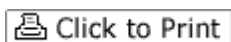




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## State Sues Interior Department Over Polar Bear ESA Listing

Currently the polar bear is only listed as threatened, however an endangered listing would greatly impact the offshore oil drilling efforts. *Photo courtesy the AP.*

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In order to try and reverse Secretary Dirk Kempthorne's decision to list the polar bear under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the State of Alaska sued the Interior Secretary. The Palin administration and other state elected officials worry that the listing will cripple offshore oil and gas development opportunities.

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Areas that would directly be impacted by the listing include the Chukchi and Beaufort seas off the state's northern boarder, the only prime polar bear habitat within U.S. jurisdiction.

"We believe that the service's decision to list the polar bear was not based on the best scientific and commercial data available," Palin said in announcing the lawsuit.

[Kassie Siegel of the Center for Biological Diversity called the lawsuit "completely ridiculous and a waste of the court's time." Siegel is the lead author of the petition that helped to enable the listing. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service scientists addressed objections of skeptics like Palin during the listing process, said Siegel.](#)

The listing was announced on May 14, three years after the petition had been filed back in 2005. After the petition was filed, the Department of the Interior conducted a yearlong initial review, a year of public comment and additional studies, until an eventual court action forced the final decision. All of this concluded with Kempthorne's decision, which stated that sea ice was vital to polar bear survival, that sea ice had dramatically melted in recent decades and would continue to do so in the future, as suggested by computer models.

Last year summer sea ice expanses depleted to a record low, about 1.65 million square miles, an almost 40-percent decrease as compared to the long-term average between 1979 and 2000.

According to the Alaska lawsuit filed in Washington, D.C., the federal analysis did not adequately consider polar bear survival through earlier warming periods centuries ago. In particular the state objects to the conclusion that polar bears could be endangered within the "foreseeable future." That "future" would come in 45 years, or three generations of polar bears, a number considered arbitrary by the state.

Additionally, the state argues that there are no major differences between the bears in the 19 subpopulations identified in Kempthorne's and by considering the population as a whole one can conclude that it is healthy. Such an argument would undermine the argument that ice loss in Alaska would effect the world wide polar bear population.

Federal officials, contends the lawsuit, did not consider the best scientific evidence demonstrating the bears' ability to survive and adapt to changing climate conditions.

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