

New West Missoula

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News

On Endangered Species Day, Panel Discusses Risks of Climate Change

By Kaylee Porter



MISSOULA—

Local scientists, faith leaders, conservation advocates and city officials gathered at the Roxy Theater in downtown Missoula on Friday afternoon to mark Endangered Species Day and draw attention to climate change's impact on Montana wildlife.

Sandwiched among photographs of threatened Montana animals, Missoula City Council President Ed Childers read the city's Endangered Species Day proclamation. The photographs were a part of the "Irreplaceable: Wildlife in a Warming World" exhibit, which will be at the Roxy until June 15 before moving on to Seattle.

The exhibit is part of a campaign that brings together four distinct groups—the worlds of art, justice, science, and faith—to combat climate change. The traveling photo exhibit will feature guest speakers and events as it tours across the country, ending in Washington, D.C., in spring 2009.

A panel discussion entitled, "Faith and Science Perspectives on Wildlife in a Warming World," followed Childers' proclamation.

An audience of delegates to the International Wildlife Film Festival listened as Jenny Harbine, an attorney with Earthjustice, a nonprofit environmental law firm, spoke about the problems facing grizzly bears in region. Because food sources are dwindling due to global warming the bears must search for alternatives, which often forces them into contact with humans.

Len Ruggiero, a biologist at the Rocky Mountain Research Station, addressed the risk global warming poses to other wildlife in the region, such as snowshoe hares, lynxes, weasels and wolverines.

"If you are a snow-dependent species like the wolverine, the absence of snow has serious and potentially dire consequences," Ruggiero said, adding that wolverines depend on snow pack for denning.

According to Ruggiero, animals like the snowshoe hare and the weasel turn white in the winter in order to blend in. As snow pack decreases due to global warming, however, they become more conspicuous to predators and prey.

Reverend Amy Carter, the pastor of University Congregational Church, discussed the role faith plays in motivating people to help reduce global warming. She said that spiritually and art are more likely to change people's hearts and minds than statistics and scientific knowledge.

"Animals are gifts of god to be treasured and protected," Carter said. "When wildlife is threatened our very souls are threatened."

For more information about the Irreplaceable campaign and the photo exhibit visit www.irreplaceablewild.org.