



CITES & LIVELIHOODS CASE STUDY 2019

# Inuit harvest and trade of Polar Bear in Canada



## SPECIES, USE AND TRADE

Canada is home to approximately 16,000 polar bears, around two-thirds of the global population. Polar bears are apex predators and play an important role in the ecosystems of Canada's vast Arctic and subarctic regions.

The most significant and long-term threat to polar bears is climate change, although its impacts on populations are uncertain and will vary across the species' range.

Polar bear population status and trends assessment includes both scientific information and indigenous (Inuit) Knowledge. In Canada, polar bears are considered a species of Special Concern under Canada's federal Species at Risk Act (SARA), requiring a management plan (currently under preparation). They are also protected under

provincial and territorial legislation, through which harvesting is regulated and managed.

Inuit have legally protected rights to harvest and use wildlife in Canada, and harvest polar bears for food, cultural, and livelihood purposes. Some of the harvest is undertaken through Inuit-guided sport hunting. Exports of polar bear specimens includes products from both subsistence and sport hunting, and includes hides, skulls, rugs, bone parts, taxidermy mounts and scientific samples.

Management is coordinated locally and regionally, and further coordinated at the national and international levels with the goal of long term conservation of the species.



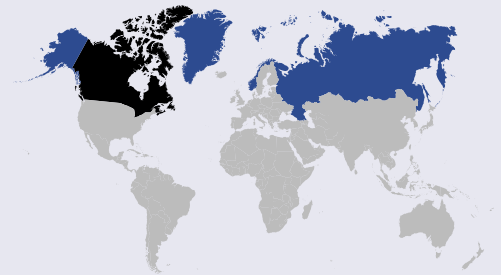
**POLAR BEAR**  
*Ursus maritimus*



**APPENDIX II**



**VULNERABLE**



## LIVELIHOOD BENEFITS

Polar bears are culturally, spiritually and economically significant for Canadian Inuit communities, who have been harvesting them for food and cultural purposes for thousands of years. Polar bear conservation, including harvest and trade, is integrally linked with indigenous subsistence and culture in Canada, where their harvest and use is an exclusive right of Inuit under land claims agreements.

Polar bear harvest and trade supports local livelihoods of Canadian Inuit by bringing much needed resources and revenues to indigenous communities in Canada's north. About 80% of

harvested bears are taken directly by Inuit, for food, clothing, and cultural purposes, and hides may be sold internationally or within Canada. The overall value of benefits of subsistence harvest was estimated in 2011 at 0.6 million Canadian dollars per year (USD 0.46 million). The remainder is sport-hunted, valued at 1.3 million per year (USD 1.1 million) in 2011. Inuit and Inuit communities gain income and jobs from sport hunts, which must be undertaken with Inuit guides who are paid by hunters, and also because local outfitters employ members of the community. Additionally, meat from the bear is distributed within the community.



Photo: Garry Donaldson

## CONSERVATION IMPACTS

Coordinated management, information exchange, research, population monitoring, assessments, conservation, and protection measures assist in ensuring that harvest is sustainable. Annual harvest quotas have been established since the 1970s, and adaptive management responds to changes as they occur. Harvest represents about 3-4% of the Canadian population each year, and exports represent approx. 2% of the Canadian polar bear population each year.

Continued harvest and export have significant economic, cultural and spiritual value for Inuit people. This value helps ensure high levels of compliance with harvest quotas and reporting requirements, supporting robust management and long-term conservation for future generations.



- |                                     |                                |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>SB</b> = Southern Beaufort Sea   | <b>NW</b> = Norwegian Bay      |
| <b>NB</b> = Northern Beaufort Sea   | <b>KB</b> = Kane Basin         |
| <b>VM</b> = Viscount Melville Sound | <b>GB</b> = Gulf of Boothia    |
| <b>MC</b> = M'Clintock Channel      | <b>WH</b> = Western Hudson Bay |
| <b>LS</b> = Lancaster Sound         |                                |

**Fig 1.** Polar bear global distribution map from IUCN SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group (<http://pbsg.npolar.no/en/status/population-map.html>)

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Polar Bear eating and disturbance.  
Photo: Brocken Inaglory.



## LESSONS LEARNT AND DIRECTIONS

Wildlife harvest and use is a fundamental part of Canada's history and heritage as practiced by indigenous peoples and their communities for millennia. Current practices seek to manage wildlife to ensure resources are available for future generations. Strong coordination of management from the local and regional levels all the way up to national and international levels will continue to be a key aspect of conservation for this wide-ranging multi-jurisdictional species.

Meaningful engagement of indigenous peoples in Canada (including Inuit) includes recognition and respect for indigenous interests, livelihoods, rights, and knowledge, as well as the proper implementation of obligations under treaties and agreements made between indigenous peoples and the government. Such engagement is essential to ensuring wildlife conservation in Canada.

Maintaining economic links between wildlife and local Inuit communities is an important component of sound conservation for this species in Canada, as is continued adaptive harvest management in the face of climate change.

Inuit grandmother and child. Photo: Ansgar Walk



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