

Press Release:

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Countries Agree on Plan to Conserve Polar Bears

Acknowledge that global action must be taken to address climate change

Ilulissat, Greenland—representatives from Norway, Canada, Greenland, the Russian Federation, and the United States (Range States) met in Ilulissat, Greenland this week to review implementation of the Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears, which was adopted in 1973. The Range States have held meetings every two years beginning in 2007.

The Range States adopted a 10-year Circumpolar Action Plan (CAP) that builds on international cooperation to conserve polar bears across their range. The CAP builds on each country's national efforts and will lead to more efficient and effective use of conservation resources. Progress on the CAP will be evaluated and made public every two years.

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.

Seven key threats are identified in the CAP; of these human-induced climate change and the effects of such changes on habitat and prey is considered the primary threat and the need to address greenhouse gas emissions for the conservation of the polar bear. The other threats include: human-caused mortality; mineral and energy resource exploration and development; contaminants and pollution; shipping; tourism-related activities, and disease.

The objectives of the plan are to:

- minimize threats to polar bears and their habitat;
- communicate to the public, policy makers, and legislators around the world the importance of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions to polar bear conservation;
- ensure the preservation and protection of essential habitat for polar bears;
- ensure responsible harvest management systems today that will sustain polar bear subpopulations for future generations;
- manage human-bear interactions to ensure human safety and to minimize polar bear injury or mortality;
- ensure that international legal trade of polar bears is carried out according to conservation principles and that poaching and illegal trade are curtailed.

Strategies and actions identified in the Plan are geared to meeting these objectives.

The Range States affirmed continued support for mitigating human-polar bear conflicts. Since 2009, the Range States have formed a working group of bear conflict experts which has been working to develop proactive strategies for mitigating these conflicts, including developing best management practices. Significant progress has been made on development of a database that is an important tool for analyzing conflict data at local and regional scales.

Following a commitment made in 2011 to explore mechanisms to counter the threat of poaching and illegal trade in polar bears and polar bear parts, the Range States endorsed 6 recommendations regarding trade in polar bears that strengthen international cooperation among law enforcement agencies and improve the clarity of legal trade data.

Additionally, the States formed a Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) working group to establish guidelines for including TEK in management decisions to consider the differing legal mandates of each country.

The inaugural Range States Polar Bear Conservation Award was presented to Dr. Erik W. Born (Greenland). This award recognizes individuals and/or organizations for long-term/extraordinary service and major contribution towards to conservation of polar bears.

The next meeting of the Parties will be held in 2017 in the United States.