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# Alaska Legislature Plans \$1.5 Million Astroturf Fight Against Endangered Species Act

by Justin Elliott, TPM

Seeking to protect the oil industry, the Alaska state legislature has appropriated \$1.5 million to fund an astroturf campaign to weaken the Endangered Species Act and put on a conference questioning the listing of polar bears as a threatened species.

Over the objections of some members who warned of "PR damage" to the state, a group of lawmakers late last week decided to move ahead with reviewing bids from public relations firms for the polar bear contract, the Anchorage Daily News reported.

Polar bears were listed as a threatened species in 2008 because of the loss of sea ice due to climate change. Worried that the move would damage prospects for new oil and gas development, Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin immediately objected to decision by the Bush Administration.

That same year, Republican state Rep. John Harris proposed putting on a conference for climate change skeptics to fight the polar bear decision. "We want to have the money to hire scientists to answer the Interior (Department) scientists," he said at the time.

That idea became too controversial, but the new conference OKed by the state's Legislative Council amounts to a toned down version of Harris' original idea.

The primary purposes of the conference will be to challenge the listing of polar bears and to determine the best ways to lessen the impacts of the Endangered Species Act for the oil and gas industries.

To do that, a Harris aide told the Anchorage Daily News, the PR firm will "initiate a grass-roots movement" to go to Congress and demand reforms to the law.

The Council is now looking at bids from various PR firms.

Among those interested is Rudy Giuliani, who pitched Harris aide Eddie Grasser on awarding the contract to Bracewell Giuliani, the ADN reported in December.