



# Conservation of Polar Bears in Canada



## Canada's Position on Up-listing Polar Bears Under CITES

Canada does not support the proposal to transfer polar bears to CITES Appendix I. Canada has taken this position based on the input of many experts, organizations and governments, and agrees with the views expressed by many that the species does not meet the CITES criteria for an Appendix I listing and is not threatened by international trade.

Canada has a unique conservation responsibility to protect this species and is taking international and domestic 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.

A key part of this strategy is Canada's strong support for the continuation of the current strict controls over international trade in polar bears as required by the current CITES Appendix II listing.

## 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

Canada is home to two thirds of the global polar bear population and is committed to the conservation of this incredible species. In Canada, polar bears are protected through a collaborative approach that is shared with provinces, territories and regional wildlife management boards. This allows activities, investments and expertise to be coordinated across the country, and ensures that each organization is meeting its responsibilities to protect the species while supporting our international commitments. This collaborative approach has been successful in positioning Canada to meet its obligations as party to the International Agreement on Conservation of Polar Bears and Their Habitat (1973).

In 2008, a committee of wildlife experts considering science and Aboriginal traditional knowledge 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.



Ongoing assessments by experts as well as the 2008 report by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) have identified the most vulnerable populations of polar bears. As a result, a number of actions have been taken including a Memorandum of Understanding with Greenland, targeted export restrictions and the revision of hunting quotas in Nunavut.

Additional actions taken to protect polar bears include:

- 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.
- Hosting 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.

## 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
- Signing bilateral agreements on the management of polar bears:
  - US-Canada Memorandum of Understanding
  - Greenland-Canada Memorandum of Understanding
- 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

## 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 work actively with international partners to implement the Copenhagen Accord as the basis for a new, legally binding post-2012 climate change agreement.
- We support an approach to climate change that achieves real environmental and economic benefits for all Canadians, including through harmonization 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 percent from 2005 levels by the year 2020.

## Research

Environment Canada is combining science, experience and Aboriginal traditional knowledge to form the basis for our research. The inclusion of traditional knowledge helps to provide information on polar bear abundances, 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.



For more information  
on polar bears, please visit:

[www.ec.gc.ca/polarbears](http://www.ec.gc.ca/polarbears)