

## Whitebark pine tree species under review for Endangered Species Act protection

Written by Wild Nevada  
Wednesday, 21 July 2010 09:48

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[Pinus albicaulis](#)—or whitebark pine—is a western tree species that grows in the sub-alpine areas of the Sierra Nevada, Cascade Range, Pacific Coast Ranges and the northern Rocky Mountains, in seven states: Nevada, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon and California. This week the [U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service agreed to review](#) whitebark pine for protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Drought and climate change appear to be hitting [whitebark pine](#) especially hard. Pine blister--a fungus--and stress from dry conditions has made it vulnerable to outbreaks of pine beetles that sometimes wipe out entire populations of the tree. Photos of pine beetle infestations are dramatic, with huge areas of forest that have turned red and brittle. (Just google "whitebark pine tree pine beetle infestation" and you'll see what we mean.)



The [Natural Resources Defense Council](#) petitioned the Fish and Wildlife Service in December 2008 to list whitebark pine for the reasons mentioned above. In addition to fungus and beetles, NRDC says that climate change might be changing fire patterns. In addition, our own fire suppression activities over the past 100+ years favor other tree species, such as Douglas fir and spruce, resulting in their forest stand dominance.

Here in Nevada, the southernmost range for whitebark pine trees, the [Nevada Department of Wildlife](#) (NDOW) has identified 16 mountain ranges that are home to whitebark pines. Elbert L. Little's 1971 publication,

[s of United States Trees](#)

, shows a narrower distribution of this tree species in Nevada.

Regardless, Nevada will play an important role in determining the status of whitebark pine because our state serves as the southernmost extent of the tree along much of its overall distribution. That means that populations in Nevada will need to be closely scrutinized by researchers to see if they are disappearing first, one possible signal that climate change is a primary factor in its decline. Here is a map ( [whitebarkpine.pdf](#) 5.3 MB) showing the whitebark pine tree's distribution in Nevada.

If you have any scientific knowledge of whitebark pine in Nevada or elsewhere, the Fish and Wildlife Service is soliciting information until September 20th. Be certain to provide your input soon, either electronically via the [Federal eRulemaking Portal](#), or by mail:

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Public Comments Processing

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Division of Policy and Directives Management

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