Animal Welfare Institute Files Suit Against BP for Burning Endangered Sea Turtles Alive

Animal Welfare Institute

NEW ORLEANS, June 30 -- The Animal Welfare Institute [1] (AWI) and other animal protection and conservation organizations have filed suit in federal court today against British Petroleum America, Inc., British Petroleum Exploration & Production and British Petroleum PLC ("BP") for burning critically endangered sea turtles in the Gulf of Mexico, in violation of the Endangered Species Act and other federal laws.

"It is horrifying that these innocent creatures whose habitat has already been devastated by the oil spill are now being burned alive," said AWI President, Cathy Liss. "They are critically endangered and must be protected."

As part of BP's efforts to contain the massive oil spill that continues to devastate the Gulf of Mexico, BP is using "controlled burns" whereby oil is corralled by fire resistant booms dragged through the water by shrimp boats and then lit on fire.

Endangered sea turtles, including the Kemp's ridley, one of the rarest sea turtles on Earth, are caught in the gathered oil and unable to escape when the oil is set ablaze.

The lawsuit was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana by AWI along with the Center for Biological Diversity, Turtle Island Restoration Network and Animal Legal Defense Fund, after notice was given to BP on Monday of its ongoing violations of federal law and the groups' intent to sue.

Under the suit, the plaintiffs have charged BP with violating the federal Endangered Species Act and the terms of its lease with the United States government for the Deepwater Horizon facility, which lease requires BP to comply with all federal environmental laws.

The plaintiffs have asked the court to prevent BP from continuing to engage in burning activities in the Gulf of Mexico which kill or injure endangered sea turtles. The plaintiffs have also filed a Temporary Restraining Order seeking an immediate halt to the burning until, at a minimum, mechanisms are implemented that will prevent any additional sea turtles from being burned alive.

"While cleaning up the catastrophic oil spill is critically important, so too is doing it in a way which doesn't destroy wildlife in a flagrantly unlawful manner," said Liss. "We hope that our legal efforts will serve to protect the endangered sea turtles whose very existence hangs in the balance."

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[1] http://www.awionline.org/