

PRESS RELEASE



New Study Finds Polar Bear Populations in the Western Arctic Healthy, Despite Climate Change.

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Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada –The results of a new study on Inuvialuit traditional knowledge regarding polar bears in Canada’s Western Arctic are providing new information that may help inform polar bear management decisions nationally and internationally.

The study, spearheaded by wildlife co-management agencies in the Western Arctic and using traditional knowledge, found that since the 1980s climate change has created new sea ice and weather conditions in the western Arctic, but polar bear populations in the area appear to have remained healthy and stable.

“This study establishes that caution is required when predicting and assessing the long-term trends for polar bear health and abundance because of the uncertainty that exists between the rapidly changing ecological and environmental conditions we are now seeing in the Arctic,” explains Lindsay Staples, Chair of the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope). “It is a great leap to declare with absolute conviction, as many have, that climate change spells the end of polar bears. While we do see effects on things like sea ice, weather and the distribution of polar bears, Inuvialuit have observed polar bears adapting to climate-induced changes.”

The study also concludes that the general health and abundance of polar bears in the Canadian Western Arctic remains generally stable but variable annually and across the region. On this point, there is disagreement with some recent assessments that suggest significant declines or suspected declines in polar bear numbers in the Southern Beaufort Subpopulation.

“Our knowledge is based on long-term, year round observations and close relationships with these animals,” explains Wildlife Management Advisory Council (Northwest Territories) Chair Larry Carpenter. “I know there are scientific reports out there that say the bears are in trouble, but the knowledge of our people should be listened to as well. Just because sea ice is disappearing doesn’t mean polar bears are disappearing too. This is a complicated relationship that involves sea ice, polar bears, seals, culture, and our northern economy. But it also involves everyone who is adding to the climate change that we, in the Arctic, feel the effects of first. When we make decisions about polar bears, we need to be careful. But we also have to make sure we do our research, and not oversimplify just because it is convenient to do so.”

Polar bears in Canada’s Western Arctic are carefully monitored and managed according to a legal system that is well established in the Inuvialuit Final Agreement and territorial and federal legislation. The system incorporates Inuvialuit knowledge and western science in an effort to sustainably manage polar bear habitat, research, and harvest.

Who Are WMAC (NS) and WMAC (NWT)?

The two Wildlife Management Advisory Councils are co-management organizations established in the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (1984) that bring Inuvialuit together with public governments and agencies to make recommendations about the management of wildlife and habitat, research, harvest, and conservation.

For copies of the report and summary, visit www.wmacns.ca

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