



MLA 003- Bowhead Whale/Arctic Ocean

NMFS ANNOUNCES CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATION MAY
BE WARRANTED FOR BOWHEAD WHALE

Vic Ferguson

The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation

P.O. Box 311117

Houston Texas 77231



May 22, 2001

CBD's scientific petition would designate approximately 26.5 million acres of protected habitat in Alaska's Arctic Ocean

Contact: Brent Plater (415) 572-6989

More Information: [Bowhead Whale](#)

Responding to a formal administrative petition submitted by the Center for Biological Diversity ("CBD"), the National Marine Fisheries Service ("NMFS") announced in the Federal Register yesterday that critical habitat for the Bowhead Whale may be warranted in areas currently slated for oil and gas development in the Beaufort Sea, a component of the Arctic Ocean that borders Alaska's North Slope. CBD proposed approximately 26.5 million acres as critical habitat in the petition, and today's announcement by NMFS indicates that the agency believes that the petition may result in a critical habitat designation within two years.

"NMFS' action today is the first step in protecting the Bowhead's home range from incompatible oil and gas development," said Brent Plater, CBD attorney. "Oil spills are a big concern in the continued recovery of this species, and the critical habitat designation will help eliminate the risk of a catastrophic spill."

The critical habitat designation is being sought to protect the Bowhead Whale, which inhabits the Arctic Waters around Alaska's North Shore. Bowheads were hunted almost to extinction the 19th century, and have been listed as an endangered species since 1970. Because of their remote location, they are one of the least well-known baleen whales in the world. However, large-scale off-shore oil exploration and development has proliferated within the Bowhead's proposed critical habitat, exposing the Bowhead's to disruptive noise levels, dangerous oil spills, and deadly collisions with ships.

The ESA defines critical habitat as "areas essential for the survival and recovery of species." Federal agencies may not authorize, permit, or fund projects which destroy or "adversely modify" critical habitat. Many activities in the proposed critical habitat need permits from federal agencies, and the critical habitat designation will require the agencies to consult with NMFS to evaluate the impact of their activities on the whale's habitat.

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