

THIS WEEK

Polar Bear Shafted Again

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Reporting by Brita Belli

The Center for Biological Diversity and other environmental groups expressed great disappointment that Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar did not act to restore polar bear protections. Oil and gas companies were pleased with the ruling. On May 8, Salazar announced that he would not rescind a “special rule” created under the Bush administration that limits polar bear protections under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This special rule means that any activities that occur outside the polar bear’s range may not come under review for their impacts on the health and habitat of the bears, including the global warming conditions that have led to their demise. The Secretary said in a conference call that the ESA is not the right tool for going after polluters despite the fact that “The single greatest threat to the polar bear is the melting of Arctic Sea ice due to climate change.”



Salazar would also have allowed thousands of federal activities to remain free from review by expert scientists—including those that produce greenhouse gases—but this rule was overturned by the Obama administration. As early acts, this doesn’t bode well for the Interior Secretary’s environmental commitment, say green groups. They’ve vowed to sue in response.

Noah Greenwald, biodiversity program director for the Center for Biological Diversity, says: “For Salazar to adopt Bush’s polar bear extinction plan is confirming the worst fears of his tenure as Secretary of Interior. Secretary Salazar would apparently prefer to please Sarah Palin than protect polar bears.”