

Fairbanks Daily News Miner

Alaska legislators blast Endangered Species Act

FAIRBANKS — Members of Alaska’s congressional delegation met with two top Obama administration environmental officials Friday to discuss several issues that could have wide-ranging impacts on the state.

Of most concern to the delegation is the proposed listing of a critical habitat for the Cook Inlet beluga whale and petitions to list ice seals as threatened or endangered species. The delegation is worried that such decisions by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration could harm the state’s economy.

“In this economic climate, the fear is that all this activity will hurt the economy of Alaska. I share that fear,” Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski said in a statement. “Everyone wants to protect the environment, our wildlife and marine mammals, but the Endangered Species Act is being used as an instrument to stifle economic growth and development.”

The meeting with Dr. Jane Lubchenco, administrator for NOAA, and Eric Schwaab, the assistant administrator for the National Marine Fisheries Service, took place in Washington, D.C.

Both Murkowski and Republican **Rep. Don Young** emphasized the need for NOAA to look at hard science above all when making listing decisions.

“I made it clear to the administrator that it is important for the agency to have basic scientific information prior to any listing or critical habitat designation,” **Young** said in statement. “Unfortunately, many decisions made by the agency under the ESA are done with little or no scientific information, and that needs to change.”

Democratic Sen. Mark Begich echoed that sentiment in his comments.

“I stressed to Dr. Lubchenco the importance of using proper science and weighing economic factors when considering ESA regulations and ocean zoning proposals,” Begich said. “As NOAA continues to act, they must listen to Alaska’s communities and respect the unique circumstances that exist in each inlet and cove across our state.”