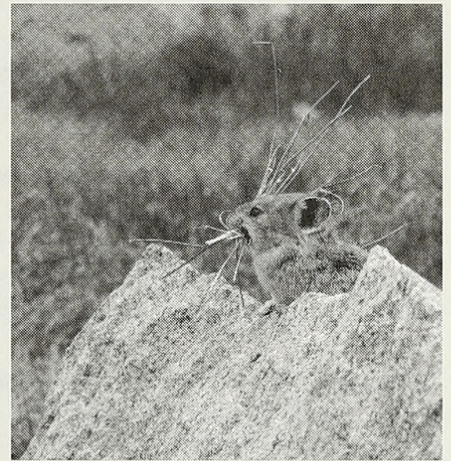


"This is an important day for conservation in the United States," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Sam Hamilton. He joined Salazar at a news conference in a Kennedy customs warehouse where the live python was on display along with a collection of intercepted snakeskins. Teams of two open and examine shipments of snakes and other animals - wearing gloves and using a crowbar to open crates containing potentially dangerous creatures. The ban proposal will be open to public comment for 60 days before a final decision is made. An invasive species can be any kind of living organism not native to an ecosystem and that causes harm - from amphibians like the cane toad (*Bufo marinus*) to plants, insects, fish, fungus and bacteria. The legislation to ban the snakes was introduced in Congress by Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., and Rep. Kendrick Meek, D-Fla. The Burmese python thrives in south Florida and a population of boa constrictors live south of Miami, while recent evidence suggests northern African pythons are reproducing on the city's western boundaries. Hamilton said he hopes the nine snake species will soon join the list of illegal wildlife trafficking that includes poisonous snakes. Across the country, more than 169,700 shipments of wildlife and wildlife products came in last year, with an estimated value of \$2.7 billion. *Source: Associated Press, 20 January 2010*

**Obama Administration Denies American Pika Endangered Species Act Protection** - The Obama administration has denied Endangered Species Act protection to the American pika (*Ochotona princeps*), a small, mountain-dwelling mammal that is on the frontlines of global warming-driven endangerment. The decision was required under a court order in a lawsuit brought by the Center for Biological Diversity, represented by Earthjustice, against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for failing to respond to a scientific petition submitted by the Center in 2007.

"This is a political decision that ignores science and the law," said Center biologist Shaye Wolf. "Scientific studies clearly show that the pika is disappearing from the American West due to climate change and needs the immediate protections of the Endangered Species Act to help prevent its extinction. The Interior Department has chosen to sit on its hands instead of taking meaningful action to protect our nation's wildlife from climate change."

"We've already lost almost half of the pikas that once inhabited the Great Basin, and scientists tell us that pikas will be gone from 80% of their entire range in the United States by the end of century," said Greg Loarie, an attorney with Earthjustice representing the Center. "To conclude that this species is not threatened by climate change is an impossible gamble that we can't afford."



**American Pika**

(Photo: Chris Kennedy/USFWS)

The pika is adapted to cold alpine conditions and can die from overheating when exposed to temperatures as mild as 78°F [25.5°C] for just a few hours. Rising summer temperatures threaten pikas with heat stress and reduce their ability to gather food and move to new areas, while diminished snowpack in winter leaves them vulnerable to cold snaps. Rising temperatures caused by greenhouse gas pollution have already led to dramatic losses of lower-elevation pika populations, pushing pikas upslope until they run out of habitat. More than a third of documented pika populations in the Great Basin mountains of Nevada and southern Oregon have gone extinct in the past century amid rising temperatures. Two separate studies have found that climate change will eliminate suitable habitat and push pikas toward extinction throughout much of the western United States in this century if greenhouse gas emissions are not drastically reduced.

The Obama administration has blocked Endangered Species Act protection for other climate change-imperiled species and has made little progress on overall listings. Last year, the Obama administration denied listing to the spotted seal (*Phoca largha*) off Alaska despite the rapid melting of its sea-ice habitat; it also upheld the Bush administration's decisions to deny listing to the climate-change-imperiled ribbon seal (*P. fasciata*) and emperor penguin (*Aptenodytes forsteri*). During its first year in office, the Obama administration listed only two species under the Endangered Species Act, compared to an average of eight species per year under Bush and 65 species per year under Clinton. *Source: Center for Biological Diversity, 4 February 2010*

**St. Lucie OKs Elephant Center Project** - County commissioners and zoo officials found a way around the elephant in the room to allow such large mammals into St. Lucie County. Representatives from the National Elephant Center agreed on 26 January to forbid the presence of a criticized training tool on the proposed 326-acre property as one condition for approval of a \$4 million project to house





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