

# Circumpolar Action Plan

## Fact Sheet for the Conservation Strategy for the Polar Bear

### The Range States



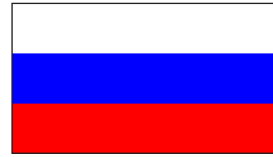
Canada



Greenland



Norway



Russia



United States

### Polar Bear Conservation History

The representatives to the Parties that are signatory to the 1973 *Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears (Agreement)*, (Norway, Canada, Greenland, the Russian Federation and the United States), have a long record of cooperation on polar bear conservation. These five countries are collectively known as the Range States (representing the range in which polar bears live). At the time the 1973 Agreement was signed, the largest threat to polar bears was unregulated and unsustainable harvest, and populations in some areas were considered to be substantially depleted. Since that time, measures implemented by the Range States, such as controlled harvest management programs and the establishment of protected areas, have increased polar bear population sizes in those areas where unsustainable hunting was a problem prior to 1973.

Since 1973, however, the nature of the threats facing polar bears has changed. The world now faces what portends to be the greatest challenge to polar bear conservation in the history of the Agreement: human activities are changing the climate at a rate that threatens the Arctic ecosystem. One of the consequences of climate change is loss of sea-ice habitat on which polar bears critically depend. Other emerging threats include contaminants and pollution, human-caused mortality, shipping, resource and energy exploration and development, tourism and disease.

### The Circumpolar Action Plan (CAP)

To address these new threats, the Range States developed a collaborative initiative: the Circumpolar Action Plan (CAP). The CAP is a range-wide strategy designed to guide the mitigation of identified threats. Recognizing that management systems are already in place in each Range State, the CAP focuses on issues that are best coordinated at the international level. The CAP identifies general actions to be focused on over the next ten years and is accompanied by a more detailed implementation plan for the first two years. Progress will be reviewed biennially by the Range States at their Meetings of the Parties and the implementation plan will be updated accordingly. Progress reports and action tables will be made public.

### Vision

The vision of the CAP is to secure the long-term persistence of polar bears in the wild that represent the genetic, behavioral, and ecological diversity of the species. This vision cannot be achieved without adequate mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions by the global community.

The CAP details the common objectives and actions that the Range States share in order to manage, research, and monitor polar bears. In addition to recognizing that polar bear conservation is crucial for ecological reasons, the Range States also recognize the importance of the polar bear to indigenous peoples throughout the circumpolar Arctic for historical, cultural, and subsistence purposes. The CAP also recognizes that the management of polar bear populations will be conducted in accordance with sound conservation practices based on the best available scientific data, taking into consideration Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) where appropriate.

### Threats

The CAP identifies and addresses the following seven threats that are currently impacting, or most likely to have an impact on the polar bear and its habitat in the next 10 years.



## Threats to polar bears:

1. Climate change
2. Disease
3. Human-caused mortality
4. Mineral and energy resource exploration and development
5. Contaminants and pollution
6. Shipping
7. Tourism and related activities

## Objectives

In order to achieve the goal of the CAP, the Range States have developed six key objectives that address the aforementioned threats:

1. Minimize threats to polar bears and their habitat through developing, implementing and sharing adaptive management practices based on coordinated research and monitoring efforts, use of predictive models and interaction with interested or affected parties;
2. Communicate to the public, policy makers, and legislators around the world the importance of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions to polar bear conservation;
3. Ensure the preservation and protection of essential habitat for polar bears;
4. Ensure responsible harvest management systems that will sustain polar bear subpopulations for future generations;

5. Manage human-bear interactions to ensure human safety and to minimize polar bear injury or mortality; and

6. Ensure that international legal trade of polar bears is carried out according to conservation principles and that poaching and illegal trade are curtailed.

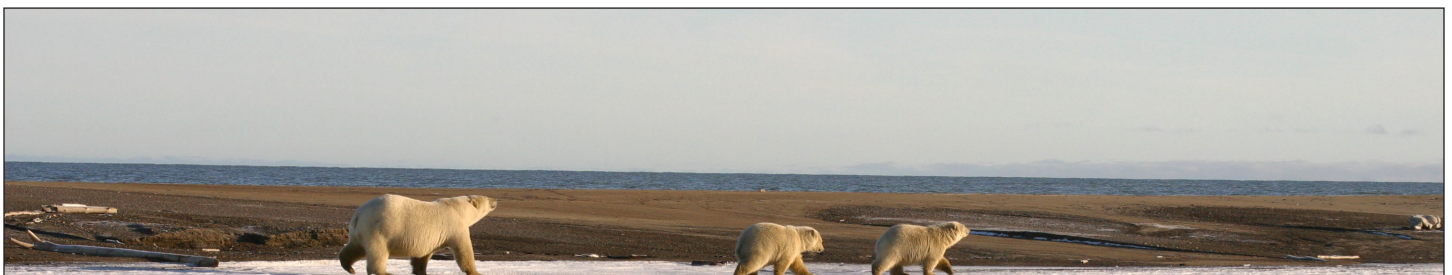
## Strategic Approaches

Polar bears roam over vast territories and several subpopulations are shared between Range States. Hence, the CAP calls for collaborative management efforts to support this vision. Currently, there are bilateral agreements in place for shared populations. These agreements, as well as each Range State's individual management plans, call for responsible management of polar bears, their habitat, and bear harvests.

The Range States identified actions and activities appropriate at the circumpolar level to address the



Canada



United States

threats and help meet the objectives identified above. Once the list of actions and activities was generated, the best method for implementation was discussed. As a result of that discussion, the following four strategies for conducting the collaborative work under the CAP have been identified.

### **Strategic Approach 1: Adaptive management**

Adaptive management is a planned and systematic process for continuously re-evaluating management decisions and practices by learning from their outcomes and new knowledge. Assumptions can be tested and, if unanticipated adverse effects are detected, actions can be modified before the adverse effects take on major importance. Adaptive management is essential to planning and decision making for polar bear conservation and management throughout the circumpolar region, particularly in addressing the threats posed by climate change and the associated implications for habitat, prey abundance and availability, and disease.

### **Strategic Approach 2: Best Management Practices (BMPs)**

BMPs are methods that have demonstrated effective results compared with other approaches, and are often therefore used as a standard. When used appropriately, BMPs will help to ensure that proposed activities are planned and carried out in compliance with applicable legislation, regulations, and policies such that activities avoid, minimize and mitigate

impacts to polar bears and their habitat. Developing, implementing and sharing BMPs has been identified as one of the strategic approaches that will address resource exploration and development, contaminants and pollution, tourism, shipping and human-bear interactions.

### **Strategic Approach 3: Monitoring and Research**

All jurisdictions have monitoring and research programs in place, some of which could benefit from enhancement and coordination at the circumpolar level. The IUCN Polar Bear Specialist Group is an important partner in implementing this strategy.

### **Strategic Approach 4: Communications and Outreach**

The communications and outreach strategy consists of actions to address the need to clearly explain and represent the Range States and the Plan, as well as efforts to raise understanding of the link between climate change issues and polar bear conservation.

Under the CAP, the Range States recognize that the polar bear is an indicator of the biological health of the Arctic where it is a significant resource. International cooperation is essential if polar bears are to be conserved for future generations. The CAP intends to guide that cooperation.

For more information, please see:  
[www.polarbear2015.gl](http://www.polarbear2015.gl)



Norway

## Polar Bear sub-population boundaries, as of June 2014

