

# irreplaceable

Wildlife in a Warming World

Read about our awe-inspiring species. Peer into the world of these plants and animals and learn their fascinating stories. Discover what makes them truly irreplaceable.

## Global Warming is Affecting Wildlife Today

Scientists now predict that temperatures will increase between 2.5 and 10.4 degrees Fahrenheit over the next century, faster than any warming for thousands of years. Many people are familiar with the plight of the polar bear, struggling as the sea ice it depends on melts away. But climate change threats reach well beyond the Arctic: habitats and ecosystems are being fundamentally altered all around us, threatening species even in our own backyards.

## Rocky Mountain Wildlife At Risk



### Grizzly Bears: Losing their favorite food

Identifiable by its distinctive hump, the mighty grizzly bear has a terrific sense of smell and can run at speeds up to 30 miles per hour. Despite their reputation as predators, grizzlies actually get many of their nutrients from nuts, berries, roots, and insects. In fact, grizzlies tend to confine their movements during late summer and fall to the alpine areas where one critical food source—seeds of the Whitebark Pine—are present. Unfortunately, the Whitebark Pine is threatened by rising temperatures and more frequent droughts caused by global warming. This is

a serious problem for grizzlies in and around Yellowstone National Park, who gorge on the nutritious seeds to store energy for winter hibernation.

### American Pikas: Running out of room

A high-pitched whistle from a rocky pile signals you are looking at a house belonging to the American pika. Nicknamed the “rock rabbit,” the tiny pika is the size of a tennis ball with babies the size of walnuts. Covered year-round in heavy fur, pikas are highly susceptible to overheating, and when temperatures climb above 75 degrees Fahrenheit, they can die in less than an hour. Pikas live at high elevations, though lately rising temperatures have been chasing them upslope to cooler climates. However, mountains have tops, and these resourceful rock rabbits may soon run out of habitat.



Local Partners: [Caring for Creation Network](#) \* [Montana Audubon](#) \* [Montana Chapter: Society for Conservation Biology](#) \* [University of Montana Environmental Law Group](#) \* [ZooMontana](#)

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### Wolverines: Stranded in a melting home

Deep snowpack means many things to a wolverine mother looking for a den to raise her kits. Warmth. Safety. Security. Wolverines den in snow tunnels up to 175 feet long, under snow that must remain thick until the spring thaw. Although the wolverine is usually a solitary animal, young kits sometimes stay with their mothers until they reach adulthood. However, denning mothers will abandon their snowy hideaways if rising temperatures melt them early, even if the kits aren't ready to leave.

### Bull Trout: In hot water

Long known for beautiful mountain streams and outstanding fisheries, Montana now lists 19 native fish species as "species of concern," including Bull trout, fluvial Arctic Grayling, Yellowstone and West Slope Cutthroat trout. These fish depend on clear, cold water, but the Rockies have lately seen reduced snowpack and an increasingly earlier spring melt. Rising summer temperatures, less water in the streams, and higher stream temperatures can cause stress and even death for cold-water fish such as Bull trout.



### Canada Lynx: Pressured by new competitors

Rare in the lower 48 states, the shy, stealthy lynx stalks the mountainous forests of the northern United States for rabbits, birds, and other small prey. Equipped with big, padded paws that serve as snowshoes and an excellent sense of smell and sight, lynx have evolved to chase their prey on snowy terrain. Global warming, however, may spell dire consequences for the lynx as diminished snowfalls allow other predators such as coyote to move in and squeeze the lynx out of its native habitat.

### What's the answer?

While this information is sobering, there is still time to act. Some answers we already know: we need to reduce the impacts of pollution, invasive species, and habitat destruction, restore migration corridors and protect key habitat areas, and, of course, stop global warming! Other solutions will take more research, time, money, and dedication to develop and implement. But together, we know we can get there.

**You can help:** Visit us online at [www.irreplaceablewild.org](http://www.irreplaceablewild.org) to:

- Sign our national Call to Care, urging our leaders to help wildlife struggling in a warming world;
- Check out more ways to get involved, like writing to your local paper, or taking part in a unique photo petition;
- View our online gallery of wildlife photography, send ecards to your friends to get them involved, download screensavers and banners, and learn more about at-risk species in your region;
- Learn about simple things you can do to help, like saving energy, creating backyard habitat, and more!

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