



Polar Bear



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Latin Name: *Ursus maritimus*

Inuktitut Name: Nanuk or nanuq

COSEWIC Status:

Special Concern, last assessed November 2018

SARA Status:

Schedule 1, Special Concern

KEY THREATS

- Loss of sea ice habitat and access to prey due to reduced sea ice
- Increased levels of human-polar bear conflict with northern communities as bears spend more time on land
- Increased industrial activities, primarily oil and gas exploration and development, which can disturb denning females

POLAR BEARS NEED SEA ICE AND SNOW

Polar bears need ice and snow to survive. Sea ice acts as a hunting, breeding and movement platform for polar bears, and is central to the entire Arctic marine food web.

In late fall, pregnant polar bears dig a snow den where they give birth to their cubs in the winter. The mother bears then rear their young until they are strong enough to make the trek to the sea ice in the spring in search of seal pups. Ringed seals, the polar bear's main food source, also use snow to construct their birthing lairs.

Sea ice forms the basis of the Arctic marine ecosystem, supporting a mostly hidden world of life, from sea ice algae and tiny zoo-plankton to polar fish and seals, all the way up to the massive bowhead whale.

Decreasing sea ice habitat has also been shown to impact polar bear movements. GPS collar research has documented bears spending more time on land, and undertaking longer swims in response to receding sea ice. These long swims take a lot of energy, and can be dangerous, especially for younger polar bears.

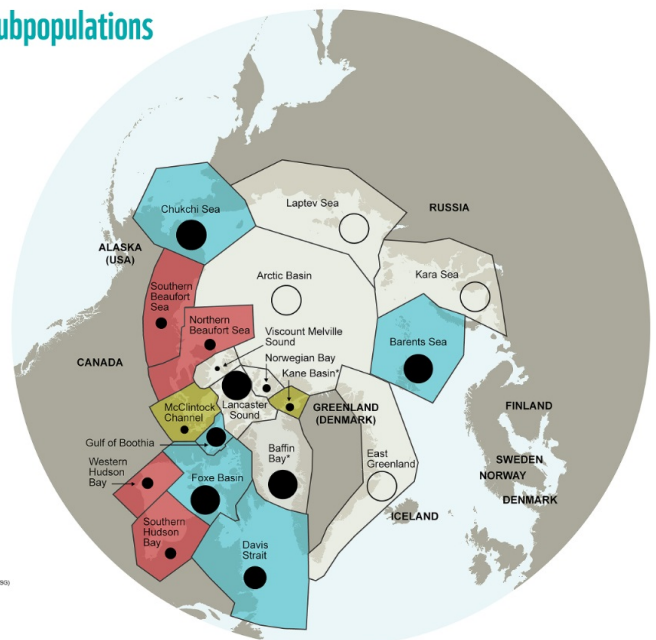
Trends in Polar Bear Subpopulations

SUBPOPULATION SIZE (Number of bears)

- < 200
- 200-500
- 500-1000
- 1000-1500
- 1500-2000
- 2000-2500
- 2500-3000
- Unknown

POPULATION TREND (2019)

- Stable
- Increasing
- Declining
- Data deficient



Produced by WWF Canada, June 2017.
 Sources: IUCN Polar Bear Specialist Group, June 2017; Population trends list are officially designated by PBSG.
 Range boundaries: IUCN 2012.
 Projection: North Pole Stereographic.
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FUN FACTS ABOUT POLAR BEARS

- The Latin name for polar bear is *Ursus maritimus*, which means ‘sea bear.’
- Typically, an adult male polar bear is an astonishing 8-10 ft. long and weighs between 780 and 1,500 lbs!
- Polar bears are proficient swimmers. Their body fat stores make them buoyant; they use their large forepaws as paddlers and their hind legs as rudders.
- Polar bears have large paws the size of dinner plates that evenly distribute their weight so they don’t fall through the sea ice.
- Polar bears have 3 sets of eyelids; the third helps protect their eyes from the glare of snow and ice.
- Polar bears have translucent fur that appears white, but under their fur, their skin is black. They also have bluish-black tongues!



About 26,000

POLAR BEARS IN THE WORLD

30%

PROJECTED GLOBAL DECLINE OF POLAR BEARS BY 2050

19

SUBPOPLUATIONS, 13 OF WHICH ARE FOUND WITHIN OR SHARED BY CANADA

1

POPULATION IN DECLINE

Though most of Canada’s polar bear subpopulations are stable, we are seeing declines in body condition and abundance. Large knowledge gaps remain for polar bears outside of Canada and in the High Arctic. The increasing McClintock Channel population is rebounding due to successful management initiatives.

HOW WWF HELPS POLAR BEARS

- Mapping and identifying denning areas used by polar bears and advocating for the protection of these areas
- Helping to implement and fund polar bear patrol programs across the Arctic in order to reduce the number of negative human-polar bear interactions
- Funding long term research projects on polar bear movements in a changing climate, as well as abundance estimates of subpopulations
- Working with local people and governments to protect key marine areas for polar bears, including Tuvaijuittuq and Tallurutiup Imanga in the Last Ice Area



Information

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