

Federal appeals court rejects Trump administration move to weaken walrus protections

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The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals this week rejected a decision by

the Trump administration that Pacific walrus no longer qualified to be listed as a threatened species.

The decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2017 reversed its earlier position, made in 2011 under the Obama administration, that the walrus warranted such protection under the Endangered Species Act because their sea ice habitat was diminishing.

The [appeals court](#), in a 20-page decision on Thursday, ruled that the agency did not adequately explain its shift in position.

"Although the assessment (in 2017) contained some new information, the actual decision document did not explain why this new information resulted in an about-face from the Service's 2011 conclusion that the Pacific walrus met the statutory criteria for listing," the appeals court decision says.

The federal agency has not listed the walrus under the Endangered Species Act, but the species remains under federal consideration for that listing.

The Center for Biological Diversity, the conservation group that petitioned for a walrus listing under the Endangered Species Act, sued the Trump administration in 2018. U.S. District Court Judge Sharon Gleason rejected the challenge, leading to the appeal.

"This ruling is big news that gives the Pacific walrus a fighting chance," said Emily Jeffers, an attorney at the conservation group. "Arctic ice is disappearing at a record rate, and walruses are suffering catastrophic habitat loss."

The appeals court decision said Fish and Wildlife must provide a sufficient explanation for its new position.

The agency "will have to go back and examine the science on sea-ice loss and walrus survival," Jeffers said in a statement from the group on Thursday.

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