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## Group vows to keep pushing for ribbon seal listing

By DAN JOLING

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — The conservation group that petitioned to list ribbon seals as threatened or endangered vowed to keep trying despite rejection by federal wildlife managers.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced Tuesday that ribbon seals were not in current danger of extinction or likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future and should not be listed.

“Our scientists have reviewed climate models that project that annual ice, which is critical for ribbon seal reproduction, molting and resting, will continue to form each winter in the Bering Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk where the majority of ribbon seals are located,” said Jim Balsiger, NOAA acting assistant administrator for fisheries, in a statement.

Brendan Cummings of the Center for Biological Diversity said the denial ignores science on global warming and the law.

“We are confident it will be overturned by either the courts or the new administration,” Cummings said.

The center will file a 60-day notice of its intent to sue.

“If they don’t change their minds in 60 days, we’ll see them in court,” Cummings said.

The conservation group petitioned to list ribbon seals because their habitat - sea ice - is disappearing due to climate change brought on by humans.

As the petition was filed in December 2007, the group acknowledged that the listing process was being used to force the Bush administration to take action to curb global warming.

Ribbon seals are found in the Bering, Chukchi and Beaufort seas off Alaska’s coast plus the Sea of Okhotsk and the Sea of Japan.

Ribbon seals are distinguished by the patterns of their fur - four white bands or ribbons encircling the head, base of the trunk and the two front flippers over a dark coat, a pattern that gives them the coloration of a panda bear.

Among marine mammals, ribbon seals may be the most dependent on sea ice, Cummings said. During summer and fall, they live in the water and feed on fish, squid and crustaceans. From March through June, ribbon seals rely on loose pack ice in the Bering and Okhotsk seas for reproduction and molting, and as a platform for foraging.

Ribbon seals give birth and nurse pups exclusively on sea ice. Ice

allows pups, which can’t swim, to avoid predators and to stay dry until they grow blubber.

According to the conservation group, it’s critical for ice floes used for pupping to remain stable until pups are independent, and that is threatened by earlier melting and thinner ice.

The Center for Biological Diversity successfully pushed to have polar bears, another species dependent on sea ice, placed on the list of threatened species because of ice loss in the Arctic and is seeking protection for Pacific walrus. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, part of the Interior Department, oversees both.

The group has petitioned to list three other ice seals, ringed, bearded and spotted seals, because of global warming. NOAA Fisheries officials have until May 28, or one year after the original petition filing date, to complete a review and propose or reject a listing for the other ice seals.

Summer sea ice in the Arctic this year shrank to 1.74 million square miles, the second lowest level on record and 860,000 square miles below the average between 1979 and 2000.