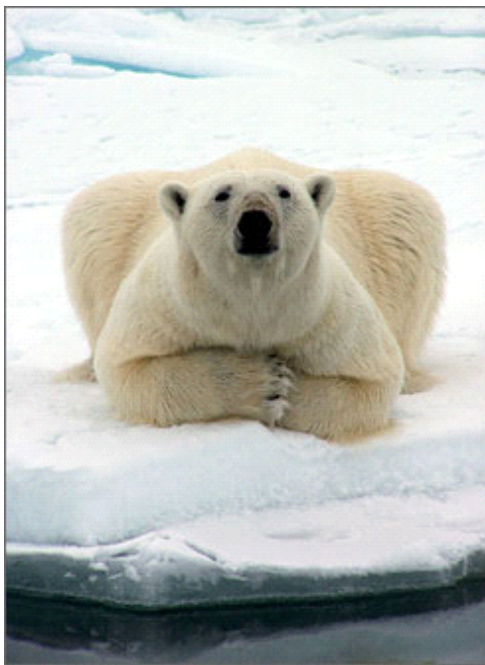


Species on endangered list challenged

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By Mary Sage,
Joseph Napaatug
Sage via AP

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A polar bear watches a whaling crew near Barrow, Alaska, on Monday.



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1996 file photo, AP

About 2,200 manatees, which can weigh up to 2,000 pounds, remain in Florida.

By Laura Parker, USA TODAY

Ever since a 3-inch fish protected by the Endangered Species Act stopped construction of a dam in Tennessee in 1978, the law has been known as one of the toughest environmental laws on the books.

Environmental groups have used it to halt development in pristine lands across the nation. Today, the law designed to protect animals such as the manatee from extinction also has become a legal tool of property-rights groups and developers.

PHOTOS : [Global warming affects species from caribou to harlequin frogs to coral](#)

In a counterpunch to environmentalists who have filed lawsuits aimed at protecting hundreds of plant and animal species by listing them as endangered or threatened, property-rights groups such as the Pacific Legal Foundation are filing lawsuits to have animals and plants removed from the list so that development can proceed.

Meanwhile, industry groups have filed dozens of legal challenges aimed at allowing development on lands set aside by the U.S. government to help protect endangered species.

"The conventional wisdom is that environmental groups exclusively used this provision in court, but today, the industry

