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**Press Release**  
January 30, 2008

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## **Polar Bears Need Urgent Protection, Conservation Groups Testify**

**Washington D.C.**— Margaret Williams, WWF's Director of the Bering Sea ecoregion program called for urgent action to save polar bears at the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works hearing entitled "Examining Threats and Protections for the Polar Bear" on Wednesday, January 30, 2008. The hearing was convened to examine the status of and legal protections for the polar bear, including the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the status of listing the species under the act.

"Listing polar bears under the ESA is a last resort, and in essence, signifies a failure of policy and management to date," said Williams. "We have known for some time of the dangers of global warming, and should have acted more expeditiously to address them. We need to closely scrutinize and prevent all actions that may add further stress to the polar bear, including conducting oil and gas leasing in prime polar bear habitat."

While WWF and Alaska Wilderness League applaud congressional interest in the plight of the polar bears, we join the conservation community in urging for the immediate listing of the polar bear and calling for a dramatic decrease in green house gases, the source of global warming that is melting polar bear habitat and transforming the Arctic.

"Today's hearing signals the need for bold and timely action to protect the polar bear and its habitat in America's Arctic," said Kristen Miller, legislative director for Alaska Wilderness League. "The responsible next step is for Secretary Kempthorne to withdraw Lease Sale 193 in the Chukchi Sea until a polar bear listing is finalized and critical habitat is designated."

Analyses recently published by the US Geological Survey show that by mid-21st century, two-thirds of the world's polar bear population could be lost, mainly due to loss of sea ice. As this sea ice habitat decreases, the entire food chain will be affected – from the tiniest plankton to the forage fish, the ringed seal, and the king of the north, the polar bear.

"The U.S. has an obligation to the world to heed the science and to uphold its commitments to protect polar bears and their habitat," Williams added. "Listing the polar bear will be the first step in the right direction. We must do everything possible to allow for the polar bear to persist, and to leave future generations of Americans with a chance of knowing that polar bears and other Arctic wildlife exist in the wild."

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### **NOTE TO EDITORS**

*B-roll and high-resolution photographs are available to accompany press stories based on this release and mentioning World Wildlife Fund.*

- On January 2, the Minerals Management Service, a Department of the Interior agency, announced its intention to open up 29.7 million acres of the Chukchi Sea to oil and gas leasing in key polar bear habitat, with the bidding on Lease Sale 193 to take place on February 6 in Anchorage, Alaska.
- On January 7, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, another Department of the Interior agency, stated it would miss a legally required deadline for a final decision on whether to list polar bears as threatened under the ESA as a result of the drastic impacts of global warming on the bear's habitat in the Chukchi Sea and across America's Arctic.

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**About World Wildlife Fund:**

*For more than 45 years, WWF has been protecting the future of nature. The largest multinational conservation organization in the world, WWF works in 100 countries and is supported by 1.2 million members in the United States and close to 5 million globally. WWF's unique way of working combines global reach with a foundation in science, involves action at every level, from local to global, and ensures the delivery of innovative solutions that meet the needs of both people and nature. Go to [worldwildlife.org](http://worldwildlife.org) to learn more.*

**About Alaska Wilderness League – Your Land. Your Voice.**

*Alaska Wilderness League's mission is to lead the effort to preserve Alaska's wilderness by engaging citizens, sharing resources, collaborating with other organizations, educating the public, and providing a courageous, constant and victorious voice for Alaska in the nation's capital. It is the only organization dedicated solely to the preservation of Alaska's wilderness in the nation's capital. Go to [www.alaskawild.org](http://www.alaskawild.org) to learn more.*

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