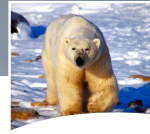




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Conservation of Polar Bears in Canada



Canada is home to two thirds of the global polar bear population and is committed to the conservation of this incredible species. We have a unique conservation responsibility to protect polar bears and we are taking action through a comprehensive approach to polar bear management, legislation and research. This approach ensures that we are making the right decisions and investments to effectively protect polar bear populations in Canada and support the work to protect the species in other range countries.

DID YOU KNOW?

Canada is home to approximately 15 500 of the estimated 20 000 to 25 000 polar bears in global polar regions.

It's no wonder that the polar bear, an icon of Canada's wildlife heritage, is of great cultural significance to the Canadian people. For the Inuit and many northern communities, polar bears are especially significant culturally, spiritually and economically.

Canada has a unique conservation responsibility to protect these iconic creatures.

Canada's Action on Polar Bears

In Canada, polar bears are protected through a collaborative approach that is shared with provinces, territories and regional wildlife management boards.

It is through this collaborative approach that the Minister of the Environment hosted a national roundtable in 2009, which brought together representatives from the provinces and territories, wildlife management boards, Inuit and First Nations representatives, scientists, and others to build a shared understanding and priorities for action.

Since the roundtable meeting, there were a number of actions taken for polar bear conservation including the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Government of Canada and the governments of Nunavut and Greenland in October 2009. This MOU will promote closer cooperation and shared management actions to preserve the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin polar bear populations.

Additional actions taken to protect polar bears include:

- Drafting a National Conservation Strategy for polar bears with provinces and territories.
- Investing \$5M over five years to facilitate priority research and monitoring identified during the roundtable.
- Providing scientific advice and Aboriginal traditional knowledge on harvest management consistent with the International Agreement on Conservation of Polar Bears and Their Habitat (1973) to ensure that quotas allow for sustainable polar bear populations.
- Regulating the import and export of live polar bears and polar bear hides and trophies through the *Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act* (WAPPRIITA).
- Establishing protected areas for habitat important to polar bears through our national parks, national and marine wildlife areas, and provincial and territorial parks.

Investing in Polar Bear Conservation, Protection and Science

Canada plays a key role in the conservation of Canadian polar bear populations. In 2008, a committee of wildlife experts considering science and Aboriginal traditional knowledge

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assessed polar bears as *Special Concern*. Extensive consultations with all Canadians, particularly in the North, are in the final stages. Once these are complete, the Minister will be able to provide his recommendation to the Governor in Council regarding listing polar bears under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA), which is strong domestic legislation to conserve and protect wildlife in Canada. A final decision on listing polar bears under SARA is anticipated in the spring of 2011.

International Action

Canada is working with its international partners, including NGOs, to coordinate our efforts in polar bear conservation. Our international actions include:

- Meeting international obligations under:
 - 1973 International Agreement on Conservation of Polar Bears and Their Habitat
 - Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
- Collaborating with the other Polar Bear Range States on conservation
 - Working on a range-wide action plan as discussed at the 2009 range states meeting in Tromsø, Norway
 - Canada will host the next range states meeting in Iqaluit in the fall of 2011
- Signing bilateral agreements on the management of polar bears:
 - US-Canada Memorandum of Understanding
 - Greenland-Canada Memorandum of Understanding
- Working with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
 - Environment Canada scientists are members of the IUCN's Polar Bear Specialist Group, who compile scientific knowledge and give independent advice to decision-makers and management authorities

Research

Environment Canada is combining science, experience and Aboriginal traditional knowledge to form the basis for our research.

Strategic 2010-2011

\$5M over five years has been allotted to facilitate priority research and monitoring identified during the 2009 polar bear roundtable. Funding for academic, Aboriginal and agency partners through Contribution agreements for four areas of priority:

- **Climate and habitat change:** Understanding linkages among changing climates, changing characteristics of winter sea ice habitats, and condition and status of polar bear populations
- **Monitoring techniques:** Developing cost-effective and less intrusive techniques for monitoring numbers and body condition of polar bears
- **Population delineation:** Improved delineation of Canadian polar bear sub-populations to support conservation and harvest management decisions
- **Integration of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and western science:** Effective integration of TEK and western science in activities undertaken in support of polar bear conservation and management decisions

The inclusion of traditional knowledge helps to provide information on polar bear abundance, movements, behaviours, and provides valuable long-term perspective on changes in the population. This approach is unique, as Canada is the only country that considers Aboriginal traditional knowledge in the management and conservation of polar bears.

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.

Climate Change

There are a variety of challenges to polar bear conservation. Environmental change is recognized as the most critical long-term threat to polar bears and their habitat. Action to address threats goes beyond polar bears and their habitats and will require national and international cooperation by players beyond those traditionally involved in polar bear management. Global action is essential to reduce greenhouse gases in order to address climate change.

- Canada is committed to tackling climate change through sustained action to build a low-carbon economy that includes reaching a global agreement, working with our North American partners and taking action domestically.
- We will continue to work constructively to implement the Copenhagen Accord and to complete the negotiations under the UNFCCC for a legally binding post-2012 agreement that is fair, effective and comprehensive.
- We support an approach to climate change that achieves real environmental and economic benefits for all Canadians, including through alignment of climate and energy policies with the United States.
- Our economy-wide target, inscribed in the Copenhagen Accord, is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 17% from 2005 levels by the year 2020.



For more information
on polar bears, please visit:

www.ec.gc.ca/polarbears

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