Polar Bear With Blue Tongue (see end of post for explanation)

Follow-up: Greenwire now (Oct. 22) has more details:

> The Obama administration today proposed protecting more than 200,000 square miles in Alaska as critical habitat for the polar bear — an area the administration said would be the largest the government has ever put forward in a bid to protect an imperiled species.
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> The Interior Department's sweeping proposal, which includes coastal barrier islands, terrestrial denning areas and sea ice off of Alaska's coast, is nearly one-third the size of Alaska and larger than the states of Washington and Oregon combined. Most of the habitat protections would go to offshore sea ice.

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Greenwire reports that the White House (OMB, actually) has cleared a rule designating critical habitat for polar bears. A key issue will be how this designation impacts oil and gas development:

> Critical habitat designations prohibit federal agencies from permitting actions that harm protected species within those areas.
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> The habitat protections could create more controversy over how federal officials should deal with climate change that is changing the bear's current habitat and what level of protections the bears need from oil and gas drilling in the Arctic.
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> Environmental groups want the habitat protections to address oil and gas development and protect not only land where the polar bear currently dwells but also the habitat it has lost from global warming.
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> An exception included in the polar bear's listing rule allows oil and gas

companies to operate in the bear's habitat, one of the issues environmentalists challenged in a lawsuit against the administration.

In the final months of the Bush administration, the Interior Department launched a controversial plan to ramp up offshore drilling in Alaska, as well as the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. The Obama administration is moving forward with that plan. The department closed a public comment period last month but has not set a timetable for a final decision.

By the way, the bear's tongue isn't blue because it's been eating a blueberry Popsicle– that's actually the normal color. True fact.