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### **NOAA Lists Population of Spotted Seals as Threatened**

NOAA today listed the southern distinct population segment (DPS) of the spotted seal as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, strictly regulating importation of the animal or its parts into the U.S.

The southern DPS of about 3,300 spotted seals is centered in Liaodong Bay, China, and Peter the Great Bay, Russia. Because the known distribution of the southern DPS occurs in areas outside the jurisdiction of the United States, no critical habitat can be designated as part of the listing action.

Under the ESA, NOAA can list a population outside the U.S., and regulate its importation into the U.S. American fishermen would also be prohibited from taking the animal.

Climate change and sea ice decline is expected to affect the sea ice habitat of these spotted seals, which use the sea ice formed each year for reproduction and molting in the spring. During the summer months they can be found in the open ocean or hauled out on shore. In the southern DPS, spotted seals have shown some capability to reproduce and molt on shore when ice is not available. However, suitable sites such as offshore rocks and isolated island beaches are limited, and may expose seals to increased predation and human disturbance.

Because of the small number of these seals and their vulnerability to the potential lack of ice, as well as other risks such as incidental fishery takes and possible oil spills, NOAA concluded that this population segment qualifies as threatened under the ESA. This designation means that this population is likely to become in danger of extinction within the foreseeable future.

The listing comes a year after NOAA did not list two other northern spotted seal populations in Russian, Japanese, and U.S. waters under the ESA. The two northern populations are large, have many offspring, and have a broad distribution, lessening their need for ESA protection.

NOAA's Fisheries Service examined the best scientific and commercial data available in its determination to list the southern segment of the spotted seal as threatened. After completing the status review in October 2009, the public had an opportunity to comment on the proposal to list the species during a 60-day comment period. Nine comments were received. NOAA also initiated an independent peer review of the proposed listing determination. The agency fully considered all comments received from the public and peer reviewers in developing this final rule.

This rule will become effective 30 days after date of publication in the Federal Register. The final rule, status review, and other supporting materials can be found on our web site at: <http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/>.

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