

### Bad news, bears

By **Os Davis** on January 8, 2008 11:05 AM

Bears all over the world are having a hard time of it these days, with the largest of 'em all, the polar bear, headlining. In fact, the story on ol' *Ursus maritimus* this week is a bit of a non-story in that the attention received is based on the United States government *not* making a decision.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service announced yesterday it would be delaying a scheduled report on the animal for up to one month. At the heart of the report is a definitive statement as to whether global warming poses polar bears with the threat of endangerment or extinction. Melting arctic ice floes caused by apparent global warming have wreaked havoc with polar bears' habits and habitats.

Fish and Wildlife Service head Dale Hall told reporters it would take as much as a month more "to analyze all the information" and that this occasion marked "the first time global warming has been a factor in proposing threatened status for any US species."

"I'm not saying that there is scientific uncertainty under the act and it's unfortunately one of those times," said Hall. "We'll have to miss the deadline in order to provide the quality product that needs to be provided."

In contrast to Hall et al, environmental groups wasted no time in their own decision-making processes: To enforce the deadline, the [Center for Biological Diversity](#), the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#) and [Greenpeace](#) will begin legal action Wednesday. "We certainly hope that the polar bear will be listed [as an endangered species] within the next month. But this is an administration of broken promises, from Bush's campaign pledge to regulate greenhouse gases to Secretary Kempthorne's failure to list a single species under the Endangered Species Act in the last 607 days," said Kassie Siegel, climate program director at the Center for Biological Diversity.

According to the Act, federal agencies are obligated "to ensure that any action they authorize, fund, or carry out will not jeopardize the [species'] continued existence or adversely modify their critical habitat..." Should global warming be listed as a primary cause of the polar bear's endangerment, well ... you can imagine the implications.

Finally, China's sun bear species have been added to the World Conservation Union's Red List of Threatened Species (name trademarked), surmising them as high risk.

Today, just two of the world's eight bear species - the prolific European/North American brown bear and North American black bear - are not threatened with extinction.