

WCAU - Philadelphia

# Bush Administration Delays Decision To List Polar Bears As Threatened

## *Without Help, Majority Of Animals Could Be Killed By 2050*

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Federal officials said they need more time to decide whether to add polar bears to the "threatened" species list. The deadline was Wednesday, but the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said it hopes to offer a recommendation to Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne in time for him to make a decision within the next month. Kempthorne had suggested listing polar bears in 2007, giving him a one-year deadline. Environmental groups argue polar bears need protection because global warming is melting their habitat. If the animals make the list, it could impose limits on manmade developments in the polar bears' territory.

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Because of this, a group of powerful environmental organizations plan to sue the federal government to enforce the deadline.

The Center for Biological Diversity, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and Greenpeace said they will begin the legal process on Wednesday.

"We certainly hope that the polar bear will be listed 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," Kassie Siegel, climate program director at the Center for Biological Diversity, and lead author of the 2005 petition, said. "We'll begin the enforcement process Wednesday."

According to NRDC, The Endangered Species Act requires a listing process of no longer than two years, but said in this case almost three years have passed since the scientific petition was submitted in Feb. 2005, calling on the government to list the polar bear under the Endangered Species Act.

The groups sued the Bush administration in December, 2005, when it missed its first deadline, a spokeswoman for NRDC explained.

Responding to the suit in February, 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that protection of polar bears "may be warranted," and commenced a full status review of the species. Then, on Dec. 27, 2006, the federal agency announced its proposal to list the species as "threatened" and had one year to make a final listing decision.

The legal deadline for doing so is Jan. 9, 2008, NRDC stated.

A spokesman for Clean Air Council in Philadelphia said the scientific evidence is overwhelming that global warming is destroying the bear's habitat, but said listing it would reveal how little the Bush administration has done to address the serious problem.

"The polar bear's iconic status would lead to enormous pressure on the Administration to finally get serious about global warming -- something that they are not willing to do," Clean Air Council's Joe Minott said.

He said listing the bears as an endangered species would also have an indirect impact on the auto industry because vehicles are a major source of greenhouse gases. Minott added that auto manufacturers have been fighting hard to prevent states like California and Pennsylvania from regulating emissions of greenhouse gases from cars.

In September, the U.S. Geological Survey concluded two-thirds of the world's polar bears, including the entire population in Alaska, will be killed off by 2050 because of thinning sea ice from global warming in the Arctic.

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