

Agency proposes critical habitat for ringed seals

December 2 2014, by Dan Joling

A federal agency has proposed about 350,000 square miles of ocean off Alaska's north and west coasts as critical habitat for the seal that's the main prey of polar bears.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced Tuesday that it's proposing much of the Bering, Chukchi (chuk-CHEE') and Beaufort seas within U.S. jurisdiction as critical habitat for [ringed seals](#).

The seals were declared threatened in December 2012 because of the loss of [sea ice](#) from climate warming. Ringed seals use sea ice for breeding and molting.

A critical-habitat designation means federal agencies that authorize activities there must consult with NOAA Fisheries to determine the effects on seals.

The agency will take public comment on the proposed [critical-habitat](#) designation for 90 days.

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