

May 8, 2009

## Decision On Polar Bears Infuriates Environmental Groups

Posted by: Brent Long

If environmentalists get their way, Ken Salazar may one day join the ranks of endangered species.

In a move that has infuriated environmental groups, the interior secretary announced today that he will uphold the Bush administration's decision to limit restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions that imperil Arctic polar bears.

Environmental groups said that they had hoped that the Obama administration would overturn the rule, which currently only restricts the burning of fossil fuels within the bears' natural habitat. These groups point out that failure to more broadly regulate carbon dioxide, even those emissions released thousands of miles from the Arctic, cripples larger efforts to address the effects of global warming. Studies show that the melting of Arctic sea ice threatens the polar bears. A spokesperson for Greenpeace said that the bears will be extinct by 2050 if stricter rules are not embraced.

"Today's announcement shows a clear willingness to compromise when it comes to global warming science and policy," said Melanie Duchin, a global warming campaigner for Greenpeace

based in Anchorage, Alaska. "I expected more from the Obama administration."

Earlier this year, Salazar angered many of the same environmental groups by endorsing another holdover from the Bush administration – a decision to remove gray wolves living in the Rockies and western Great Lakes from the list of threatened and endangered species. In a statement today, the secretary expressed sympathy for the plight of the polar bears, while justifying his decision not to extend Endangered Species Act protections to the iconic bear.

"We must do all we can to help the polar bear recover, recognizing that the greatest threat to the polar bear is the melting of Arctic sea ice caused by climate change," Salazar said in a statement. "However, the Endangered Species Act is not the proper mechanism for controlling our nation's carbon emissions. Instead, we need a comprehensive energy and climate strategy that curbs climate change and its impacts – including the loss of sea ice. Both President Obama and I are committed to achieving that goal."

Salazar said that trying to determine how much carbon emissions by a coal burning plant in Pennsylvania



(AP)

is hurting bear populations is impractical. He called for a more comprehensive strategy to reduce global warming.

Greenpeace and the Center for Biological Diversity delivered almost 150,000 petitions calling on Salazar to eliminate the polar bear rule. They did not mince words in denouncing the Obama administration's decision.

"We need the change that Obama promised, not more Friday announcements from the interior department that they're going to sacrifice the polar bear and the environment to polluters," said Kassie Siegel, a spokesperson for the Center for Biological Diversity. "This is incredibly disappointing for the Obama administration to adopt Bush's polar bear extinction program as its own. Salazar's announcement is the worst kind of doublespeak."