

# Whitebark pine tree faces threat of extinction

By Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post

The Fish and Wildlife Service determined Monday that whitebark pine, a tree found atop mountains across the American West, faces an “imminent” risk of extinction because of factors including climate change.

The decision is significant because it marks the first time the federal government has identified climate change as one of the driving factors for why a broad-ranging tree species could disappear. The Canadian government has already declared whitebark pine to be endangered throughout its entire range; a recent study found that 80 percent of whitebark pine forests in the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem are dead or dying.

The Natural Resources Defense Council asked the Fish and Wildlife Service to place the tree on the endangered species list. In its determination, the agency said that it found a listing was “warranted but precluded,” meaning the pine deserved federal protection but the government could not afford it.

The whitebark pine will remain a candidate under the Endangered Species Act and will come under review annually.

An invasive disease, white pine blister rust, along with insects such as mountain pine beetle, has infiltrated the historically colder altitudes where whitebark pines thrive. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Amy Nicholas said these factors, along with fire patterns and global warming more broadly, are undermining the tree’s viability.

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