

"Pikas in Peril" Research Project



Jenny Lake Rock Harvesting

Researchers help park managers make informed decisions on trail improvements at Grand Teton

The Pikas in Peril research project is a collaboration between scientists from the NPS Inventory and Monitoring Program and two western universities. The team is investigating the vulnerability of American pikas to climate change across western parks, including Grand Teton National Park. There is currently a proposed trail improvement project that involves harvesting rocks near Jenny Lake, an important pika habitat.

Trail improvement projects sometimes have unintended consequences for plants and animals. However, when projects are carefully planned, plant and animal populations can be protected. Information gleaned from researching and monitoring plants and animals in a project area can help managers keep migration corridors intact, better understand impacts on sensitive species, and choose appropriate locations for new developments.

Armed with data about the locations and genetic structure of pikas across the park, the Pikas in Peril team evaluated the potential impacts of a proposal to harvest rocks near Jenny Lake on pikas. Results of the study indicate that although habitat would be disturbed by the rock

Results of the study call for careful monitoring throughout the life of the project. Work should proceed carefully to minimize impacts to pikas.

harvesting, there is sufficient suitable habitat surrounding it to support continued migration through the area. The rock harvesting is unlikely to affect the persistence of pika populations locally or parkwide.

The Jenny Lake area is one of the only low elevation pika habitats in the park. Preliminary predictions of climate change impacts on pikas at Grand Teton suggest that low elevation habitats, like those near Jenny Lake, may become more important. Should the proposed project to harvest rocks proceed, the team urges long-term, continued monitoring of the pika populations in the Jenny Lake area. Cautious planning guided by pika monitoring can help minimize impacts.

Grand Teton National Park



The American pika (*Ochotona princeps*) is related to the rabbit, has short rounded ears, and has no visible tail. Pikas are temperature sensitive, and are considered an indicator species for detecting the effects of climate change on ecosystems in the western US. **Photo: Will Deacy**



A view of a talus, or broken rock, slope in the Jenny Lake area that is inhabited by pikas. A section of talus in this area is under consideration for harvesting rocks to be used for adjacent trail improvements. **Photo: Clint Epps**