

IUCN SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group

2016-2017 Report



Dag Vongraven



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Number of members

35

Social networks

Website:
<http://pbsg.npolar.no> (old)
<http://www.iucn-pbsg.org> (new)



Mission statement

The mission of the IUCN SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group (PBSG) is to coordinate, synthesize and distribute scientific information necessary to guide the long term viability of polar bears and their habitats.

Main activities by Key Priority Area (2016 & 2017)

Barometer of life

■ Research activities

i. Update of the status table for polar bear subpopulations. A small working group has refined and defined criteria for assessing status/trend. These will be transmitted to the whole membership for discussion, possible revision, and finally application to all 19 subpopulations. (KSR #12)

Communications

■ Communication

i. Publication of proceedings of the 18th Working Meeting. Proceedings were completed and submitted to IUCN Publication Unit for final review and approval. (KSR #28)

■ Scientific meetings

i. 18th Working Meeting of the PBSG. Face-to-face meeting was held 7-11 June 2016, Anchorage, Alaska. Scientific information was exchanged, recent research findings reviewed, collaborations discussed, and a general business meeting held. Group agreed to expand membership.

Conservation action

i. The Group discussed and developed research-related action items for consideration of the five government comprised Range States of incorporation into its Circumpolar Action Plan. (KSR #27)

Acknowledgements

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Targets for the quadrennium 2017-2020

Barometer of life

Research activities: development of new criteria for describing the status/trend of polar bears and subsequent application to all 19 currently recognized subpopulations.

Communications

Scientific meetings: hold 19th Working Meeting of the PBSG.

Policy

Agreements: in collaboration with the five governments comprising the Polar Bear Range States, develop Terms of Reference for the PBSG that will enable and facilitate its role as the independent scientific advisor to the Range States.
Policy advice: (1) provide to the five governments comprising the Polar Bear Range States, advice with respect to priorities for multi-lateral actions that the Range States could take over the next 2-10 years to best address conservation and research needs for polar bears; (2) participation at the 2018 Biennial Meeting of the Parties to the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears, 2-4 February 2018, Fairbanks, Alaska; (3) participation at a planned 2020 Biennial Meeting of the Parties to the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears to be held in Norway.



Twin three-month-old polar bears,
Churchill, Manitoba, Canada
Photo: David McGeachy



Dr. Nick Lunn weighing three-month-old
polar bear cub, Churchill, Manitoba, Canada
Photo: David McGeachy



18th Working meeting of the IUCN/SSC Polar Bear
Specialist Group, 7-11 June 2016, Anchorage, Alaska, US
Photo: Morten Ekker

**Projected impact for the quadrennium
2017-2020**

The polar bear is currently classified as Vulnerable (VU) on the basis of a projected reduction in global population size due to loss of sea ice habitat. Loss of Arctic sea ice due to climate change is the most serious threat to polar bears throughout their circumpolar range, but action to mitigate this threat is beyond the ability of either the PBSG or the five governments that comprise the Polar Bear Range States. Our assessment of global threats to polar bears and research priorities were critical pieces that were incorporated by the Polar Bear Range States into its 2015 Circumpolar Action

Plan: Conservation Strategy for Polar Bears. We consider the commitment to the implementation of this plan critical to help secure the long-term persistence of polar bears in the wild that represent the genetic, behavioural, and ecological diversity of the species. During the current quadrennium, we would expect continued actions identified under this plan to be taken by the responsible authorities and that the PBSG would continue to provide technical advice and scientific oversight where appropriate.

Summary of activities (2016-2017)

Key Priority Area ratio: 3/7

Key Priority Areas addressed:

- Barometer of life (1 activity)
- Communications (2 activities)
- Conservation action (1 activity)

Main KSRs addressed: 12, 27, 28

KSR: Key Species Result