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## Conservationists intervene in polar bear habitat lawsuit

-Alaska Newspapers Staff

Three conservation groups have intervened in defense of polar bear critical habitat in lawsuits filed by the oil industry and the state of Alaska, the Center for Biological Diversity said today.

“If polar bears are going to live to see the next century, we have to rapidly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and preserve the Arctic, not turn it into a dirty industrial zone,” said Rebecca Noblin, Alaska director for the Center for Biological Diversity.

Noblin is also representing Defenders of Wildlife and Greenpeace in the litigation.

In separate lawsuits filed in March, the Alaska Oil and Gas Association and the state of Alaska chal-

lenged the federal government’s designation 187,157 square miles - an area larger than the state of California - as critical habitat, saying it is excessive and unnecessary.

Noblin said she expects the court to consolidate the cases, for which briefing schedules are still pending.

Still pending before a federal judge in Washington D.C. is another state lawsuit, filed two years ago, that challenges the federal government’s designation of polar bears as a threatened species.

Designation of critical habitat requires that before resource development exploration and other such activities proceed that the federal government consider whether such action would ad-

versely affect habitat and interfere with recovery of polar bear populations.

The Alaska Oil and Gas Association alleges that the designated polar bear critical habitat will result in billions of dollars in economic effects to the industry. Alaska Gov. Sean Panell, in a lawsuit closely following on the one filed by AOGA, says designation of this habitat spells more red tape on offshore development projects.

Polar bears were listed as a threatened species in 2008 under the Endangered Species Act due to rapid demise of sea ice habitat. Then in November 2010, Interior officials designated 120 million acres of coastal areas, sea ice and barrier islands as critical habitat for the polar bears.