

Half a world away from the gulf oil spill: penguins get good news

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On Thursday, Center for Biological Diversity announced a legal settlement that will protect seven penguin species at risk from global warming and fisheries.

On Friday, BP finally made some headway with temporarily containing the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico that started six weeks ago, which has devastated the area, fouled pristine beaches, marshes, fragile estuaries, and killed unknown numbers of sea birds and marine life.

Brown pelicans have been observed covered with oil, unable to breath, trying helplessly to clean off the toxic, tenacious dark slime. These majestic sea birds were recently delisted from Endangered Species Protection.

Therefore, with all the heartache going on in the Gulf communities, any positive news for wildlife is a welcome event.

Thursday, a federal judge approved a settlement that requires the federal government to finalize protections for seven penguin species under the Endangered Species Act. The court-ordered settlement results from a lawsuit filed by the Center for Biological Diversity and Turtle Island Restoration Network (TIRN) challenging the Obama administration's failure to finalize its

determination that these penguins warrant Endangered Species Act protection due to threats from climate change and commercial fisheries.

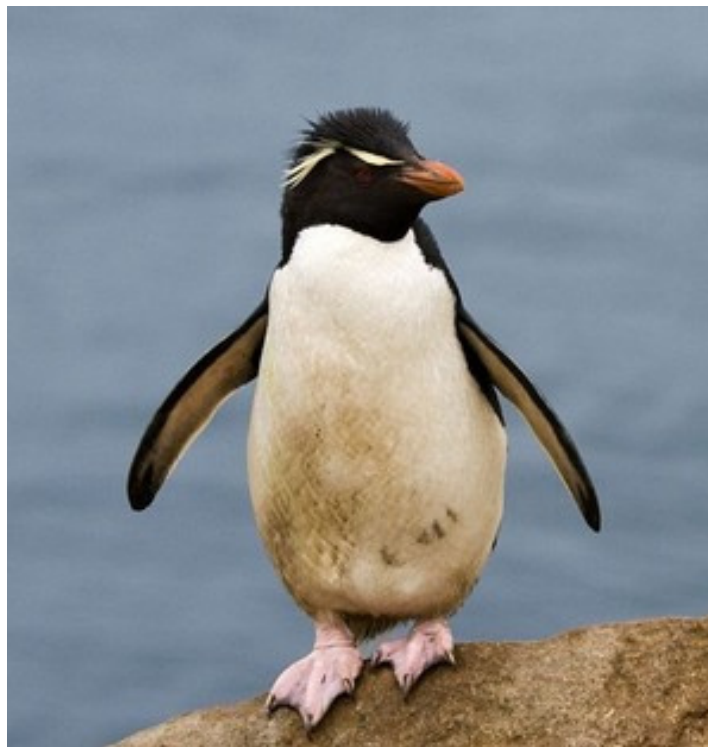
"Penguins are poster children for the devastating effects of climate change," said Catherine Kilduff, a Center attorney. "The Endangered Species Act provides a springboard for protecting penguins and our planet."

In 2006, the Center filed a petition to list 12 penguin species under the Act. In December 2008, the Interior Department proposed listing seven of those penguins as threatened or endangered – African, Humboldt, yellow-eyed, white-flipped, Fiordland crested, erect-crested, and a population of the southern rockhopper penguins – while denying listing to emperor

and northern rockhopper penguins despite scientific evidence that they are also threatened by climate change and commercial fisheries.

"Industrial fisheries and ocean warming are starving the penguins. Longlines and other destructive fishing gear entangle and drown them," said Todd Steiner, biologist and executive director of TIRN. "Finally the government is throwing penguins a lifeline to recovery by protecting them under the Endangered Species Act."

Thursday's settlement guarantees protections for the seven penguin species the Interior Department proposed for listing; the Center and TIRN also intend to file suit against Interior for denying protections to emperor and northern rockhopper penguins.



Northern rockhopper penguin. Samuel Blanc

Warming oceans, melting sea ice, and fishery harvests have wreaked havoc on penguins' food supply: Krill, an essential nutrient for penguins, whales, and seals, has declined by up to 80 percent since the 1970s over large areas of the Southern Ocean.

The Endangered Species Act listing will protect penguins from multiple threats, raise awareness of their plight, and increase research funding. The Act also has a key role in managing greenhouse gas pollution by compelling federal agencies to analyze and reduce the impact of the emissions generated by their activities on listed species.