Polar Bear SARA Management Plan Progress Report  
(as of September 15, 2016)

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)

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\(^1\), ECCC committed to publishing a proposed Polar Bear Management Plan by March 31, 2017. However, ECCC is anticipating a delay and does not anticipate posting the proposed Management Plan until at least 2018. In the interim, ECCC will continue to be actively involved in numerous national and international committees and bilateral/multilateral agreements for the conservation and the management of polar bear.

The Management Plan will include key aspects of the National Polar Bear Conservation Strategy\(^2\), the jurisdictional management plans (or sections of the plans) and a SARA federal addition. Incorporation of the provincial and territorial management plans 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 Management Plan that meets SARA requirements are dependent on the completion of the provincial and territorial plans.

ECCC is working in collaboration with all the provinces and territories involved in the development of the Management Plan. Significant progress has been made by all jurisdictions as per below.

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\(^2\) The central goal of the National Polar Bear Conservation Strategy is to contribute to the long-term maintenance of subpopulations of polar bear in Canada by taking into account all of the threats that face the species, and to increase the level of coordination between jurisdictions for the management of polar bear. Consult this website for more details: [http://ec.gc.ca/nature/default.asp?lang=En&n=60D0FDBD-1](http://ec.gc.ca/nature/default.asp?lang=En&n=60D0FDBD-1)
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 down the coast and to eastern coastal areas of Newfoundland, and summer movements to Baffin Island. The Newfoundland and Labrador Government is working with representatives of Torngat Wildlife and Plants Co-Management Board, Canadian Wildlife Service, and Nunatsiavut Government to develop a Polar Bear Management Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador. The purpose of this management plan is to establish the goals and actions required to ensure the long-term persistence of polar bears as a self-sustaining viable species throughout its range in Newfoundland and Labrador. This plan has been developed to meet the requirements of the Newfoundland and Labrador *Endangered Species Act* and covers the Davis Strait sub-population found in Newfoundland and Labrador. Potential threats to this population include over-harvesting, contaminants, habitat disturbance, mortality associated with incidental human contact, and the effects of climate change.

Management of the Davis Strait sub-population includes the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement, Federal-Provincial-Territorial Polar Bear Technical and Administrative Committees for Polar Bear Research and Management, Torngat Wildlife and Plants Co-Management Board (WMB), Labrador Inuit Park Impacts and Benefits Agreement for the Torngat Mountains National Park of Canada, Nunavik Inuit Park Impacts and Benefits Agreement for the Torngat Mountains National Park of Canada, Torngat Mountains National Park Cooperative Management Board.

The intended completion date of a final Newfoundland and Labrador Polar Bear Management Plan is April 2017, once input from all partners has been reviewed and included.

Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories and Yukon)

Co-management partners are developing the *Inuvialuit Settlement Region Polar Bear Co-management Plan*. 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 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* has been developed. This companion document outlines actions and areas where further work should be directed. The framework is meant to be 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 final draft will be posted for a 60 day public comment period in summer 2016 on the Government of NWT Species at Risk website with the intention of finalizing the plan by January 2017.

**Nunavut**

Nunavut has been developing a territory wide co-management plan for polar bears since 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. To date 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 Land Claim Agreement. The NWMB held a written public hearing for input into the plan in the fall of 2015. The Department of Environment has revised the co-management plan based on the submissions to the written hearing. The majority of comments received from parties were incorporated including revisions suggested by ECCC.

The draft Nunavut Polar Bear Co-management Plan is now undergoing final edits before it is re-submitted to the NWMB. The NWMB may choose to resume the public hearing process in order to allow for additional comments. As such, the timeline for the completion of the Board process has yet to be determined but it is expected to be concluded before the end of 2016. Once finalized, the NWMB will send their decision to Nunavut's Minister of Environment. The expectation is that the plan will be in place for the 2017-2018 management season which begins July 1, 2017.

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, when it resumes, is expected to continue as an in-person hearing. This allows for stakeholders to provide additional input, voice concerns, and to hear explanations as to why the draft plan has taken its final form.
This process will ensure that the concerns and input of all parties are heard, addressed where possible and appropriate, and that the product will robustly address the needs of multiple stakeholders, including harvesters, wildlife managers, and federal SARA requirements while at the same time addressing public safety concerns and long-term sustainable management of the species.

**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.

In 2011, the Recovery Strategy for polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*) in Ontario was finalized and provides 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 has developed a draft species-specific policy (the government response statement) that outlines the provincial policy direction on the protection and recovery of the species. In April 2016, Ontario posted this draft government response statement for polar bear on the Environmental Registry for public comment. The comment period has now closed and all comments received from the public, stakeholders, and Indigenous communities and organizations are being considered in the finalization of the policy.

Ontario's government response statement on polar bear will contribute to the national management plan for polar bear. The Ontario government is also taking steps to mitigate the impacts of climate change, the primary threat to polar bears in Ontario, through the development of the Climate Change Strategy released in 2015 and the development of a provincial cap and trade program. 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.
Quebec

Three of Canada's polar bear subpopulations (Southern Hudson Bay, Foxe Basin and Davis Strait) occur in northern Quebec 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 Quebec and Newfoundland- Labrador.

In accordance with the Act Respecting Threatened or Vulnerable Species, the Quebec government listed the polar bear as a vulnerable species in 2009. In Northern Quebec, 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 Quebec Territories.

A Quebec - Nunavik Marine Region - Eeyou Marine region (QC-NMR-EMR) Bear Management Plan is currently being 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 & Trappers Association / Regional Nunavimmi Umajulirijiit Katuujiqatigiinninga (NHFTA/RNUK), Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board and Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment).

One of the key objectives of all parties involved in this process is that the QC-NMR-EMR 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 Quebec- Eeyou Istchee - Nunavik Marine Region Polar Bear Management Plan Working Group will visit every Nunavik community in winter 2017 to ensure that Inuit have been given an opportunity to provide their comments on this process. A separate process will be held in the Cree region.

The Management Plan is planned to be in effect for a period of 10 years (2017-2027), 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.

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. Manitoba will provide an update on their polar bear strategy at a later date.