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Groups Ask Salazar to Help Save Endangered Species

A polar bear will paw-deliver a petition to U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar in San Francisco on Thursday, asking him to roll back Bush administration's regulations environmentalists say weaken the federal Endangered Species Act.

Salazar is in San Francisco to conduct the last of four nationwide public hearings on the country's offshore energy strategy, to be held at the University of California, San Francisco's Mission Bay campus.

According to Brian Nowicki of the Center for Biological Diversity, a national conservation organization focusing on protecting endangered species and habitats, before the close of the Bush administration, two rules were implemented that jeopardize endangered species such as the polar bear, which is listed as threatened under the act.

One of the rules limits the ability of the government's environmental agencies to review the impacts of thousands of proposed federal actions on endangered species.

The second disallows consideration of global warming and greenhouse gases when considering protections for polar bears, "even when those are the primary threat to the species," said Nowicki.

A March 3 memo signed by President Obama required federal agencies to return to their prior practice of consulting with scientific experts on the impacts of their actions on threatened or endangered species,



Environmental groups will rally Thursday morning outside the hearing, along with a polar bear that Nowicki says hopes to paw-deliver a petition signed by 50,000 people to Salazar. Courtesy: Lincoln Park Zoo

but an April 3 letter to Salazar signed by 44 members of Congress expressed concern that "it cannot undo all of the damage that these rules may inflict."

Salazar has been given the authority by Congress under the recently approved 2009 Omnibus Appropriations Bill to withdraw those regulations, but he must do so within 60 days of its signing, by May 9, and Nowicki worries that a significant amount of time has already passed without word from the secretary on the issue.

"That window is closing and we really want him to take advantage of that authority," Nowicki said.

Hugh Vickery, a spokesman for Salazar, responded this morning, "No decision's been made on that."

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hearing, along with a polar bear that Nowicki says hopes to paw-deliver a petition signed by 50,000 people to Salazar.

"I think I'm most likely the polar bear tomorrow," Nowicki admitted. "And I'm glad it's going to be only about 60 degrees tomorrow."

Costumes are not allowed inside the hearing, where Nowicki will be among several environmental representatives that plan to address Salazar.

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