TALK ABOUT taking the polar opposite view. After years of gutting environmental standards and denying global warming, the Bush administration has agreed to study whether or not the iconic and much-loved polar bear should be added to the nation’s endangered species list. Bravo.

Of course, the announcement came only after a lawsuit, a year of stonewalling, and an unprecedented public shift in thinking about global warming. Over a year ago, three environmental organizations sued the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for just such a proposal after federal officials had been "reviewing" the status of polar bears for more than two years. There was nothing for them to review, really -- polar bears hunt, mate and procreate on polar ice, which has been shrinking at a rapid rate. Without ice, the bears starve on land. And so their population has declined 15 percent in the last decade, and things have gotten so bad for them that they are breaking into homes in search of food and marauding through towns -- recently, a polar bear was responsible for the death of a 15-year-old girl in the far western Russian Arctic.

Still, it will take at least another year of official study before the White House makes any decision on the polar bear, so Bush’s admission is a small one indeed. But with even the Republican base shifting gears on global warming -- it's no accident that the White House announcement came the day after more than 85 Christian evangelical leaders signed a statement urging the federal government to issue mandatory limits on greenhouse-gas emissions -- even this obstinate administration may be getting the message that its inaction is unpopular and unsustainable.

We urge the White House to "study" not just the polar bear, but also human options for reducing the emissions that have led to its endangerment.