



Backgrounder

Conservation of Polar Bears in Canada

Polar Bears are found in Russia, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, the United States (Alaska) and Canada. Canada is home to approximately 15 500 of the estimated 20 000 to 25 000 Polar Bears in global polar regions.

Canadian Polar Bear populations are managed by the provinces, territories and wildlife management boards where the populations live. Research is primarily conducted by government agencies and universities, including the Government of Canada.

Environment Canada plays a key role by providing scientific expertise on Polar Bears, and by working collaboratively with other jurisdictions on national and international committees to ensure that populations are managed sustainably.

Canadian Populations

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Species in Canada (COSEWIC) is the independent body responsible for identifying and assessing species considered to be at risk in Canada. COSEWIC uses the best available information, including science, Aboriginal traditional knowledge and community knowledge. The assessments made by COSEWIC are the basis for consideration of legal listing under the federal *Species At Risk Act* (SARA). Polar bears were re-assessed by COSEWIC in 2008 as a single Canadian population and were identified, overall, as a species of Special Concern. Consultations concerning listing the polar bear as a species of special concern under SARA are underway.

The Polar Bear Technical Committee (PBTC) provides an annual status report to the Polar Bear Administrative Committee, including scientific assessments of near-term trends of subpopulations. These assessments are used in the management of the various sub-populations by the responsible jurisdictions. The PBTC 2009 scientific assessments indicated that three subpopulations were likely to be increasing (Viscount Melville Sound, M'Clintock Channel, and Gulf of Boothia), three subpopulations were likely to be stable (Davis Strait, Northern Beaufort Sea, and Southern Hudson Bay), six subpopulations were likely to be decreasing (Baffin Bay, Kane Basin, Lancaster Sound,

Norwegian Bay, Southern Beaufort Sea, and Western Hudson Bay), and one subpopulation was unknown (Foxe Basin).

Research

Cooperative research is often undertaken where the project is of interest to several jurisdictions, including the United States (Alaska), Denmark (Greenland), and Norway. Some research projects conducted by university researchers are coordinated with government scientists. Other projects are supported by funds from wildlife management boards established by the land claims process, by independent foundations, and through grants to graduate students.



Management

Management of Canadian Polar Bear populations is the responsibility of the provinces and territories as well as wildlife management boards in regions in which these populations are found, including Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Yukon, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, and of co-management boards / resource user groups, which are the main organizations for wildlife management in many northern areas.

Government of Canada	Territorial and Provincial
<p>Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International agreements • National legislation • Coordination between jurisdictions • Protection of national heritage <p>Research Support for research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants • Logistics 	<p>Management authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harvest management • Habitat management • Uphold Canada's federal and international mandates for Polar Bear conservation • Research

The overall management framework for ensuring the sustainability of Polar Bear populations in Canada includes the legislation, research and management programs of each of these jurisdictions, along with the national Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk, the *Species at Risk Act*, and the Canadian Polar Bear Technical and Administrative Committees.

In Canada the hunting of Polar Bears is restricted to Aboriginal people who harvest in accordance with sound conservation practices. In some regions, Aboriginal people may choose to allocate a small proportion of the quota for non-resident hunts, guided by

Aboriginal peoples; these hunts are an important part of the economy in some northern communities.



The management of the harvest in Canada is consistent with the 1973 International Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears. Responsible jurisdictions manage the Polar Bear harvest to ensure the sustainability of Polar Bear populations.

Quotas are set that take into account recommendations from federal, provincial and territorial scientists, and university specialists as well as United States researchers based in Alaska. Quotas take

into account the problem of nuisance Polar Bears that must be dispatched in the interest of public safety, as well as bears hunted by tourists. Quotas are met with an exceptionally high level of compliance.

Some examples of Environment Canada's involvement in Polar Bear management include:

- working with the United States to conserve shared Polar Bear populations such as the southern Beaufort Sea subpopulation;
- working with the Government of Nunavut and with Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada to develop an agreement with Greenland on the management of shared populations of Polar Bears;
- establishing protected areas for wildlife species, in cooperation with territorial and provincial governments and wildlife management boards in the territories. For example, across the North, there are National Parks, National Wildlife Areas, Migratory Bird Sanctuaries, and provincial and territorial parks that protect some terrestrial habitat;
- regulating the import and export of live Polar Bears and Polar Bear hides and trophies;
- participating on the national Polar Bear Administrative Committee, which takes the technical advice of the Polar Bear Technical Committee and makes coordinated decisions on the management of Polar Bears in Canada, and ensures that Canada fulfills its obligations as party to the International Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears (1973); and
- administering Canada's *Species at Risk Act* to prevent wildlife from becoming extinct in Canada.