



Economic Analysis for Polar Bear Critical Habitat

The polar bear was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on May 15, 2008. On October 29, 2009 the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) published a proposed rule to designate critical habitat for the polar bear in the *Federal Register*. The ESA requires that the Service conduct an economic analysis prior to publishing a final rule designating critical habitat. The Service will accept comments during the 60 day public comment period following the publication of the draft economic analysis in the *Federal Register*.

The purpose of an economic analysis is to identify and analyze the potential economic impacts associated with the proposed critical habitat designation. The economic impact of the proposed critical habitat designation is analyzed by comparing scenarios both “with critical habitat” and “without critical habitat.” The “without critical habitat” scenario represents the baseline for the analysis, and qualitatively considers protections already in place for the species (e.g., under the ESA and other federal laws).

The economic analysis provides estimated costs of the reasonably foreseeable potential economic impacts of the proposed critical habitat designation through 2039. This time horizon pertains to the forecast of impacts to oil and gas exploration, development, and production, and associated construction projects, as these are the primary activities occurring within the proposed critical habitat area.

Polar bears already receive significant protection under the Marine Mammals



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Protection Act and because of their threatened status under the ESA. The draft economic analysis concludes that most costs associated with the proposed critical habitat designation are related to additional consultation under requirements of section 7 of the ESA. The total value of future impacts from 2010-2039 (those estimated to occur because of critical habitat designation) are estimated to be \$669,000, assuming a seven percent discount rate.

Copies of the critical habitat proposal and the draft economic analysis are available on the Internet at: <http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mmm/polarbear/criticalhabitat.htm> or by calling the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office at 1 800/362 5148.

Comments may be submitted by one of the following methods:

Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the

instructions for submitting comments to Docket No. FWS-R7-ES-2009-0042.

U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R7-ES-2009-0042; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

Once the comment period ends, the Service will analyze the comments received on both the proposed critical habitat and draft economic analysis. A final determination regarding proposed critical habitat for the polar bear will be published in the *Federal Register*.

For more information, contact:
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Alaska
1 800/362 5148 (phone)
<http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mmm/polarbear/criticalhabitat.htm>