



Living With Wildlife in Alaska

Coexisting With Polar Bears



Defenders of Wildlife has long been an active voice for the protection of polar bears in the face of the complex threats posed by climate change. We worked to ensure Alaska's polar bears were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2008. Since then more than 187,000 square miles have been designated critical polar bear habitat. We continue to advocate permanent protection for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the largest onshore denning site for polar bears. We also oppose drilling in Alaska's Chukchi and Beaufort seas, because no proven method exists to clean up and control oil spills in the icy Arctic seas where the polar bear, a marine mammal, lives.

The Obama administration has acknowledged that polar bears are in serious trouble, but continues to exempt the leading threat to the species' survival—

the greenhouse-gas pollution that causes climate change—from regulation under the ESA. Meanwhile, rising temperatures are melting the sea ice polar bears depend on for hunting seals, forcing the bears to look for food on land, a search that is increasingly bringing them into contact—and conflict—with people.

Given all the threats now facing polar bears, Defenders recognizes that addressing conflicts between people and polar bears is essential to increasing the species' odds for survival. To reduce conflict and the polar bear fatalities that often result, Defenders is working with partners on several efforts to promote coexistence.

With Arctic ice melting earlier and re-forming later, polar bears, marine mammals well-adapted to life at sea on the ice platform, are spending more time on land, a much more challenging place for them.

When sea ice melts, polar bears are forced to look for food on land, a search that is increasingly bringing them into contact—and conflict—with people.

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A polar bear feeds on the remains of a bowhead whale on the coast of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. With the disappearance of the ice polar bears need to hunt seals, the staple of their diet, hungry polar bears must find alternative sources of nourishment on land.

Working with Alaska Native communities

Defenders sponsored the participation of Alaska Natives in an international human-bear conflict avoidance workshop and shared information from this workshop about resolving human-bear conflicts with other communities. In December, 2012, we will co-host a workshop with the Alaska Nanuq Commission and World Wildlife Fund. The workshop will introduce deterrent tools and techniques to commission members from 12 communities interested in reducing conflicts and coexisting with polar bears.

Disseminating science-based information

Defenders commissioned and published *Sea Bear Under Siege: Polar Bears and Climate Change in Alaska*, a comprehensive review that details habitat changes related to climate change and recommendations for action. We are using this report with communities and federal and state agencies to promote coexistence and conservation strategies.

Field-testing polar-bear-resistant food lockers

With the ice cellars traditionally used by native communities failing as the permafrost melts, Defenders has joined forces with World Wildlife Fund to fund a food-locker pilot program in Kaktovik, Alaska. Securing food supplies in these lockers keeps polar bears from being lured into the community, preventing them from learning to associate people with food and reducing the risk of conflict. Results from the program will inform similar projects in other coastal communities across the North Slope. The food lockers will be tested during the winter of 2012-2013. We are also working with renewable energy companies to identify practical ways to cool the lockers in summer to ensure that food does not spoil.

Exploring diversionary feeding

Defenders convened a workshop in Alaska to bring experts from all over the world together to examine the use of diversionary feeding as a polar bear coexistence and conservation tool. This method involves moving attractants such as animal remains to a safe location away from human communities. Polar bears and other wildlife can then feed without connecting the food source to people, thereby reducing the risk of conflict. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is using the workshop results to inform Alaska coastal communities about the use of diversionary feeding as a tool in wildlife management and conservation going forward.



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