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## ENDANGERED SPECIES: Lawsuit seeks protection for rare Alaskan loon

Three environmental groups filed a lawsuit this week seeking to protect the yellow-billed loon under the Endangered Species Act.

The groups filed the lawsuit in U.S. District Court in San Francisco, saying the protection is overdue and federal officials have not done enough while the bird's Alaskan tundra habitat disappears from oil drilling and global warming.

"The yellow-billed loon is one of the rarest and most vulnerable birds in the United States," said Andrea Treece, attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the groups suing. "If the loon is to survive in a warming Arctic, we need to protect its critical habitat, not open it up for oil development."

The Natural Resources Defense Council and Pacific Environment are also plaintiffs in the suit.

About 4,000 of the world's 16,500 yellow-billed loons are in Alaska. The vast majority of the Alaska breeding pairs are found in the National Petroleum Reserve, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Bruce Woods, a FWS spokesman, would not comment directly on the lawsuit but said the agency was trying to complete the studies necessary for any listing decision (Yereth Rosen, Reuters, Dec. 20).

"We expect to have money available in the fiscal year '08 budget and then complete the status review and the 12-month finding," Woods said.

FWS accepted the petition for review last May, which required the agency to solicit public comment, carry out a status review of the loons and, if merited, issue a proposed rule to protect loons. That has not happened, and the lawsuit will seek an order from a federal judge telling the agency to do so (AP/MSNBC, Dec. 19).

Current leasing plans for the National Petroleum Reserve come from a presidential directive guiding the Department of Interior to foster oil and gas development there (Dan Joling, AP/Houston Chronicle, Dec. 19). -- SG