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Natural Resources Committee

Press Release

U.S. Rep. Don Young, Ranking Member

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“This polar bear decision represents an assault on sound science and common sense.” – U.S. Rep. Don Young

Washington, D.C. – The following is U.S. Rep. Don Young’s (R-Alaska) statement regarding the announcement today to list the polar bear as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Young is the Ranking Member on House Natural Resources Committee.

“This decision represents an assault on sound science and common sense. It is hard to fully blame the Secretary for this decision, which seriously threatens the economy and freedoms of Alaskans and all Americans. He has been compelled to make a premature decision by a Clinton-appointed federal judge in Oakland, California, who is presiding over a lawsuit brought by radical environmental groups.

“However, with this decision, Secretary Kempthorne has determined that opportunities to continue to explore and drill in Alaska will not be impacted, and neither will resource and economic development opportunities for Alaskans and Alaska Natives. He is seeking to administer the listing in the most practical and sound manner as possible.

“Unfortunately, my fear is that radical environmental groups led by the Center for Biological Diversity, will file numerous frivolous lawsuits to stop development and traditional activities the Alaska Natives have conducted for thousands of years.

“Since the ESA was enacted 35 years ago, these radical environmental groups have misused both the ESA and courts to effectively regulate local economies and to destroy private property rights. While the ESA is a well-intentioned law, it has been stretched beyond its original meaning, and the consequence is that species are not being saved by it, some species that are not endangered are being listed as endangered, and the average American pays the price.

“This is a classic example of how these extreme environmental groups have meddled in the science of listing species under the ESA.

Polar Bear Population Has Increased By 15,000 to 20,000 Since 1950

“The polar bear populations are healthy. In 1950, there were an estimated 5,000 polar bears. Current estimates put the population at 20,000 to 25,000 polar bears.

“The science on Arctic ice, CO2 emissions and climate change is too speculative and uncertain to justify a listing of the polar bear as ‘threatened’. The listing decision is based on a computer projection of the healthy polar bear populations declining 45 to 50 years from now. This projection in turn relies on climate and ice modeling that, as the climate modelers concede, do not have predictive value.

“To list a species based on computer projection of what may happen 45 to 50 years from now is outrageous.

“In the past 13 years, I have authored bills to protect populations of rhinos, tigers, elephants, and other species that were truly ‘threatened’ or ‘endangered’. I care about the future of the polar bears. But I must oppose the listing of the healthy polar bear species based on an arbitrary computer projection of their population in 2050. This is not sound science, it’s a computer game.

“This listing is far beyond anything I imagined when I voted for the creation of the Endangered Species Act in 1973.

Center For Biological Diversity Plans To Use Polar Bears To Shut Down Domestic Energy Production

“We have clearly seen that one of the major problems is with the Act itself - it gives bureaucrats enormous authority to render arbitrary decisions that are not based on sound, accepted scientific and forecasting principles.

“It’s important to also examine the motives of the group that petitioned for the listing - the Center for Biological Diversity. The Center has not hidden its agenda, which is to impose price controls and energy rationing on hard working Americans. The authors of the polar bear petition outlined these goals very clearly in their published articles on the issue. They include finding a federal judge to:

- Increase mileage standards for autos and trucks beyond that which Congress decides;
- End all offshore oil and gas leasing in the entire United States Outer Continental Shelf;
- Shut down new coal-fired power plants;
- Kill oil shale leasing;
- Stop limestone mines for cement manufacturing;
- And endeavor to stop ‘dozens, perhaps hundreds, of other projects [...] individually and cumulatively having an appreciable effect on the atmosphere.’

(Cummings and Siegel, “*Ursus Maritimus: Polar Bears on Thin Ice*”, *Natural Resources & Environment*, Fall 2007).

“Does this sound far-fetched? Not where the San Francisco-based Ninth Circuit is concerned. The Center has indicated its ‘test’ for imposing energy rationing will be performed in the liberal Ninth Circuit, which has an overwhelming majority of its decisions overturned when heard by the U.S. Supreme Court.”

For more information, access the Committee on Natural Resources’ Minority website at:

<http://republicans.resourcescommittee.house.gov/default.aspx>

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