

Emily Bryant
Marine Policy Seminar
Thursday, April 25th

Polar Bears, Climate Change, and the Endangered Species Act

This presentation will review the recent Endangered Species Act (ESA) litigation that pertains to polar bears and climate change. Climate change is creating a host of problems for a variety of plant and animal species, and polar bears are no exception. That being said, are characteristic megafauna like polar bears treated differently in legal terms, especially as one could argue that they serve as one collective “poster child” for climate change? Do they merit protection under the Endangered Species Act? If so, how successful has the Endangered Species Act been as one legal means of addressing the problems that climate change has created for animal species (and, more specifically, how successful has it been in the case of recent polar bear litigation)? This presentation will grapple with these questions. There will be a brief review of the Endangered Species Act in general and then an overview of recent ESA litigation in regards to polar bears, during which more light will be shed on the successes (or failures) of the ESA as a means of addressing species loss and degradation due to climate change. Finally, there will be a brief discussion of whether or not there are different legal avenues that are available as a means of combating climate change (in terms of protecting different animal species from its effects.)