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Alaska Oil and Gas Association issues notices of intent to challenge decisions to list Bearded and Ringed Seals as threatened or endangered.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 19, 2013

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ANCHORAGE- The Alaska Oil and Gas Association (AOGA) announced today its notices of intent to file a lawsuit challenging recent federal decisions to list certain populations of Arctic bearded and ringed seals as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

There is no scientific evidence linking climate change now or in the future to adverse effects on these species. AOGA's notices explain that these listings are not supported by the available scientific data, which show bearded and ringed seal populations to be healthy, abundant, and thriving.

The 60 day notices filed today by AOGA follow a series of climate-based listings from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; however, the ringed and bearded seal listings are further removed from the state of scientific knowledge than any previous decision to list a species on the sole basis of a future threat.

AOGA's members have a long history of supporting and advocating wildlife conservation and research in the Arctic. "AOGA members have always been committed to protecting the species of wildlife we interact with during the course of doing business," says Kara Moriarty, Executive Director for AOGA.

There is no evidence that oil and gas activities are a present or foreseeable threat to ringed and bearded seals. "Restrictions on activity must be based on the scientific record and consistent with the law. Unfortunately, we believe these listings are flawed and misguided," continued Ms. Moriarty.

AOGA opposes the listings because if it is lawful to list Arctic bearded and ringed seals as threatened when their populations are currently healthy, abundant, and wide ranging, and are experiencing no adverse effects linked to climate change, then it is possible to list any and virtually all species on the basis of unsupported speculation.

"NMFS' decisions, in our opinion, are not consistent with its own policy or the best available science," says Moriarty. "The decisions to list bearded and ringed seals are based on speculation regarding how climate change might affect these species 100 years from now, despite their populations currently being healthy and abundant. That's bad precedent for making evidence-based decisions that have real impacts for Alaska."

The Alaska Oil & Gas Association is a private, business trade association. Its member companies represent the majority of oil and gas exploration, production, transportation, refining and marketing activities in Alaska. More information about the organization is available at aoga.org.

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