

Lawsuit aims to protect polar bears

Green groups take on U.S. government

Action to limit warming, save ice

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ANCHORAGE, Alaska—Three environmental groups sued the U.S. government Thursday, seeking to protect polar bears from extinction because of disappearing Arctic sea ice.

The lawsuit, filed in federal court in San Francisco, demands that the government take action on a petition environmentalists filed earlier to have polar bears listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act. Once a species is listed as threatened, the government is barred from doing anything to jeopardize the animal's existence or its habitat.

In the case of the polar bear, the environmentalists hope to force the government to curb U.S. emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide.

The Center for Biological Diversity, the Natural Resources Defense Council and Greenpeace said extensive scientific evidence shows sea ice is melting because of global warming.

"Global warming and rising temperatures in the Arctic jeopardize the polar bear's very

existence," said Melanie Duchin of Greenpeace.

"Polar bears cannot survive without sea ice. Polar bears could disappear in our lifetime if we don't take action." Valerie Fellows, a Fish and Wildlife Service spokeswoman in Washington, said she did not have the lawsuit in front of her and could not comment.

It's estimated there are fewer than 25,000 polar bears worldwide. About 40 per cent live in Canada.

The Beaufort Sea stock off Alaska's northern coast is estimated at 2,000 animals. The Bering-Chukchi stock off Alaska's northwest coast, a population shared with Russia, is estimated at 2,000 to 5,000.

The lawsuit did not indicate how many polar bears may have been lost because of retreating ice.

In September, the University of Colorado's National Snow and Ice Data Center, NASA and the University of Washington announced a "stunning reduction in Arctic sea ice at the end of the northern summer."

In related news, scientists for the first time have documented multiple deaths of polar bears off Alaska, where they likely drowned after swimming long distances in the ocean amid the melting of the Arctic ice shelf, the *Wall Street Journal* reported yesterday.

The bears spend most of their time hunting and raising their young on ice floes.

Polar-bear drownings are so rare they have never been documented in 25 years of aerial surveys of the Alaskan coastline by the U.S. Minerals Management Service.

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