

Alaska again seeks delisting of polar bears as threatened

Listing could stall development of oil, governor says.

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The state of Alaska is bolstering efforts to overturn the listing of the polar bear as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Attorney General Dan Sullivan announced Wednesday he has filed a supplement to the state's earlier lawsuit in federal court in Washington, D.C. In it, the state claims the U.S. Department of Interior did not respond to the state's concerns in a timely manner before polar bears were listed last year.

Former Gov. Sarah Palin and the state filed an initial lawsuit in August 2008, fearing a listing would cripple offshore oil and gas development in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas, which provide prime habitat for the only polar bears under U.S. jurisdiction.

Gov. Sean Parnell, who succeeded Palin upon her resignation last summer, joined Sullivan at a news conference in which they said the Endangered Species Act was being used as a way to shut down resource development along Alaska's northern coast. Parnell said he does not intend to let that happen.

Sullivan reiterated concerns over models used by the government to list the bears. He claimed the models projecting future declines in sea ice are flawed.

A message left after business hours Thursday with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was not immediately returned. Agency officials in Washington, D.C., were expected to discuss a proposal to designate critical habitat for the bears Thursday.

Sullivan said the federal government's listing used speculative scientific models that went too far into the future and failed to take into account what is already successfully being done to protect polar bears.

"The listing of the polar bears under the ESA is unprecedented," Sullivan said. "We are doing and others have been doing a good job in protecting the species."

Rebecca Noblin with the Center for Biological Diversity said the state's move disappointing. The center first petitioned to get polar bears listed in February 2005.

"We are really disappointed to see that the state of Alaska is continuing to deny the science of climate change," she said. "It is ironic in a state that is feeling the impacts of global warming before everyone else that the state would take this position that can only hurt Alaskans."