status review finding to the Federal Register by February 1, 2010.

The petitioners assert that American pika populations are threatened by climate change, livestock practices, fire suppression and invasive species, changes in disease and predator relationships, inadequate regulatory mechanisms, off-highway vehicle usage, and roads.

Aside from climate change, other threats cited in the petition do not at this time appear to be significant to the species or its habitat. However, those threats will be further examined during the status review.

For more information regarding the American pika, please visit our web site at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/americanpika>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of

the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).

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