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Interior Department Mixes Oil and Polar Bear

Polar Bear's Critical Habitat Proposed as oil and gas development moves forward

Statement from Cindy Shogan, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League:

“Today’s announcement outlining the proposed critical habitat area for the beleaguered polar bear acknowledges that some of the most sensitive areas on land and in the offshore waters of America’s Arctic – including much of the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge – are key to the species survival. In particular, this announcement emphasizes the significance of the Arctic Refuge’s coastal plain as a vital denning habitat for the polar bear.

On paper, this designation essentially requires what we’ve been calling for all along, a rational approach to oil and gas development in some of the lands and waters that make up one of our nation’s last great wild places. However, actions speak louder than words. Earlier this week, the Minerals Management Service (MMS) gave Shell Oil the green light to start drilling in the Arctic’s Beaufort Sea as early as this summer, despite a glaring lack of information on the impacts of such development on species like the polar bear. MMS also announced it is considering a similar proposal in the Arctic’s Chukchi Sea.

How can the Department of Interior protect a threatened species in a stressed environment and allow oil and gas development? This nation needs a rational approach to development in America’s Arctic, one that is based on sound science as previously stated by Interior Secretary Ken Salazar. There must be a timeout on all development activity in America’s Arctic until a comprehensive, science based plan can be developed. Only then, will we begin to protect the polar bear, its melting habitat and the people who have lived off the bounty of America’s Arctic for thousands of years.”

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