

PRESS RELEASE

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Palin Lawsuit Against Beluga Whales Ignores Science *Experts Agree Whale is Endangered*

ANCHORAGE – The Palin Administration’s recent announcement to challenge the listing of the Cook Inlet beluga whale under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) drew a sharp rebuke from scientists and citizens’ groups today. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) listed the beluga whale as “endangered” in October 2008 after an exhaustive scientific review. The State of Alaska announced its intent to challenge the listing in a January 12, 2009, letter to NMFS.

“It seems the Palin Administration only likes one kind of science – the kind it agrees with,” said Craig Matkin, an Alaskan marine mammal expert with the North Gulf Oceanic Society. “Every objective expert who’s looked at this small and isolated population agrees it should be listed.”

In 2006, the renowned World Conservation Union (IUCN) put the Cook Inlet beluga whale on its “Red List” for critically endangered species.¹ IUCN relies on scientific experts well-versed in marine mammal population dynamics to develop its recommendations; the only IUCN category above “critically endangered is “extinct”.

The U.S. Marine Mammal Commission – the expert agency charged by Congress with protecting the nation’s marine mammal populations – has repeatedly called for an endangered species listing for the Cook Inlet beluga whale.²

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¹ See IUCN Red List: www.iucnredlist.org/details/61442#nogo1

² See U.S. Marine Mammal Commission: www.mmc.gov/species/belugawhale.html

“The science supporting this listing is unequivocal and a listing decision was supported by the prestigious U.S. Marine Mammal Commission. An ESA listing of the Cook Inlet population of beluga whales is clearly a case where science and the rule of law should prevail,” said Dr. John Schoen, Senior Scientist at Audubon Alaska.

“The ESA has a long, demonstrated history showing that responsible development and endangered species can co-exist,” said Bob Shavelson, Executive Director of Cook Inletkeeper. “The Palin Administration should respect the science and the rule of law, not throw public tax dollars at a frivolous lawsuit.”

“Once again Governor Palin has demonstrated either a complete lack of understanding or lack of concern over the plight of endangered species,” said Brendan Cummings, Oceans Program Director at the Center for Biological Diversity.”

“The good news is that with the ESA listing we are already in the process of finding out why the whales are not thriving and what we should do to reverse the decline. The Cook Inlet beluga whale population cannot recover without our help, but the Governor is using precious state funds and staff resources to block our collective efforts. We’re disappointed but not surprised,” concluded Karla Dutton, Alaska Director of Defenders of Wildlife.

Additional information on the long history of NMFS’s scientific and policy inquiry into the Cook Inlet beluga whale listing can be found at:

<http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/whales/beluga/management.htm#esa>

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