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## US considers adding Pacific walrus to endangered species list

Shrinking summer ice from climate change and oil exploration among the threats facing the Pacific walrus

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Polar bear, move over. The Obama administration is considering whether to grant endangered species protection to the Pacific walrus because of shrinking summer ice from climate change and oil exploration in the northern Chukchi Sea.

Conservationists say the Pacific walrus faces a similar threat to its existence as the polar bear, whose plight is seen as iconic of the melting Arctic.

The Pacific walrus lives on the Arctic sea ice between Alaska and Siberia. The mammals rely on ice platforms to breed and forage, diving for mussels and clams in the shallow outer continental shelves. Females depend on the ice floes as resting stations to nurse young calves.

The disappearing summer sea ice has put intense pressure on herds. Thousands of young walrus were trampled to death in 2007 because of crowding on ice floes; other exhausted calves died at sea.

In yesterday's decision, the US fish and wildlife service said it would undertake a 60-day review to determine whether to grant endangered species protection to the Pacific walrus.

The move comes in response to a legal challenge brought by the [Centre for Biological Diversity](#) which had argued



Pacific walruses sit on the rocks at an aquarium in New York.

Photograph: Julie Larsen Maher/AP

that the mammal was threatened by global warming as well as a decision last year by the Bush administration to open up about 1m hectares (2.7m acres) of the Chukchi Sea off Alaska to oil exploration.

"The Endangered Species Act is our nation's strongest law for wildlife protection and, properly applied, can help the walrus survive the stress of a melting Arctic," Rebecca Noblin of the Centre for Biological Diversity in Anchorage, Alaska said. "But unless we take immediate action to reduce greenhouse pollution, the grim reaper of global warming will ultimately claim the Pacific walrus as a victim."

Summer sea ice reached its second lowest level last year since satellite

monitoring began in 1979.

The move comes barely six months after the Obama administration frustrated environmental activists by retaining a Bush-era rule which denied polar bear protection from global warming under the endangered species act.

Before the Obama administration's decision last May, environmentalists had hoped polar bear protection could serve as a trigger, allowing the government to impose limits on greenhouse gas emissions from power plants thousands of miles away which are causing the Arctic sea ice to melt and threatening the animals' habitat.