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Environmental group releases new plea to save sea ice

By Alaska Newspapers Staff

A new report issued today by the Endangered Species Coalition names Arctic sea ice as one of the top 10 places to save for wildlife, fish and plants on the brink of extinction.

The critical status of Arctic sea ice topped a list of 10 areas noted by the coalition as in need of urgent protection.

"If we are serious about saving endangered species from global warming, then these are the places to start," said Leda Hula, executive director of the Endangered Species Coalition. The non-profit group is a national network of hundreds of conservation, scientific, religious, sporting, outdoor recreation, business and community organizations working to protecting endangered species and their habitat.

"The Arctic is warming twice as fast as the rest of the world, and Arctic sea ice is melting faster than any of the climate models predicted," said Re-

becca Noblin, Alaska director of the Center for Biological Diversity, which distributed the coalition's list in Alaska.

"Unless we drastically reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, sea-ice dependent animals like the polar bear will not survive into the coming century.

The report highlights 10 ecosystems that are hotspots for threatened and endangered species, many of which are highly vulnerable to climate change now. Coalition members nominated the ecosystems for inclusion in the report, and the submissions were then reviewed and judged by a panel of scientists. For each ecosystem, the report identifies resident endangered species and necessary conservation measures to help them survive.

Hula and Noblin said that according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 20 percent to 30 percent of the world's species will be at an increased risk of extinction if global temperature increases exceed 3 to 5

degrees Fahrenheit (1.5 to 2.5 degrees Celsius) above preindustrial levels. Climate threats to species include increased disease, diminished reproduction, lost habitat and reduced food supply, they said.