

Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*): Management Plan Progress Report, June 2019

Official title: Polar Bear Species at Risk Act (SARA) Management Plan Progress Report (revised June 27, 2019)

The Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*) was listed as a species of Special Concern under the federal Species at Risk Act (SARA) in 2011. A Special Concern designation is used for species that may become threatened or endangered as a result of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.

In accordance with SARA, a management plan must be developed in cooperation with others and published on the Species at Risk Public Registry for all species of Special Concern. A management plan sets goals and objectives for maintaining sustainable population levels of the species.

In accordance with the Three-Year Recovery Document Posting Plan^{Footnote 1}, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) committed to publishing a proposed Polar Bear Management Plan by March 31, 2017. However, ECCC is anticipating a delay and does not anticipate publishing the proposed Management Plan for a 60-day public comment period until 2020 at the earliest. In the interim, ECCC will continue to be actively involved in numerous national and international committees and bilateral/multilateral agreements for the conservation and management of Polar Bear.

The National Polar Bear Management Plan will include key aspects of the National Polar Bear Conservation Strategy for Canada^{Footnote 2}. It will be comprised of a federal addition (Part 1), and a compendium of jurisdictional recovery documents (Parts 2-7). Incorporation of the jurisdictional recovery documents will reflect the reality of Polar Bear management in Canada and result in appropriate and effective delivery of conservation measures while allowing for a sustainable harvest. The development of the federal addition and the completion of a National Management Plan that meets SARA requirements are dependent on the completion of the jurisdictional recovery documents.

ECCC is working in collaboration with all the co-management partners (e.g. provincial and territorial governments, Wildlife Management Boards, Indigenous organizations, etc.) involved in the development of the National Management Plan. Significant progress has been made by all jurisdictions as per below.

Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories and Yukon)

Co-management partners recommended the completed Inuvialuit Settlement Region Polar Bear Co-management Plan to the Ministers in 2017. This plan describes the management goal and

objectives for Polar Bears in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR), Northwest Territories (NWT) and Yukon. This plan was developed to meet the requirements of a management plan under the territorial *Species at Risk (NWT) Act* and to serve as the ISR (Yukon and NWT) regional component of the National Polar Bear Management Plan under the federal *Species at Risk Act* while respecting the co-management process legislated by the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA)*.

Management authority for Polar Bears in the ISR is jurisdictionally complex and the plan is intended to facilitate an integrated and common approach by all jurisdictions. To facilitate this process, Framework for Action, a companion document to the ISR Polar Bear Co-Management Plan was also recommended. This companion document outlines actions and areas where further work should be directed. The framework was used by co-management partners to develop an implementation table.

The process undertaken to develop the plan involved engagement meetings in the 6 ISR communities annually since 2012, formation of a drafting working group, and reviews of various drafts of the plan by all partners. The proposed management plan was posted for a 60 day public comment period in summer 2016 on the NWT species at risk website.

The document was adopted under the *Species at Risk (NWT) Act* in March 2017 and released publically by the Minister of ENR in June 2017. Under the NWT Act, the management authorities (WMAAC [NWT] and Government of NWT) agreed to finalize a consensus agreement on implementation of the plan in the NWT. To facilitate this process, the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope), the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (Northwest Territories), and the Inuvialuit Game Council recommended a joint implementation table for all actions in the ISR plan to the Ministers in December 2017. The implementation table replaces the Framework for Action, discussed above.

Nunavut

Nunavut began developing a territory wide co-management plan for Polar Bears in June 2014. Although Nunavut has species at risk legislation, the Polar Bear has not been assessed. Therefore the co-management plan in Nunavut will not only provide a territorial management framework but will also support federal initiatives required under SARA. Consultations have been conducted with stakeholders in all 25 Nunavut communities and their input has been used to develop a draft. The draft was then submitted to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) for approval as per the Nunavut Agreement. The NWMB held a written public hearing for input into the plan in the fall of 2015. The Department of Environment revised the co-management plan based on the submissions to the written hearing. An additional round of consultations was carried out to inform communities of the changes that were made to the document, and which comments were not incorporated, following the written public hearing.

The draft Nunavut Polar Bear Co-management Plan was re-submitted to the NWMB in March 2017, and an in-person public hearing was held on November 13-16, 2018. Once the NWMB decision process, as outlined in the Nunavut Agreement, is finalized, the NWMB will send their

decision to Nunavut's Minister of Environment. The expectation is that the plan will be in place by December 2019.

The process for developing and approving a management plan in Nunavut is complex. Inuit have a right to be fully involved and informed in the process and this requires appropriate levels of consultation and review. This process has been thoroughly completed during the development phase, and is further implemented through the NWMB's public hearing process. The public hearing was an opportunity for Indigenous rights' holders and stakeholders to provide input, voice concerns, and hear explanations as to why the draft plan has taken its final form.

This process ensured that the concerns and input of all parties were heard, addressed where possible and appropriate, and that the product will robustly address the needs of multiple stakeholders, including harvesters and wildlife managers, while at the same time addressing public safety concerns and long-term sustainable management of the species.

Manitoba

The Polar Bear was listed as a threatened species in Manitoba in 2008 under the *Manitoba Endangered Species and Ecosystems Act*. As a result of the listing, the province is preparing a provincial Polar Bear Conservation and Recovery Strategy. It is expected that a draft of the Conservation and Recovery Strategy will be circulated to partners for review in the near future. Following the integration of comments received during the review of the Conservation and Recovery Strategy, the province of Manitoba will post a draft of the document for public comment on Manitoba Sustainable Development's website for 60 days. The Conservation and Recovery Strategy will be finalized after the 60-day public comment period is complete.

Ontario

In Ontario, Polar Bears occur at the southern limit of their global range, which extends along the Hudson and James Bay coast. In 2009, the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario (COSSARO) assessed and classified the Ontario population of Polar Bear as Threatened. Under the Endangered Species Act, 2007 (ESA), this status entitles the Polar Bear to receive automatic species and habitat protection. Polar Bears are protected under the ESA from being killed, harmed, or harassed and their habitat is protected from being damaged or destroyed. Polar Bear habitat is protected under the general habitat definition in the ESA which identifies habitat as the areas depended on by the species to carry out their life processes.

The [Recovery Strategy for Polar Bear \(*Ursus maritimus*\) in Ontario](#) was finalized in 2011 and provided scientific advice to government on the biological needs of the species and the suggested approaches to support recovery. Following completion of the recovery strategy, Ontario developed a species-specific policy (the [government response statement](#)) that outlines the provincial policy direction on the protection and recovery of the species. This policy was finalized in December 2016 after consideration of comments received from the public, stakeholders, and Indigenous communities and organizations, and is available online [here](#).

Ontario's policy direction on Polar Bear (Government Response Statement) and Recovery Strategy for Polar Bear will contribute to the National Polar Bear Management Plan. Ontario will continue to be represented and support provincial, national and international management of Polar Bears through participating in inter-jurisdictional committees such as the Polar Bear Administrative Committee and the Polar Bear Technical Committee. Ontario continues to lead and support efforts to increase our knowledge of Polar Bear through collaborative monitoring and research initiatives, through aerial surveys that monitor trends in abundance, and by supporting the development of community-based monitoring programs.

Québec

Three of Canada's Polar Bear subpopulations (Southern Hudson Bay, Foxe Basin and Davis Strait) occur in northern Québec and its adjacent waters. The Southern Hudson Bay subpopulation includes all of the area of James Bay and the eastern Hudson Bay north to the 60th parallel. The Foxe Basin subpopulation occupies north-eastern Hudson Bay and the Hudson Strait, until a point west of the village of Kangiqsujuaq. The Davis Strait subpopulation occupies the remaining portion of Hudson Strait and all of Ungava Bay to the border between Québec and Newfoundland-Labrador.

In accordance with the Act Respecting Threatened or Vulnerable Species, the Québec government listed the Polar Bear as a vulnerable species in 2009. In northern Québec, provisions dealing with threatened or endangered species (e.g. Polar Bear) are subject to the terms of the Act Respecting Hunting and Fishing Rights in the James Bay and New Québec Territories.

A Québec - Eeyou Marine Region - Nunavik Marine Region (QC-EMR-NMR) Polar Bear Management Plan has been drafted and is the result of a collaborative approach involving representation from several groups (Cree Nation Government, Cree Trappers Association, Eeyou Marine Region Wildlife Board, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Makivik Corporation, Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs, Nunavik Hunters, Fishermen and Trappers Association / Regional Nunavimmi Umajulirijit Katujjiqatigiinninga (NHFTA/RNUK), Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board and Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment). The draft plan was sent to the responsible governments for their internal review in 2018. Once all comments from the internal review are incorporated as appropriate, the draft plan will be submitted to the relevant wildlife co-management boards, and to the Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Coordinating Committee, for their approval processes as defined in the pertinent Land Claims Agreements. These decisions are expected to be made by December 2019.

One of the key objectives of all parties involved in this process is that the QC-EMR-NMR Polar Bear Management Plan must reflect the knowledge, concerns, traditions and principles of the Inuit of Nunavik and the Cree of Eeyou Istchee. In order to attain this objective, members of the Québec- Eeyou Istchee - Nunavik Marine Region Polar Bear Management Plan Working Group visited every Nunavik community in winter 2017, ensuring that Inuit were given an opportunity to provide their comments on this process. A separate process was held in Eeyou Istchee (the Cree region).

The Management Plan is planned to be in effect for a period of 10 years (2020 to 2030), subject to ongoing monitoring of its effectiveness and a full review and assessment after 5-years. Prior to the end of this 10-year period, a new management plan will be tabled for adoption, in accordance with applicable Land Claims Agreements.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Polar Bears are listed as Vulnerable under the Newfoundland and Labrador *Endangered Species Act*. Polar Bears range along the entire northern Labrador coast, with southerly winter movements extending to the western side of the Northern Peninsula and east coast of Newfoundland, and with summer movements extending to the northernmost portions of the Labrador Peninsula and Baffin Island. Under the Newfoundland and Labrador *Endangered Species Act*, a management plan is required within three years of listing. A Newfoundland and Labrador *Endangered Species Act* Management Plan is required to identify measures for the conservation of a species, these are generally outlined in terms of goals, objectives and actions. The first Polar Bear Management Plan was developed collaboratively by Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Division and Nunatsiavut Government, Department of Lands and Natural Resources, and released in 2006.

Although the first Polar Bear Management Plan outlined conservation measures over a five-year timeframe, management plans under the ESA are considered living documents to be updated as required. Recognizing the contribution of other agencies to Polar Bear conservation and shared management responsibilities, Wildlife Division formed an ad hoc working group in 2012, consisting of Nunatsiavut Government (NG), Wildlife Division (WD), Torngat Wildlife and Plants Co-Management Board (TWPCB), and Parks Canada Agency (PCA) to update the 2006 plan. In 2016, the group was broadened to include the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS).

A draft plan has been prepared with engagement from the ad hoc working group. This plan has gone through a number of iterations and Newfoundland and Labrador anticipates completion in late summer of 2019. The Province hopes to incorporate new information from the recent mark-recapture survey of the Davis Strait polar bear subpopulation. In addition to the mark recapture survey, Indigenous knowledge studies are underway. It is anticipated that the findings of these studies will inform the development of the final goals and actions to be outlined in the Newfoundland and Labrador Management Plan. The Management Plan will be ready for indigenous consultation in 2019 pending final endorsement by the working group.