

# IUCN SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group

2020 Report



Dag Vongraven



Nick Lunn

## CO-Chairs

Dag Vongraven (1)

Nick Lunn (2)

## Red List Authority Coordinator

Eric V. Regehr (3)

## Location/Affiliation

(1) Norwegian Polar Institute, Fram Centre, 9296 Tromsø, Norway

(2) Environment and Climate Change Canada, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

(3) Polar Science Center, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, US

## Number of members

35

## Social networks

Website: [www.iucn-pbsg.org](http://www.iucn-pbsg.org)



## Mission statement

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

## Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

The Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*) 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 IUCN SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group 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 Polar Bear Specialist Group would continue to provide technical advice and scientific oversight where appropriate.

## Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

### Assess

Research activities: develop new criteria for describing the status/trend of polar bears and subsequently apply to all 19 currently recognised subpopulations.

### Plan

Policy: (1) provide advice to the five governments comprising the Polar Bear Range States, with respect to priorities for multilateral actions that the Range States could take over the next 2–10 years to best address conservation and research needs for polar bears; (2) participate 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) participate at a planned 2020 Biennial Meeting of the Parties to the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears to be held in Norway.

### Network

Agreements: in collaboration with the five governments comprising the Polar Bear Range States, develop Terms of Reference for the Specialist Group that will enable and facilitate its role as the independent scientific advisor to the Range States.

### Communicate

Scientific meetings: hold the 19th Working Meeting of the Polar Bear Specialist Group.



Adult male Polar Bears  
 Photo: David McGeachy, Environment and Climate Change Canada

## Activities and results 2020

### Plan

#### Policy

- i. A report was provided to the Polar Bear Range States (PBRS) for their consideration that evaluated all the science-related actions in the PBRS Circumpolar Action Plan and prioritised them into two- and ten-year actions. (KSR #26)
- ii. Both the PBSG Co-Chairs plus one other member participated at the Biennial Meeting held 4–6 March 2020, in Longyearbyen, Svalbard, Norway. PBSG made a presentation that provided an update on polar bear conservation status and research efforts. (KSR #26)

### Communicate

#### Scientific meetings

- i. The 19th Working Meeting of the Polar Bear Specialist Group was originally planned for June 2020 in Copenhagen, Denmark; however, it was indefinitely postponed due to global travel restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. (KSR #28)

## Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the governments, agencies, and organisations for their ongoing support of their employee’s participation on the PBSG.

## Summary of activities 2020

Components of Species Conservation Cycle: 2/5

Plan **2** ||

Communicate **1** |

Main KSRs addressed: 26, 28

KSR: Key Species Result