

# Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*): management plan progress report, January 2021

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**Official title:** Polar bear *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) management plan progress report (revised January 20, 2021)

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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](#), 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 late 2021. 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<sup>Footnote 1</sup>. 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)**

The Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR) Polar Bear Joint Management Plan was completed in 2017, and can be accessed at [this link](#).

The purpose of the joint management plan is to describe and enhance the existing management system in the ISR in order to achieve the management goal of ensuring the long-term persistence of healthy polar bears in the ISR while maintaining traditional Inuvialuit use. The plan presents five recommended management objectives for polar bears in the ISR, including:

- 1) Collect traditional knowledge, scientific knowledge and monitoring information in a timely manner to inform management decisions
- 2) Adaptively co-manage polar bears and their habitat in accordance with the best information available
- 3) Encourage wise use of polar bear populations and all polar bear products
- 4) Minimize detrimental effects of human activities on polar bears and their habitat

5) Communicate and share information on polar bears and impacts of climate change on polar bears

## Nunavut

The Nunavut Polar Bear Co-Management Plan was completed in 2019, and can be accessed at [this link](#).

The two intents of the Nunavut Polar Bear Co-Management Plan include:

- (1) Identify goals and objectives for polar bear management; and
- (2) Guide co-management partners in decision-making.

The goal of Nunavut's Polar Bear Co-Management Plan is to maintain viable and healthy polar bear subpopulations capable of sustaining harvesting needs for current and future generations, and to ensure that polar bears remain an integral and functioning part of the ecosystem while monitored, sustainable harvests occur.

## 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 the Engage Manitoba website for 60 days. The Conservation and Recovery Strategy will be finalized after the 60-day public comment period is complete.

# Ontario

## Ontario Polar Bear Recovery Strategy:

The Ontario Polar Bear Recovery Strategy was completed in 2011, and can be accessed at [this link](#).

The Recovery Strategy, which provides scientific advice to the government on the biological needs of the species and the suggested approaches to support recovery, indicates that the recovery goal for the Polar Bear in Ontario is to have a viable sub-population that can persist in a changing environment and supports traditional uses of Polar Bears by coastal Cree communities.

*The recovery objectives are to:*

- reduce the impact of global climate change within Ontario;
- identify, protect and adaptively co-manage Polar Bear habitat in Ontario;
- conduct research to fill knowledge gaps that will aid in the recovery and protection of Polar Bears and their habitat;
- maximize Cree and Ontario's participation in inter-jurisdictional Polar Bear management and research in the Hudson and James Bay eco-region;
- develop and implement effective monitoring strategies for Polar Bear, including community based monitoring;
- minimize incidental mortalities of Polar Bears;
- enhance communication and information sharing with coastal Cree communities and stakeholder groups on Polar Bear biology and management; and
- explore viable, sustainable and complementary activities to existing traditional harvesting of Polar Bear.

## Ontario Polar Bear Government Response Statement (GRS):

The GRS was completed in 2016 and can be accessed at [this link](#).

The GRS is the government's policy response to the scientific advice provided in the recovery strategy. The Ontario government's recovery goal for polar bear, as stated in the GRS, is to extend the length of time that the species persists in Ontario to the extent possible, and to collaborate with other jurisdictions, including Indigenous communities and organizations, to increase the likelihood of the species' persistence within Canada.

The GRS lays out three focus areas and associated objectives:

1) **Focus area:** Climate change mitigation and habitat management

*Objective:* Work collaboratively to maintain suitable habitat conditions for Polar Bear in Ontario, to the extent possible.

2) **Focus area:** Monitoring and research

*Objective:* Monitor trends in Polar Bear populations and implement actions to manage the detected impacts.

3) **Focus area:** Inter-jurisdictional management

*Objective:* Collaborate with other jurisdictions to increase the likelihood of the persistence of Polar Bears in Ontario and Canada.

## 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 60<sup>th</sup> parallel. The Foxe Basin subpopulation occupies north-eastern Hudson Bay and the Hudson Strait, until a point west of the village of Kangiqsujaq. 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 Umajulirijiit 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. All comments from the internal review have been incorporated as appropriate. In March 2021, 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.

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 (2021 to 2031), 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) in Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC).

A draft plan has been prepared with engagement from the ad hoc working group. This plan has gone through a number of iterations. 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 2021 pending final endorsement by the working group.