Status Report on the World’s Polar Bear Subpopulations

IUCN/SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group

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Introduction

Polar bears have a circumpolar distribution limited to portions of the northern hemisphere covered by sea ice for extended portions each year. They are not evenly distributed throughout the Arctic, nor do they comprise a single nomadic population. Rather, they occur in 19 relatively discrete subpopulations (Figure 1). The subpopulation summaries and statuses listed here are based on information provided and discussed by members of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) / Species Survival Commission (SSC) Polar Bear Specialist Group (PBSG) by remote correspondence during autumn 2020 and spring 2021, and during a virtual meeting in spring 2021. We present estimated subpopulation sizes and associated uncertainty in those estimates, subpopulation trends, changes in sea-ice habitat, recent human-caused mortality, and summaries of subpopulation-specific concerns and vulnerabilities.

Subpopulation delineation

Subpopulation boundaries were initially established in the 1960–1970s based on information on seasonal fidelity, reconnaissance surveys, local knowledge, natural barriers to movement (e.g., land, open water), management considerations, and as capture-recapture studies advanced, from recapture of marked bears and harvest tag returns. From the 1980s to date, telemetry data has augmented subpopulation delineation and been the primary means of establishing boundaries. Use of genetic analyses has also provided insights on population structure but has not been used to set boundaries between areas. Gene flow among adjacent subpopulations is common and thus, biologically, the 19 identified subpopulations have similarity with management units. Despite this similarity, the subpopulations are intended to reflect group membership and vital demographic processes internal to these groups, which are the primary drivers of population dynamics.
The boundaries of subpopulations are intended to identify discontinuities to movement and are based on the best available scientific data. Recent studies identifying boundaries have used clustering or kernel density methods to identify units, although many earlier boundaries were based on limited data without rigorous scientific assessment. There is no single recognized approach for boundary delineation. To facilitate long-term monitoring and management, boundaries have been moved infrequently over time, although changes have been made if new analyses supported a biologically meaningful adjustment. New methods have been developed in recent years to delineate boundaries but there has not been a large-scale reassessment of existing subpopulation delineation for polar bears. Subpopulation boundaries are likely dynamic over long periods and are predicted to shift with climate warming and the resulting loss of sea-ice habitat.

**Ecoregions**

Polar bears rely on the sea ice to access their seal prey, but sea ice is not uniform across the Arctic, rather there are four distinct sea ice habitats—or ecoregions—that have been recognized as differing in sea ice freeze-up, break-up, and drift patterns (Amstrup et al. 2008). Also, the ice among and within ecoregions lies over ocean waters that vary in biological productivity. Sea ice will continue to be lost in all four ecoregions unless climate warming is addressed (IPCC 2019). However, differences in ice character, ocean productivity, and other factors mean that the impacts of warming on the 19 polar bear subpopulations living within the four ecoregions are, and will continue to be, different.

*Seasonal Ice Ecoregion*

The polar bear habitats in much of central and eastern Canada lie within the Seasonal Ice Ecoregion, where, unlike the rest of the Arctic, the sea ice always has melted entirely in summer, forcing bears ashore, where there is little to eat. During the ice-free periods, polar bears live largely off their fat reserves until the ice forms in the fall and they can hunt seals again. In the past, polar bears thrived in this seasonal environment because it almost entirely encompasses shallow and productive waters over the continental shelf. The rich environment
historically allowed polar bears to gain enough weight in spring to survive a long summer fast. Five polar bear subpopulations occur in the Seasonal Ice Ecoregion: Baffin Bay, Davis Strait, Foxe Basin, Southern Hudson Bay, and Western Hudson Bay. Throughout the Seasonal Ice Ecoregion, ice is melting earlier in the spring and freezing up later in the fall, and the bears are food deprived for longer periods. Much of the Seasonal Ice Ecoregion occurs at the southern extreme of the polar bear’s range. The number of ice-free days faced by “southern bears” in the Hudson Bay region is impacting the survival of cubs, because of insufficient ability of adult females to maintain adequate body mass.

Polar Basin Divergent Ice Ecoregion

Across the rest of their range, polar bears used to be able to remain on perennial ice (i.e., ice that survives the summer melt) year-round. In the Divergent Ice Ecoregion, which extends around the Arctic from coastal Alaska to Svalbard, ocean currents continually carry the ice offshore as it forms. This movement of ice “diverging from the shoreline” is especially noticeable in summer. As the weather warms, new ice stops forming and the remaining ice drifts toward the center of the polar basin, leaving a gap of ocean water between land and the polar ice pack. Historically, the summer sea-ice retreat was small and these bears were able to hunt on the ice over productive shallow water all summer, reaching peak body weights by fall. With warmer temperatures, the sea ice is retreating farther from shore and these bears are faced with a choice of coming ashore, where there is little to eat, or following the sea ice over the deep polar basin where biological productivity is low. Because seals can live a pelagic lifestyle, they don’t need to follow the ice and instead remain nearer shore where productivity is high. Thus, polar bears remaining on the ice, like those that come ashore, are largely food deprived and end up fasting until autumn freeze-up. Five polar bear subpopulations live in divergent ice areas: Barents Sea, Chukchi Sea, Kara Sea, Laptev Sea, and the Southern Beaufort Sea. These subpopulations differ greatly in the productivity of their waters. The Chukchi Sea, for example, may be the most productive of arctic seas and includes a vast continental shelf area. The neighboring Beaufort Sea, in contrast, is among the least productive of arctic waters. Although sea-ice retreat in both neighboring subpopulations has been great, the productivity of
the Chukchi Sea and the broad area of continental shelf means that polar bears there are likely to persist through longer fasting periods than are those in the Beaufort Sea. Greater persistence, even with dramatic sea ice decline, also may apply to the highly productive Barents Sea. Despite productivity differences, long fasts for bears of the Divergent Ice Ecoregion which, unlike those in the Seasonal Ice Ecoregion, are accustomed to feeding through the summer, make them among the most vulnerable of all polar bears to climate warming and loss of sea-ice habitats.

**Polar Basin Convergent Ice Ecoregion**

In the Convergent Ice Ecoregion, ice transported from the Divergent Ice Ecoregion, along with locally formed sea ice, collects along the shore, or moves parallel to shorelines, on its way out of the polar basin. The collection of ice along coastlines provides polar bears with access to seals over productive waters throughout the summer, and presently these bears can remain on the sea ice all year. Two polar bear subpopulations live in these areas: Eastern Greenland and Northern Beaufort Sea. Amstrup *et al.* (2008) included the Queen Elizabeth Islands as a subpopulation in the Convergent Ice Ecoregion, although the Queen Elizabeth Islands is not considered by the PBSG to be one of the 19 recognized polar bear subpopulations inhabiting the circumpolar Arctic.

**Archipelago Ecoregion**

The ocean channels separating the islands of the far north Canadian Arctic have historically been covered by sea ice all summer, and polar bears living there have been able to remain on ice year-round. This ecoregion, along with the northernmost portions of the Convergent Ice Ecoregion, is likely to provide a last refuge for polar bears and their prey. Six polar bear populations live in the Archipelago Ecoregion: Gulf of Boothia, Kane Basin, Lancaster Sound, M’Clintock Channel, Norwegian Bay, and Viscount Melville Sound.

**Assessing Global Status**
Studying polar bears is expensive and logistically difficult (Vongraven et al. 2012), and subpopulations differ in how much information is available to understand their statuses and trends. There is high uncertainty about the discreteness and status of several subpopulations, particularly in the Russian Arctic. For example, until 2005, the PBSG Status Table included estimates for three subpopulations (Chukchi Sea, Kara Sea, and Laptev Sea) where accepted scientific methods had not been applied. These estimates were removed in 2005 to avoid the incorrect impression that reliable data were available. Similarly, the PBSG has never provided estimates of abundance for the East Greenland and Arctic Basin subpopulations.

The PBSG recognizes that there is public interest in the abundance of the global polar bear population. The group provided its first global population estimate in 1993 of 21,470–28,370 polar bears (PBSG 1995). Although this was based on the best available scientific information, confidence in estimates of subpopulation size varied due to different research methods and sampling intensity. Some estimates were based solely on knowledge of habitat quality or expert judgment. Recognizing that combining subpopulation estimates that differ greatly in quality could lead to a false sense of precision, the PBSG rounded the range of global abundance to 22,000–27,000 in 1997 (PBSG 1998). Reflecting additional discussion and data, the global range was adjusted to 21,500–25,000 in 2001 (PBSG 2002) and 20,000–25,000 in 2005 and 2009 (PBSG 2006, 2010).

Although better information is now available for several subpopulations, some estimates remain missing, outdated, or include large uncertainty. The most recent estimate of global abundance is 26,000 (95% Confidence Interval [CI] = 22,000–31,000; Regehr et al. 2016). Like previous ranges, these numbers must be interpreted with caution because they reflect the status of polar bears as well as the amount and quality of scientific information, both of which can change over time. Adjustments to the reported global estimate will continue as new information becomes available.

Recent demographic and ecological models have evaluated the relative influence of environmental and anthropogenic stressors on polar bears (Atwood et al. 2016), projected changes in the global population based on alternate assumptions about sea-ice conditions and how polar bears will respond to climate warming (Regehr et al. 2016), and provided estimates
of when polar bears in different parts of their range will reach reproductive and survival thresholds that precipitate declining numbers (Molnár et al. 2020). High-resolution estimates (e.g., predictions of specific years in which survival thresholds might be crossed) are not possible due to the absence of detailed data (e.g., on body condition) for many subpopulations, uncertainty about future greenhouse gas emissions and mitigation strategies, uncertainty about the mechanisms through which habitat change affects polar bear population dynamics, and other factors. Lack of detailed data on abundance for some subpopulations and uncertainty in estimates of future polar bear subpopulation status do not detract from the fundamental relationship between polar bear persistence and availability of sea ice over productive waters.
Figure 1. Map of four polar bear ecoregions defined by grouping recognized subpopulations which share seasonal patterns of ice motion (dark blue lines) and distribution (excerpted from Amstrup et al. 2008). The polar basin divergent ecoregion (PBDE) (purple) includes Southern Beaufort Sea (SBS), Chukchi Sea (CS), Laptev Sea (LVS), Kara Sea (KS), and the Barents Sea (BS). The polar basin convergent ecoregion (PBCE) (blue) includes East Greenland (EG), Queen Elizabeth Islands* (QE), and Northern Beaufort Sea (NBS). The seasonal ice ecoregion (SIE) (green) includes southern Hudson Bay (SHB), western Hudson Bay (WHB), Foxe Basin (FB), Davis Strait (DS), and Baffin Bay (BB). The archipelago ecoregion (AE) (yellow) includes Gulf of Boothia (GB), M’Clintock Channel (MC), Lancaster Sound (LS), Viscount-Melville Sound (VM), Norwegian Bay (NW), and Kane Basin (KB).

*Queen Elizabeth Islands was included as a subpopulation in Amstrup et al. (2008) but is not considered by the PBSG to be one of the 19 recognized polar bear subpopulations inhabiting the circumpolar Arctic.
Status Table Structure and Definitions

**Column primary heading:** Subpopulation

**Column secondary heading:** BLANK

**Example in table:** Gulf of Boothia

Subpopulations are defined as geographically or otherwise distinct subgroups of the total global population between which evidence suggested that demographic and genetic exchange historically had been low, following the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria (IUCN 2017). Polar bear subpopulations may not meet the IUCN criteria of no more than one successful migrant individual per year on average. Furthermore, subpopulations are characterized by different levels of demographic, ecological, and genetic distinctness (Amstrup *et al.* 2004; Thiemann *et al.* 2008). Subpopulations are used for demographic assessments, harvest monitoring, and other research and management activities. The IUCN/SSC PBSG recognizes 19 subpopulations (Durner *et al.* 2018). Modifications to subpopulation boundaries are assessed based on the best available scientific information.

**Column primary heading:** Subpopulation size

**Column secondary heading:** Estimate and uncertainty

**Example in table:** 1,525 (95% CI = 949–2,101)

Subpopulation size is the total number of individuals (i.e., including dependent young) that are alive and rely primarily upon habitats within a subpopulation boundary for a significant part of the year, and are not enumerated as part of a different subpopulation. Subpopulation size may be observed, estimated, or projected (definitions in IUCN 2017, pages 19–20). The scientific bases for reported subpopulation sizes are publicly available (e.g., as a governmental report or journal publication). Estimates of subpopulation size are typically associated with uncertainty due to sampling error, natural variability, and other sources. When possible, uncertainty is characterized by an interval estimate derived using quantitative methods (e.g., 95% Confidence Interval) that is listed in parentheses. If an observed, estimated, or projected value of subpopulation size is not publicly available, it may be listed as Data Deficient.
**Column primary heading:** Subpopulation size

**Column secondary heading:** Method and type of evidence

**Example in table:** Physical capture-recapture (estimated)

A brief description of the quantitative or qualitative method of assessment used to determine subpopulation size. The type of evidence on which the estimate is based (definitions in IUCN 2017, pages 19–20) is listed in parentheses. Example entries include but are not limited to: Total count (observed), Capture-recapture (estimated), Distance sampling (estimated), and Matrix-based projection (projected).

**Column primary heading:** Subpopulation size

**Column secondary heading:** Most recent year of estimate, and citation

**Example in table:** 2,000 (Taylor et al. 2009)

The most recent year to which the value of subpopulation size applies. For example, if an assessment provided an average estimate of subpopulation size for the period 1998–2000, the year would be listed as 2000. A citation for the value of subpopulation size is listed in parentheses.

**Column primary heading:** Change in subpopulation size

**Column secondary heading:** Long term (>2 polar bear generations)

**Example in table:** Likely stable (1996 to 2020)

Change in subpopulation size over a period of approximately three polar bear generations (34.5 years; Regehr et al. 2016), ending with the most recent estimate of subpopulation size. If necessary, a shorter period may be used if it is at least two polar bear generations (23 years). The range of years to which the trend is referenced is listed in parentheses. Change in subpopulation size may be observed or estimated (as defined by IUCN 2017, pages 19-20) based on comparison of two, or more, point estimates of abundance. Possible values for change in subpopulation size are: Increased, Stable, Decreased, and Data Deficient. The
reported change reflects the best current understanding and interpretation but may or may not meet standard criteria for statistical significance. The listed value is preceded by a modifier reflecting the likelihood of the change, as determined statistically, by weight of evidence, or by expert judgment, using likelihood terms established by the IPCC (Table 1.2 in Cubasch et al. 2013). Subpopulations for which a biologically meaningful change cannot be assessed with a likelihood of “Likely” (i.e., 66-100% probability of being true) or higher, are listed as Data Deficient. If available, information on historic changes in subpopulation size (i.e., extending more than three polar bear generations into the past) can be included in the column Comments, vulnerabilities, and concerns.

**Column primary heading:** Subpopulation trend

**Column secondary heading:** Short term (approx. 1 polar bear generation)

**Example in table:** Likely stable (2006 to 2017)

Subpopulation trend over a period of approximately one polar bear generation (11.5 years; Regehr et al. 2016), ending with the most recent year for which trend has been assessed. If necessary, a shorter period may be used. The range of years to which the trend is referenced is listed in parentheses. Short-term trend may be observed, estimated, projected, or inferred (as defined by IUCN 2017, pages 19–20). Possible values for recent trend are: Increased, Stable, Decreased, and Data Deficient. The reported trend reflects the best current scientific understanding and interpretation but may or may not meet standard criteria for statistical significance. The listed value is preceded by a modifier reflecting the likelihood of the trend, as determined either statistically or by expert opinion, using likelihood terms established by the IPCC (Table 1.2 in Cubasch et al. 2013). Subpopulations for which a biologically meaningful trend cannot be assessed with a likelihood of “Likely” (i.e., 66–100% probability of being true) or higher, are listed as Data Deficient. The timeframe for short-term trend may extend into the future if appropriate population projection methods have been used (e.g., quantitative Population Viability Analysis).

**Column primary heading:** Sea-ice metrics (1979 to 2019)
**Column secondary heading:** Change in date of spring sea-ice retreat (days per decade) / change in date of fall sea-ice advance (days per decade)

**Example in table:** -9.8 / +14.3

Subpopulation-specific change in date of spring sea-ice retreat (days per decade) and change in date of fall sea-ice advance (days per decade) over the period 1979–2019, calculated using the methods of Stern and Laidre (2016) and sea-ice data from Cavalieri et al. (1996, updated yearly). Every year, the area of sea ice reaches a maximum in March and a minimum in September. To measure the timing of the seasonal change in sea ice, we find the date each spring when the area of sea ice has dropped to a specific threshold, and the date each fall when the area has grown back to that same threshold. The region-specific threshold is halfway (50%) between the mean March sea-ice area and the mean September sea-ice area, where the means are calculated over the 30-year reference period 1981–2010.

**Column primary heading:** Sea-ice metrics (1979 to 2019)

**Column secondary heading:** Change in summer sea-ice area (percent change per decade)

**Example in table:** -12.2

Subpopulation-specific change in the summer (01 June to 31 October) sea-ice area (percent change per decade) over the period 1979–2019. Percent change is calculated relative to the average summer sea-ice area during the period 1981–2010, using the methods of Stern and Laidre (2016) and sea-ice data from Cavalieri et al. (1996, updated yearly).

**Column primary heading:** Human-caused removals (2015/16 to 2019/20)

**Column secondary heading:** 5-year mean potential (bears per year)

**Example in table:** 72.4

The mean annual potential removals (e.g., harvest quota) over the five-year period, as determined and authorized by the jurisdictions and agencies with management authority for the subpopulation. The five-year period may be based on calendar years or harvest years, which are typically defined as 01 July in year t to 30 June in year t + 1. For subpopulations that are not subject to a legal harvest, the value “N/A” is used.
**Column primary heading:** Human-caused removals (2015/16 to 2019/20)

**Column secondary heading:** 5-year mean actual (bears per year) and what this represents as a percentage of the total population

**Example in table:** 61.8 (3.9%)

The mean annual number of bears that were actually removed from the subpopulation, including all forms of direct human-caused mortality, over the five-year period. The five-year period may be based on calendar years or harvest years, which are typically defined as 01 July in year t to 30 June in year t + 1.

**Column primary heading:** Comments, vulnerabilities, and concerns

**Column secondary heading:** BLANK

**Example in table:** “A new subpopulation assessment is underway.”

The status of each polar bear subpopulation is assessed using the best available scientific data including subpopulation abundance, trend, vital rates, movements and habitat use, human-caused removals, and changes in habitat availability. The Comments, vulnerabilities and concerns column provides additional background information on subpopulation assessments, bear health, population modelling and ongoing research programs that contribute to the current scientific knowledge of the status of each subpopulation. This column may be used to highlight potential vulnerabilities and concerns that exist for the subpopulation.
Polar Bear Subpopulations

Arctic Basin (AB)

The AB subpopulation is a geographic designation to account for polar bears occurring in the most northern areas of the circumpolar Arctic that are not clearly part of other subpopulations. Historically, polar bears have occurred at low densities here, in part because of deep, cold, stratified, and less biologically productive waters and, formerly at least, extensive coverage by multiyear ice. Polar bears from several subpopulations are known to have traveled through the area (Durner and Amstrup 1993), and although there are multiple reports of bears in this area, it is uncertain whether they are residents or merely passing through to other more productive regions of the Arctic. The ice and ecological characteristics in the AB region have changed with climate warming, but the impact on polar bears is unknown. As climate warming continues, it is anticipated that areas where some ice remains over the continental shelf may become important for polar bears as a refuge, although a large part of the AB region is over the deepest waters of the Arctic Ocean and biological productivity will likely remain low. Further reduction in sea ice cover may also reduce connectivity between the AB region and several subpopulations in future. Polar bears with cubs have been observed from icebreakers in this region (Ovsyanikov 2010) and Rode et al. (2015) reported telemetry data indicating that three bears from the Chukchi Sea subpopulation denned in the AB region, although the fates of these bears and their cubs is not known. The total numbers of bears that occupy the AB region seasonally or year-round is unknown. The northernmost documented observation was made at 89°46.5’N, which is 25 km from the North Pole (van Meurs and Splettstoesser 2003).

Baffin Bay (BB)

Based on movements of adult females with satellite radiocollars and recaptures of tagged animals, the BB subpopulation is bounded by the North Water Polynya to the north, Greenland to the east and Baffin Island, Canada, to the west (Taylor and Lee 1995; Taylor et al. 2001; Laidre et al. 2013). A distinct southern boundary at Cape Dyer on Baffin Island in Nunavut, Canada is evident from the movements of tagged bears (Stirling et al. 1980; Peacock et al. 2013).
2012) and from polar bears monitored by satellite telemetry (Taylor et al. 2001). This boundary overlaps with the northern boundary of the Davis Strait subpopulation. Studies of microsatellite genetic variation have not revealed significant differences between polar bears in BB and the neighboring Kane Basin subpopulation, although there was significant genetic variation between polar bears in BB and those in Davis Strait (Paetkau et al. 1999; Peacock et al. 2015; Malenfant et al. 2016; SWG 2016). However, polar bears in BB cluster with bears in northern Davis Strait (Peacock et al. 2015).

An initial subpopulation estimate of 300–600 bears in BB was based on mark-recapture data collected in spring (1984–1989) in which the capture effort was restricted to shore-fast ice and the floe edge off northeast Baffin Island. However, work in the early 1990s showed that an unknown proportion of the subpopulation was typically offshore during the spring and, therefore, unavailable for capture. A second study (1993–1997) was carried out during September and October, when all polar bears were thought to be ashore in summering areas on Bylot and Baffin islands (Taylor et al. 2005). Taylor et al. (2005) estimated the number of polar bears in BB at 2,074 ± 226 (SE). A three-year genetic mark-recapture survey (via biopsy darting) was completed in 2014 resulting in a new population estimate, survival rates, and habitat use analyses (SWG 2016). The mean estimate of total abundance of the BB subpopulation in 2012–2013 was 2,826 (95% CI = 2,059–3,593) polar bears. Due to statistical uncertainty and evidence that the sampling design and environmental conditions resulted in an underestimate of abundance in the 1990s, estimates from the 1990s and 2010s are not directly comparable and trend in abundance cannot be determined.

Satellite telemetry data and habitat selection studies in the 2000s identified ecological changes related to sea-ice loss in BB (SWG 2016; Laidre et al. 2020a). There has been a significant reduction in the range of the subpopulation in all months and seasons when compared to the 1990s. The most marked reduction is a 60% decline in the size of the subpopulation range in summer. Emigration from BB has declined since the 1990s, especially with a reduction of bears moving from BB into Davis Strait and Lancaster Sound. The total number of bears marked during studies in 2011–2012 in BB was equivalent to approximately 34% of the estimated population size. Instances of emigration were ≤1% of the recaptures and
recoveries of marks for the BB subpopulation.

Compared to the 1990s, adult female BB bears now use significantly lower sea-ice concentrations in winter and spring and spend 20–30 more days on land on Baffin Island in the ice-free season. Changes in maternity denning have been observed and entry dates into maternity dens are >1 month later in the 2000s than the 1990s. Furthermore, the first date of arrival on land by pregnant females is significantly earlier in the 2000s. Maternity dens in the 2000s occurred at higher elevations and steeper slopes than the 1990s, likely due to reduced snow cover (Escajeda et al. 2018).

**Barents Sea (BS)**

The size of the BS subpopulation was estimated to be 2,650 (95% CI = 1900–3600) in August 2004 using mark-recapture distance-sampling with data collected from aerial surveys (Aars et al. 2009). Earlier population estimates based on den counts and ship surveys (Larsen 1972) were higher. Ecological data supports that the BS subpopulation grew steadily during the first decade after hunting ceased in 1973, and then either continued to grow or stabilized. A new survey in the Norwegian extent of BS was conducted in August 2015 (Aars et al. 2017). During this survey, the ice edge was located beyond an ice-free gap north of the Svalbard Archipelago, thus local bears in Svalbard were separated from bears that occupied the areas along the sea ice. The number of bears encountered in Svalbard indicates that there is a local stock of approximately 200–300 bears, which did not differ much from the number detected in 2004. The results also indicate, in accordance with results from 2004, that most bears are offshore in the pack ice in autumn. The total estimate for the Norwegian Arctic (i.e., the Norwegian part of BS) was just under 1,000 bears, considerably higher than the total for the Norwegian side in 2004, but with a confidence interval overlapping the earlier estimate. During the 2015 survey, the distribution of bears was clumped along the ice edge with most bears close to the Russian border, but access to the Russian portion of BS for the aerial survey was not permitted, so no current reliable estimates exist for bear abundance in the Russian part of the BS subpopulation. Because of the overlapping confidence intervals, we cannot ascertain a trend in subpopulation size. Recently, Popov and Davydova (2020) reported observations of polar bears from icebreakers in the Russian part of the BS region.
Subpopulation boundaries based on satellite telemetry data indicate that BS is a natural subpopulation unit, albeit with some overlap to the east with the Kara Sea (KS) subpopulation (Mauritzen et al. 2002). Overlap between BS and the East Greenland (EG) subpopulation may be limited (Born et al. 1997), although to some degree home ranges of bears from the EG overlap with those of bears from Svalbard in Fram Strait (Born et al. 2012). Genetically, polar bears from BS are similar to those in the EG, KS, and Laptev Sea (LP) subpopulations (Paetkau et al. 1999; Peacock et al. 2015). At a global level, polar bears in BS belong to the Eastern Polar Basin genetic cluster (one of four global genetic clusters); substantial directional gene flow occurs from the Eastern Polar Basin to the Western Polar Basin cluster (Peacock et al. 2015).

At a finer scale, there is evidence to support sub-structuring of polar bears within BS. Studies on individual movement using satellite telemetry and mark-recapture have been conducted in the Svalbard area since the early 1970s (Larsen 1972, 1985; Wiig 1995; Mauritzen et al. 2001, 2002). These data show that some bears associated with Svalbard are very restricted in their movements. Bears specifically from the Barents Sea, however, range widely between Svalbard and Franz Josef Land in the western Russian Arctic (i.e., a ‘pelagic type;’ Wiig 1995; Mauritzen et al. 2001; Blanchet et al. 2020). Within the BS subpopulation boundaries, substructure between local Svalbard bears and pelagic bears is likely increasing as sea ice around the islands disappears seasonally for longer durations. Fewer of the pelagic bears use maternity dens in the eastern part of Svalbard (Derocher et al. 2011; Aars 2013), in traditionally important denning areas, and it is likely that many of these bears now den more on Franz Josef Land. Some bears of the pelagic type from northern Svalbard move north to the Arctic Ocean in the summer, and return to northern Svalbard in the winter, whereas bears from southeast Svalbard follow retreating ice to the east (Blanchet et al. 2020). Capture-recapture data also show that movement between northwest and southeast Svalbard is rare (Lone et al. 2013, Brun et al. 2021).

Habitat loss for the BS subpopulation is projected to continue. Although pelagic bears in the BS have a slightly higher body condition than the local Svalbard bears (Blanchet et al. 2020), consistent temporal trends in body condition (mainly coastal bears) have thus far been undetected (Lippold et al. 2019). In 2016, the Russian Federation expanded its Russian Arctic
National Park with the inclusion of Franz Josef Land, which is an important summering area for polar bears.

**Chukchi Sea (CS)**

Studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s revealed that polar bears in the CS subpopulation (also known as the Alaska-Chukotka population, with slightly different boundaries) are widely distributed on the pack ice of the northern Bering, Chukchi, and eastern portions of the East Siberian seas (Garner *et al.* 1990, 1994, 1995). Based upon these telemetry studies, the western boundary of the subpopulation was set near Chaunskaya Bay in northeastern Russia. The eastern boundary was set at Icy Cape, Alaska, which is also the western boundary of the Southern Beaufort Sea (SB) subpopulation (Amstrup *et al.* 1986; Amstrup and DeMaster 1988; Garner *et al.* 1990; Amstrup *et al.* 2004, 2005). Support for the CS-SB boundary has been recently reaffirmed with an updated analysis of movement data (Scharf *et al.* 2019). However, similar movement data are not available to evaluate the western boundary between the CS and Laptev Sea (LS) subpopulations.

The first quantitative estimate of the size of the CS subpopulation (2,937 95% CI = 1,552–5,944) was obtained from capture-recapture research in the U.S. portion of the subpopulation’s range, with density estimates extrapolated to other regions within the subpopulation boundary (Regehr *et al.* 2018a). An aerial survey in 2016 provided independent estimates of abundance that ranged from 3,435 (95% CI = 2,300–5,131) to 5,444 (95% CI = 3,636–8,152), where the range reflects uncertainty about how many bears were missed on the transect line in the Russian portion of the aerial survey (Conn *et al.* 2021). Subpopulation abundance was previously estimated to be between 2,000 and 5,000 animals based on the number of maternity dens observed on Wrangel and Herald islands and the Chukotkan coast, and the assumed proportion of females in the subpopulation (Belikov 1993). In recent years, sea ice has retreated farther north in the area occupied by the CS subpopulation resulting in more days in which the biologically productive waters of the continental shelf are ice free (Durner *et al.* 2009; Rode *et al.* 2014). Sea-ice loss is expected to continue (Wang *et al.* 2018). Rode *et al.* (2014, 2021) documented stable or improving body condition and reproduction for polar bears
captured in the U.S. portion of the CS between 1986–1994 and 2008–2011, a period over which substantial sea-ice loss occurred. This suggests some resiliency of the CS subpopulation to summer habitat loss, likely associated with high biological productivity of the region. Autumn-based observations on Wrangel Island for the period 2004-2010, however, may indicate declining cub production and maternity denning (Ovsyanikov 2012). Systematic ground-based surveys on Wrangel Island were started in 2016 and continue annually, providing information on the critical importance of Wrangel Island as a denning and resting area for polar bears and helping to monitor the ecological and demographic status of the CS subpopulation (E. Regehr, unpublished data).

A quantitative harvest risk assessment has been completed using new estimates of abundance, vital rates, and human-caused removals (Regehr et al. 2018b, 2021b). Estimates of illegal take of polar bears in Russia are based on village interviews conducted 2010–2012. The current take level in Russia appears to be significantly lower than in the 1990s although up-to-date and accurate information is lacking (Kochnev and Zdor 2016). Uncertainty in previous estimates of abundance and other subpopulation parameters (e.g., levels of human-caused removals) result in a designation of “Data deficient” for the long-term change in subpopulation size. The designation of “Likely stable” for short-term subpopulation trend is based on estimates of population growth rate using vital rates for the period 2008–2016 (Regehr et al. 2018b).

New studies have found that CS polar bears have increased land use during the summer, primarily on Wrangel Island and the Chukotkan peninsula in Russia (Rode et al. 2015). Further, Wilson et al. (2014, 2016) found that habitat selection preferences of polar bears on the sea ice in the CS region have not changed over time despite declines in the availability of their preferred habitats. This suggests that CS bears are not changing habitat use, and that climate warming will continue to reduce the availability of preferred sea-ice habitat. The observed relationship between summer sea-ice availability and the duration of time and proportion of the CS subpopulation that comes to shore suggests that land use will increase as sea-ice loss continues.

**Davis Strait (DS)**
Based on the recapture or harvest of previously tagged animals, and tracking data from adult female polar bears with satellite collars, the DS subpopulation occurs in Canada within the Labrador Sea, eastern Hudson Strait, Davis Strait south of Cape Dyer, and along a portion of southwest Greenland (Stirling and Kiliaan 1980; Stirling et al. 1980; Taylor and Lee 1995; Taylor et al. 2001). A genetic study of polar bears (Paetkau et al. 1999) indicated significant differences between bears from southern DS and both the Baffin Bay and Foxe Basin (FB) subpopulations. Crompton et al. (2008, 2014) found that individuals from northern portions of DS and those from FB share a high degree of ancestry. Peacock et al. (2015) used samples from both northern and southern DS in an updated circumpolar genetic analysis and found that the two regions belong to two different global genetic clusters (i.e., southern DS to the Southern Canada cluster and northern DS to the Canadian Archipelago cluster).

The initial subpopulation estimate of 900 bears for DS (Stirling and Kiliaan 1980; Stirling et al. 1980) was based on a subjective correction from the original mark-recapture estimate of 726 bears, which was thought to be too low because of possible bias in the sampling. In 1993, the estimate was subjectively increased to 1,400 bears and again to 1,650 in 2005. These increases were to account for bias resulting from springtime sampling, the fact that the existing harvest appeared to be sustainable and not have negative effects on the age structure, and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) that suggested that more bears were being seen over the last 20 years. In addition, harp seals (Pagophilus groenlandicus), an important prey species for the subpopulation, had increased dramatically (due to reduction in their overharvest) over the same period, providing an enhanced potential prey base. Polar bears were seen and radio-tracked in the large pupping areas off the coast of southern Labrador in spring. The most recent inventory of DS was completed in 2007 and the subpopulation estimate was 2,158 (95% CI = 1,833–2,542; Peacock et al. 2013). Polar bear survival in DS varied with time and geography (i.e., northern vs. southern DS) and was related to factors that included reductions in sea-ice habitat and increases of harp seal numbers (Peacock et al. 2013). It was suggested that the observed lowered reproductive rates and declines in body condition of polar bears in DS were likely a result of habitat changes, changes in polar bear density, or both (Rode et al. 2012; Peacock et al. 2013).
During the fall of 2017 and 2018, the field component of a genetic biopsy capture-mark-recapture study was completed. Analysis of the resulting data is currently underway.

**East Greenland (EG)**

Satellite telemetry data show that polar bears range widely along the coast of eastern Greenland and in the pack ice in the Greenland Sea and Fram Strait (Born et al. 1997, 2009; Wiig et al. 2003; Laidre et al. 2013, 2015). Various studies have shown that there are resident bears in the region (Born 1995; Dietz et al. 2000; Sandell et al. 2001), and the EG subpopulation is thought to have limited exchange with other subpopulations (Wiig 1995; Born et al. 2009). Although there is little evidence of genetic difference between subpopulations in the eastern Greenland and Svalbard-Franz Josef Land regions (Paetkau et al. 1999), satellite telemetry and movement of marked animals have detected minimal exchange between polar bears in EG and the Barents Sea subpopulation (Wiig 1995; Born et al. 1997, 2009; Wiig et al. 2003; Laidre et al. 2013). The polar bears in EG cluster with the *Eastern Polar Basin* genetic cluster, one of four global genetic clusters of polar bears (Peacock et al. 2015). Laidre et al. (2015) showed that due to multi-decadal sea-ice loss within EG, there have been changes in bears’ habitat use between the 1990s and 2000s. Adult females tracked in the 2000s used areas with significantly lower sea-ice concentrations (10–15% lower) than adult females in the 1990s during winter. They were also located significantly closer (100–150 km) to open water in all seasons and spent approximately two months longer in areas with <60% sea-ice concentration, compared to bears in the 1990s. No inventories have been conducted to determine the size of the polar bear subpopulation in EG, however pilot studies were initiated in southeast Greenland in 2015 to collect data to inform a subpopulation assessment (K. Laidre, *unpublished data*).

**Foxe Basin (FB)**

Based on decades of mark-recapture studies and satellite tracking of female bears in Western Hudson Bay (WH) and Southern Hudson Bay (SH), the FB subpopulation appears to occur in Foxe Basin, northern Hudson Bay, and the western end of Hudson Strait (Taylor and Lee 1995; Sahanatien et al. 2015). The most recent mapping of satellite telemetry data indicates
substantial overlap of the FB subpopulation with the WH and SH subpopulations and, to a lesser extent, with the Davis Strait subpopulation (Peacock et al. 2010; Sahanatien et al. 2015). During the ice-free season, polar bears are concentrated on Southampton Island and along the Wager Bay coast; however, significant numbers of bears are also encountered on the islands and coastal regions throughout the FB region (Stapleton et al. 2016). A total subpopulation estimate of 2,197 bears (standard error [SE] = 260) for 1994 was developed (Taylor et al. 2006a) from a mark-recapture analysis based on tetracycline biomarkers, where the marking effort was conducted during the ice-free season and distributed throughout the entire area. Traditional ecological knowledge suggests that the FB subpopulation had increased (Government of Nunavut consultations in communities in Foxe Basin, 2004–2012). During a comprehensive summertime aerial survey in 2009 and 2010, based on distance sampling and double-observer estimation and covering about 40,000 km each year, 816 and 1,003 bears were observed, respectively (Stapleton et al. 2016). This most recent study yielded an abundance estimate of 2,585 (95% CI = 2,096–3,189) polar bears (Stapleton et al. 2016), which is not statistically different from the 1994 estimate, suggesting a stable population. Sea-ice habitat for polar bears has decreased substantially over the last several decades in FB (Sahanatien and Derocher 2012; Stern and Laidre 2016).

Gulf of Boothia (GB)

The boundaries of the GB subpopulation are based on genetic studies (Paetkau et al. 1999; Campagna et al. 2013; Peacock et al. 2015; Malenfant et al. 2016), movements of tagged bears (Furnell and Schweinsburg 1984; Taylor and Lee 1995), radiotelemetry in GB and adjacent areas (Taylor et al. 2001), and interpretations by Inuit hunters of how local conditions influence the movements of polar bears in the area. GB belongs in the Canadian Archipelago global genetic cluster (Peacock et al. 2015). An initial subpopulation estimate of 333 bears was derived from the data collected within the boundaries proposed for GB, as part of a study conducted over a larger area of the central Arctic (Furnell and Schweinsburg 1984). Although data from this area were limited, local hunters reported that numbers remained constant or increased since the time of the central Arctic polar bear survey. Based on traditional ecological knowledge,
recognition of sampling deficiencies, and polar bear densities in other areas, an interim subpopulation estimate of 900 was established in the 1990s. Following the completion of a mark-recapture inventory in spring 2000, the subpopulation was estimated to number 1,592 (SE = 361 bears; Taylor et al. 2009). Natural survival and recruitment rates were estimated at values higher than previous estimates (Taylor et al. 1987). Taylor et al. (2009) concluded that the subpopulation was increasing in 2000 because of a high intrinsic rate of growth and low harvest. Harvest rates were increased in 2005 based on the 2000 abundance estimate, and the subpopulation was believed to be stable.

A three-year genetic mark-recapture study was conducted between 2015 and 2017. Results of live-capture dead-recovery models suggest a mean abundance estimate of 1,525 bears (SE = 294) for the period 2015–2017, which was similar to the previous mean abundance estimate during the period 1998–2000 (Dyck et al. 2020b). Mean cub-of-the-year and yearling litter sizes for the period 2015–2017 were 1.61 (95% CI = 1.51–1.70) and 1.53 (95% CI = 1.41–1.64), respectively, with no apparent trend compared to 1998–2000. The mean number of yearlings per adult female for the period 2015–2017 was 0.36 (95% CI = 0.26–0.47) which suggests that GB is currently a productive polar bear subpopulation despite sea-ice changes. This is consistent with the finding that polar bear body condition (i.e., fatness) in the spring improved between the periods 1998–2000 and 2015–2017. Sex- and age-specific variation in total survival rate (i.e., including harvest mortality) were detected with higher estimates for adult females (0.95; 95% CI = 0.81–0.99) than adult males (0.85; 95% CI = 0.74–0.92) for the period 2005–2017. A potentially related effect was detected as an increase in the proportional abundance of females from 0.57 in 1998–2000 to 0.61 in 2015–2017. The asymptotic, intrinsic population growth rate calculated using a matrix projection model with estimates of total survival was 0.06 (95% CI = -0.06–0.12) for the period between 2005 and 2017, suggesting strong potential for growth. However, the results for subpopulation size and trend should be interpreted with caution because the estimate of abundance reflects the “superpopulation” (i.e., it includes all bears that use the GB management area, some of which spend time in other subpopulations as well) and the estimate of population growth rate does not account for permanent emigration from the GB management area. Spatial and temporal changes in sea-ice
extent and composition may have provided transient benefits to the GB subpopulation due to increased biological productivity associated with decreased sea-ice thickness and multiyear ice.

**Kane Basin (KB)**

Based on the movements of adult females with satellite collars and recaptures of tagged animals, boundaries of the KB subpopulation include the North Water Polynya to the south, the Kennedy Channel to the north, and Greenland and Ellesmere Island to the east and west (Taylor *et al.* 2001). Polar bears in KB do not differ genetically from those in Baffin Bay (Paetkau *et al.* 1999; Peacock *et al.* 2015). The size of the subpopulation was estimated to be 164 bears (SE = 35) for the period 1994–1997 by Taylor *et al.* (2008a). The intrinsic natural rate of growth for KB polar bears was estimated to be low at 1.009 (SE = 0.010; Taylor *et al.* 2008a), likely because of large expanses of multiyear ice and a low density of seals (Born *et al.* 2004). A genetic mark-recapture survey (via biopsy darting) and aerial survey were completed in 2014 resulting in a new subpopulation estimate, survival rates, and habitat use analyses (SWG 2016). Using genetic mark-recapture, the estimated abundance of the KB subpopulation was 357 polar bears (95% CI = 221–493) for 2013–2014. More bears were documented in the eastern regions of the KB subpopulation during 2012–2014 than during 1994–1997. The difference in distribution between the 1990s and 2010s may reflect differences in spatial distribution of bears, possibly influenced by reduced hunting pressure by Greenland in eastern KB, but also some differences in sampling protocols. An estimate of abundance based on a springtime 2014 aerial survey in KB was 190 bears (95% lognormal CI = 87–411; Wiig *et al.* In prep). However, due to insufficient coverage of offshore polar bear habitat, this estimate is likely negatively biased. The total number of bears marked during studies in 2012–2013 in KB was equivalent to approximately 25% of the estimated subpopulation size. Documented cases of emigration comprised <4% of recaptures and recoveries in KB.

Changing sea-ice conditions have resulted in broad movement and habitat-use patterns of KB bears that are similar to those of bears in seasonal sea-ice ecoregions (SWG 2016; Laidre *et al.* 2020b). The size of the subpopulation range has expanded since the 1990s in all seasons, especially in summer (June-September) when the subpopulation range doubled between the 1990s and the 2000s. Land use in KB during summer is intermittent because some sea ice
remains inside fjords and coastal areas. Reproductive metrics for KB were comparable between the 1990s and 2010s sampling periods. Body condition in KB appeared to have slightly improved between sampling periods (see SWG 2016). Overall, the available data on abundance together with information on movements, body condition, and reproduction, suggest that the KB subpopulation has increased in size.

**Kara Sea (KS)**

The KS subpopulation overlaps in the west with the Barents Sea (BS) subpopulation in the area to the east of Franz Josef Land and includes the Novaya Zemlya archipelago. Data for KS and BS in the vicinity of Franz Josef Land and Novaya Zemlya are mainly based on dated aerial surveys and den counts (Parovshikov 1965; Belikov and Matveev 1983; Uspenski 1989; Belikov and Gorbunov 1991; Belikov et al. 1991; Belikov 1993). Telemetry studies of movements have been done throughout the area, but data to define the eastern boundary are incomplete (Belikov et al. 1998; Mauritzen et al. 2002). Using samples from the 1990s, at a global level, polar bears in KS belong to the *Eastern Polar Basin* genetic cluster (together with polar bears from the BS and Laptev Sea subpopulations); gene flow suggests substantial directionality (29-fold difference) from the *Eastern Polar Basin* cluster to the *Western Polar Basin* cluster (Peacock et al. 2015).

**Lancaster Sound (LS)**

Information on the movements of adult female polar bears monitored by satellite radiocollars and mark-recapture data has shown that the LS subpopulation is distinct from the adjoining Viscount Melville Sound, M’Clintock Channel, Gulf of Boothia, Baffin Bay, and Norwegian Bay (NW) subpopulations (Taylor et al. 2001). Survival rates of the pooled LS and NW subpopulations were used in a population viability analysis to minimize sampling errors, and the subpopulation estimate of 2,541 bears (SE = 391) is based on an analysis of mark-recapture data through 1997 (Taylor et al. 2008b). This abundance estimate is considerably larger than a previous estimate of 1,675 that included NW (Stirling et al. 1984). Taylor et al. (2008b) estimated survival and recruitment parameters that suggest the LS subpopulation has a lower renewal rate than previously estimated. However, what effect this may have on the status of the subpopulation is unknown, especially under changing sea-ice conditions. The available data
for LS are dated, but the subpopulation is thought to be stable based on local traditional information. A new genetic subpopulation assessment (via biopsy darting) is currently underway.

**Laptev Sea (LP)**

The LP subpopulation area includes the western half of the East Siberian Sea and most of the Laptev Sea, including the Novosibirsk and possibly Severnaya Zemlya Islands (Belikov et al. 1998). The 1993 estimate of subpopulation size for LP (800–1,200) is based on aerial counts of dens on the Severnaya Zemlya in 1982 (Belikov and Randla 1987) and on anecdotal data collected in 1960s through 1980s on the number of females coming to dens on Novosibirsk Islands and the mainland coast (Kistchinski 1969; Uspenski 1989). At present, the subpopulation size is unknown.

**M’Clintock Channel (MC)**

The current boundaries for the MC subpopulation are based on recoveries of tagged bears, movements of adult females with satellite radiocollars in adjacent areas (Taylor and Lee 1995; Taylor et al. 2001), and genetics (Paetkau et al. 1999; Campagna et al. 2013; Peacock et al. 2015; Malenfant et al. 2016). These boundaries appear to be a consequence of large islands to the east and west, the mainland to the south, and the multiyear ice in Viscount Melville Sound to the north. An estimate of 900 bears was derived from a 6-year study in the mid-1970s within the boundaries proposed for the MC subpopulation, as part of a study conducted over a larger area of the central Arctic (Furnell and Schweinsburg 1984). Following the completion of a mark-recapture inventory in spring 2000, the subpopulation was estimated to number 284 bears (SE = 59; Taylor et al. 2006b). Natural survival and recruitment rates were estimated at values lower than previous standardized estimates (Taylor et al. 1987). Due to apparent declines in subpopulation abundance, and after an initial harvest moratorium, harvest levels for MC were reduced to levels that were expected to allow the subpopulation to recover and increase.

A three-year genetic mark-recapture study was conducted 2014–2016. Results of a closed capture-recapture model, implemented in a Bayesian framework and fitted to data for
independent animals (i.e., >2 years), suggest a mean abundance of 716 bears (95% Credible Interval [CRI] = 545–955) for the period 2014–2016, indicating that the MC polar bear subpopulation increased since 1998–2000 (Dyck et al. 2020a) and likely demonstrating the effectiveness of local management. Both male and female segments of the subpopulation increased between study periods (i.e., 1998–2000 and 2014–2016), likely because of a combination of reduced harvest and improved habitat quality. Estimated apparent survival for bears aged 2 and older was 0.88 (SE = 0.02), although this is likely negatively biased due to temporary or permanent movement of individual bears with respect to the study area and limited data on immigration and emigration. These scientific findings align with local observations that the subpopulation has recovered since the year 2000.

As with habitat in Gulf of Boothia, Barber and Iacozza (2004) found no trends in ringed seal (Pusa hispida) habitat or sea-ice conditions from 1980 to 2000 for MC. A general trend has been detected for earlier break-up and delayed freeze-up (Markus et al. 2009; Stern and Laidre 2016), but multiyear ice is predicted to persist into the near future (Howell et al. 2008; Sou and Flato 2009; Maslanik et al. 2011). Habitat quality for the MC subpopulation could be improved over the short-term as multiyear ice declines.

**Northern Beaufort Sea (NB)**

Studies of movements and abundance estimates of polar bears in the eastern Beaufort Sea have been conducted using telemetry and mark-recapture at intervals from the early 1970s to the present (e.g., Stirling et al. 1975; DeMaster et al. 1980; Stirling et al. 1988; Lunn et al. 1995; Stirling et al. 2011). From these studies, it became clear that there were separate polar bear subpopulations in the Northern and Southern Beaufort seas (i.e., the NB and SB subpopulations, respectively; Stirling et al. 1988; Amstrup et al. 1995; Taylor and Lee 1995). The density of polar bears using the offshore multiyear ice that predominated in much of the northernmost area of NB was lower than in the south where most polar bear habitat consisted of annual ice over the biologically productive continental shelf (Lunn et al 1995; Stirling et al. 2011). Abundance of the NB subpopulation in 1988 was estimated to be 1,200 (Stirling et al. 1988) although parts of the northwestern coast of Banks Island and M’Clure Strait were under-
sampled because of local concern about disruption to guided polar bear sport hunters. The most recent mark-recapture assessment, completed in 2006, estimated the NB subpopulation to be 980 bears (SE = 155; Stirling et al. 2011). The authors stated that, due to potential bias in the abundance estimate from 2006, the 2004–2005 estimates of approximately 1,200–1,300 bears were likely more reflective of the true abundance. The apparent stability of the NB subpopulation at the time was attributed to relatively stable ice conditions through 2006 and a harvest that was within sustainable limits (Stirling et al. 2011).

After the 2006 population reassessment and based on data from satellite tracking of female polar bears and spatial modeling techniques (Amstrup et al. 2005), the boundary between the NB and SB subpopulations was moved west to 133° W (at Tuktoyaktuk) from its previous eastern limit at Pearce Point (122° W). The revised boundary has been accepted and used by the responsible management authorities since 2014. The PBSG has adopted use of the revised boundary between the SB and NB, and it is used for reporting sea-ice conditions and harvest in the current Status Table. The Status Table will continue to report estimates of subpopulation size reflecting the previous boundary (e.g., Stirling et al. 2011; Bromaghin et al. 2015) until updated estimates pertaining to the revised boundary are available. Griswold et al. (2017) conducted an exploratory analysis to estimate NB and SB subpopulation abundance under the boundary at 133°W. Results indicated a mean of 311 bears should shift from SB to NB following the change in boundary. For management purposes, an abundance estimate of 1,710 bears is used, which reflects the boundary change and an adjustment based on potential negative bias due to lack of coverage of the entire area (ISR Management Plan – Joint Secretariat 2017). Since the early 2000s, sea-ice conditions in the eastern Beaufort Sea have declined (Stroeve et al. 2014; Stern and Laidre 2016) and have resulted in declines in body condition of adult ringed seals in the eastern Amundsen Gulf (Harwood et al. 2020) with predicted long-term declines in ringed seal pup survival in response to declining snow and sea-ice conditions (Reimer et al. 2019). Up-to-date scientific data are not available on how declines in the quality and availability of polar bear prey and habitat may be impacting the NB subpopulation. Harvest pressure in NB is low with levels consistently below a 4.5% total harvest rate, with ice conditions making travel for hunters difficult in some years (Stirling et al. 2011).
new demographic assessment of the NB subpopulation is currently underway.

**Norwegian Bay (NW)**

The NW subpopulation appears to be genetically unique (Malenfant et al. 2016). This subpopulation is bounded by heavy multiyear ice to the west, islands to the north, east, and west, and polynyas to the south (Stirling et al. 1993; Stirling 1997; Taylor et al. 2008b). Data collected during mark-recapture studies, and from satellite radiotracking of adult female polar bears, suggest that most of the polar bears in the NW subpopulation are concentrated along the coastal tide cracks and ridges along the northern, eastern, and southern boundaries (Taylor et al. 2001). The most current (1993–1997) estimate of abundance is 203 bears (SE = 44; Taylor et al. 2008b). Survival rate estimates for the NW subpopulation were derived from pooled Lancaster Sound and NW data because the subpopulations are adjacent, and the number of bears captured in NW was too small to generate reliable survival estimates. The five-year mean harvest (1.4 bears per year between the harvest years 2014/15 and 2018/19) has been below the sustainable harvest level for the estimated subpopulation size. The available data for the NW subpopulation are dated and a new study is planned to begin in 2021.

**Southern Beaufort Sea (SB)**

Radiotelemetry and mark-recapture studies through the 1980s indicated that polar bears in the SB region comprised a single subpopulation, with an eastern boundary between Paulatuk and Baillie Island, Northwest Territories (NWT), Canada, and a western boundary near Icy Cape, Alaska, U.S. (Amstrup et al. 1986; Amstrup and DeMaster 1988; Stirling et al. 1988). More recently, data from female polar bears carrying satellite radiocollars suggested that at Utqiagvik (formerly known as Barrow), Alaska, in the west, 50% of polar bears were from the SB subpopulation and 50% were from the adjacent Chukchi Sea (CS) subpopulation. Similarly, at Tuktoyaktuk, NWT, to the east, there was a 50% probability of polar bears being either from the SB or the adjacent Northern Beaufort Sea (NB) subpopulation (Amstrup et al. 2005). Based on these satellite tracking data and spatial modeling techniques (Amstrup et al. 2005), and recognizing changing patterns of breakup and freeze-up resulting from climate warming as well
as traditional ecological knowledge (Joint Secretariat 2015), the original boundary between the NB and SB subpopulations was moved west from its previous eastern limit at Pearce Point (122° W). The revised boundary occurs at 133°W longitude and has been used by management authorities in the U.S., NWT, and Yukon since 2014.

The PBSG has adopted use of the revised boundary between the SB and NB, and it is used for reporting sea-ice conditions and harvest in the current Status Table. The Status Table will continue to report estimates of subpopulation size reflecting the previous boundary (e.g., Stirling et al. 2011; Bromaghin et al. 2015) until updated estimates pertaining to the revised boundary are available. Information that applies to the previous boundary is identified as such in the section “Comments, vulnerabilities, and concerns” of the Status Table. More recently, a boundary re-analysis using satellite tracking data was completed for the SB subpopulation where it borders the CS subpopulation, confirming support for the CS-SB boundary near Icy Cape, Alaska (Scharf et al. 2019).

The abundance of the SB subpopulation (using the previous SB-NB boundary at 122° W) was estimated to be approximately 1,800 (mean) animals from 1972–1983 (Amstrup et al. 1986). A subsequent analysis of capture data from 1967–1998 suggested that abundance had potentially reached 2,500 animals during the latter portion of this period (Amstrup et al. 2001). However, the estimate of 2,500 animals was not considered reliable due to concerns over heterogeneity within the data in the late 1990s, and managers were encouraged to continue using the abundance estimate of 1,800 individuals (Regehr et al. 2006). Results from a mark-recapture study conducted from 2001–2006 in both the U.S. and Canada indicated that the SB subpopulation included 1,526 (95% CI = 1,211–1,841) polar bears in 2006 (Regehr et al. 2006). That study and others found that the body condition, survival, and breeding success of polar bears were negatively affected by changing sea-ice conditions, and that population growth rate was strongly negative in years with long ice-free seasons, such as 2005 when arctic sea ice extent reached a (then) record low (Hunter et al. 2010; Regehr et al. 2010, Rode et al. 2010). In 2009, Griswold et al. (2017) reanalyzed capture-recapture data for the SB subpopulation from 2001–2006 that were originally presented in Regehr et al. (2006) and determined that moving the boundary to 133°W longitude would decrease the estimated size of the SB subpopulation
by approximately 311 polar bears. As a result, an estimated abundance of 1,215 polar bears in the SB subpopulation has been used in Canada for management purposes since the boundary shift in 2014.

Bromaghin et al. (2015) modeled survival and abundance (using the previous SB-NB boundary at 122° W) using data collected in the U.S. and Canada from 2001–2010 and found that survival estimates remained low through 2007 and increased through 2009, resulting in an abundance estimate of approximately 900 (90% CI = 606–1,212) polar bears in 2010. However, they recognized the potential for un-modeled heterogeneity in mark-recapture data resulting from differences in sampling protocols over time, which could have biased both survival and abundance estimates. For example, the authors suspected negative bias in abundance estimates for the early years of the study associated with the distribution of search effort. They also noted the potential for negative bias in later years and concluded that the decline in abundance for the SB subpopulation was likely greater than 25% and may have approached 50% (see Bromaghin et al. 2015 for details). Although the authors expressed the need for caution in interpreting the estimated decline in abundance, other demographic evidence was consistent with a decline including a low proportion of yearlings in the subpopulation and failure of subadult survival rates to rebound in the latter years of the study. A new analysis of mark-recapture data collected in Alaska from 2001–2016, using a modeling approach that differed from Regehr et al. (2006) and Bromaghin et al. (2015), corroborated the decline in abundance in the Alaskan portion of the subpopulation from 2003–2006 and suggested stabilization through 2015 (Atwood et al. 2020). A recent Traditional Knowledge study from Canada concluded that the numbers of polar bears in regularly used hunting areas have remained relatively stable within living memory (Joint Secretariat 2015). A multiyear biopsy-based mark-recapture abundance study for the SB is in currently underway.

Stirling et al. (2008) observed low hunting success of polar bears during the spring in 2003–2006, likely due to unusual sea-ice conditions and exacerbated by reproductive failure of ringed seals in 2005 (Harwood et al. 2020). Assessments of temporal patterns of feeding ecology found that the number of bears in a physiological fasting state in April and May increased from the mid-1980s to the mid-2010s (Cherry et al. 2009; Rode et al. 2018). These
studies support the hypothesis that the energy balance of polar bears has changed in the SB (e.g., Pagano et al. 2020), which may explain declines in survival observed in the mid-2000s. The availability of sea-ice habitat for polar bears (Durner et al. 2009, 2019) is reduced with declining sea-ice extent (Stroeve et al. 2014), resulting from the continuing effects of climate warming. Atwood et al. (2016) found that polar bears in the SB are spending significantly more time on land, which is correlated with the extent of ice retreat. Further, while on land, many polar bears feed on the subsistence-harvested bowhead whale remains aggregated at Cross Island near the Prudhoe Bay industrial infrastructure and Barter Island near the community of Kaktovik, Alaska (Herreman and Peacock 2013, Rogers et al. 2015). Increased polar bear activity near human settlements may increase exposure to terrestrial-based pathogens (Atwood et al. 2017) and the risk of human-bear interactions.

Southern Hudson Bay (SH)

Boundaries of the SH polar bear subpopulation are based on observed movements of marked and collared bears (Jonkel et al. 1976; Kolenosky and Prevett 1983; Kolenosky et al. 1992; Obbard and Middel 2012; Middel 2014). The geographic range of the SH subpopulation includes much of eastern and southern Hudson Bay and James Bay and large expanses of the coastline of Ontario and Québec, as well as areas up to 120 km inland (Kolenosky and Prevett 1983; Obbard and Walton 2004; Obbard and Middel 2012).

An initial estimate of subpopulation size of 763 bears (SE = 323) was derived through a three-year (1984–1986) capture-recapture study conducted in mainland Ontario (Kolenosky et al. 1992). This estimate was subsequently adjusted to 1,000 for management purposes by the Canadian Polar Bear Technical Committee because areas away from the coast may have been under-sampled due to the difficulty of locating polar bears in the boreal forest, and because some areas in James Bay were not sampled (Lunn et al. 1998). A reanalysis of the 1984–1986 data produced an estimate for the study area of 641 (95% CI = 401–881 for those years; Obbard 2008; Obbard et al. 2007). A subsequent three-year capture-recapture study conducted over the same geographical area and with similar capture effort (2003–2005) produced an estimate of 673 (95% CI = 396–950; Obbard 2008). An analysis of bears captured on Akimiski Island in
James Bay during 1997 and 1998 resulted in the addition of 70–110 bears to the total subpopulation estimate (Obbard 2008). While the results of the two capture-recapture studies suggest that abundance was unchanged between 1984–1986 and 2003–2005, body condition declined and survival rates in all age and sex categories tended to decline between the two capture periods, although point estimates were not significantly different because of the overlap in confidence intervals (Obbard et al. 2006; Obbard 2008).

Intensive aerial surveys were conducted during the fall ice-free season over mainland Ontario (same geographic area as for the capture-recapture studies) and Akimiski Island in 2011, and over the remaining islands in James Bay, the coastal areas of Québec from Long Island to the border between the SH and Foxe Basin subpopulations, and the off-shore islands in eastern Hudson Bay in 2012. Results of this mark-recapture-distance-sampling analysis provided an estimate of 860 bears (95% CI = 580–1,274) in the mainland Ontario, neighboring islands, and Akimiski Island portions of the SH management unit during the 2011 ice-free season. The estimate for the 2012 survey was 83 bears (SE = 4.5) in the 2012 study area. Thus, combining the aerial survey results from 2011 and 2012 to cover the entire SH subpopulation area yielded an estimate of 943 (95% CI = 658–1,350; Obbard et al. 2015). Overall, despite the difference in methodologies, assumptions, and biases between capture-recapture studies and aerial surveys, the evidence suggests it is likely that abundance of the SH subpopulation was unchanged between 1986 and 2012.

The ice-free season within the SH subpopulation boundary increased by about 30 days from 1980 to 2012 (Obbard et al. 2016; Stern and Laidre 2016). Concurrently, body condition declined in all age and sex classes, though the decline was less for cubs than for other social classes (Obbard et al. 2016).

The intensive aerial survey was repeated in September 2016 to assess recent trend in abundance. Two changes were made between the protocol for the 2011/2012 survey and that for the 2016 survey. First, all areas in Ontario, Nunavut and Québec were sampled within a three-week period to ensure complete coverage within the same year. Second, some inland transects were added along the Québec coast north of Long Island in response to feedback received during community consultations following the 2011/2012 survey and during planning
for the 2016 survey. Data collection protocols and analyses were otherwise identical between the two surveys. Results of the 2016 survey suggest that abundance declined by about 17% from 943 bears (95% CI = 658–1,350) in 2011/2012 to 780 (95% CI = 590–1,029) in 2016. The proportion of yearlings declined from 12% of the population in 2011 to 5% in 2016, whereas the proportion of cubs-of-the-year remained similar (16% in 2011 vs. 19% in 2016), suggesting low survival of the 2015 cohort (Obbard et al. 2018). Recently, a quantitative harvest risk assessment was completed using data from harvested bears, capture-recapture studies, and aerial surveys conducted between 1984 and 2016 (Regehr et al. 2021a). This assessment considered alternative scenarios for how habitat loss may affect the demographic status of the SH subpopulation in the future.

**Viscount Melville Sound (VM)**

Initial research on the VM polar bear subpopulation was conducted in the early 1970s but only included field work in the southern portions of the subpopulation’s range (Schweinsburg et al. 1981). A five-year study of movements and subpopulation size, using telemetry and mark-recapture, was completed for polar bears inhabiting VM in 1992 (Messier et al. 1992, 1994; Taylor et al. 2002). Subpopulation boundaries were based on observed movements of female polar bears with satellite radiocollars and movements of bears tagged in and out of the study area (Bethke et al. 1996; Taylor et al. 2001). The most recent subpopulation estimate of 161 bears (SE = 40) dates from 1992 (Taylor et al. 2002), and the PBSG regards VM as a data-deficient subpopulation. However, in spring 2014, the field component of a mark-recapture study (2012–2014) to reassess abundance and status of the VM subpopulation was completed. This study included applying radiocollars to female polar bears to evaluate movements and population delineation. Analysis of the resulting capture-recapture and movement data are underway, and a revised subpopulation estimate is expected in 2021. Harvest for the VM subpopulation has been typically below the quota.

**Western Hudson Bay (WH)**

Hudson Bay is a relatively shallow inland sea that is ice covered in winter and ice free in
summer (Hochheim et al. 2010). Although three subpopulations of polar bears (Foxe Basin [FB], Southern Hudson Bay [SH], and WH) occur on the sea ice of Hudson Bay in winter and spring, they appear to be largely segregated during the open-water season (Derocher and Stirling 1990; Peacock et al. 2010; Viengkone et al. 2016). During the ice-free period, WH polar bears exhibit strong fidelity to terrestrial summering areas in northeastern Manitoba (Stirling et al. 1977; Derocher and Stirling 1990; Cherry et al. 2013; Stapleton et al. 2014; Lunn et al. 2016). The current WH subpopulation boundary is based largely on capture-recapture data and harvest data for tagged animals (Stirling et al. 1977; Derocher and Stirling 1990, 1995a; Taylor and Lee 1995; Lunn et al. 1997).

Although the size of the WH subpopulation was unknown until the 1990s (Derocher and Stirling 1995a), sightings of polar bears by Inuit have increased in recent decades relative to historical levels of the early 1900s to 1970s (McDonald et al. 1997; Tyrrell 2006, 2009; Nirlungayuk and Lee 2009; Henri et al. 2010; Kotierk 2012). A factor likely contributing to this observed increase was a population-level response to decreased hunting pressure that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s resulting from the closure of the fur trading post at York Factory, withdrawal of military personnel from Churchill, and the closure of hunting in Manitoba (Stirling et al. 1977; Derocher and Stirling 1995a).

Derocher and Stirling (1995a) estimated the mean subpopulation size for 1978–1992 to be 1,000 bears (SE = 51). However, this estimate was considered conservative because the study had not covered the southern portion of the range east of the Nelson River (Calvert et al. 1995; PBSG 1995). Therefore, for management purposes, the subpopulation size was adjusted to 1,200 (Calvert et al. 1998). In 1994 and 1995, Lunn et al. (1997) expanded the capture program to sample animals to the management boundary between the WH and SH subpopulations, and estimated abundance to be 1,233 (SE = 209) in 1995. Regehr et al. (2007) reported a decline in abundance from 1,194 (95% CI = 1,020–1,368) in 1987 to 935 (95% CI = 794–1,076) in 2004, and documented that the survival rates of cubs, subadults, and old bears (>20 years) were negatively correlated with the date of sea-ice breakup.

A mark-recapture distance-sampling study resulted in an abundance estimate of 1,030 bears (95% CI = 754–1,406) in 2011 (Stapleton et al. 2014). During this survey, 711 total bears
were observed and more bears, particularly adult males, were observed in the coastal areas east of the Nelson River towards the WH-SH boundary than were documented during the late 1990s (Stirling et al. 2004). Stapleton et al. (2014) suggested that a distributional shift may have negatively biased abundance estimates derived from capture samples. Mean litter size (cubs-of-the-year, 1.43 [SE = 0.08]; yearlings, 1.22 [SE = 0.10]) and numbers of cubs as a proportion of total observations (cubs-of-the-year, 0.07; yearlings, 0.03) were lower than those recorded for the neighboring subpopulations of FB and SH, which is consistent with the WH subpopulation having low reproduction (Regehr et al. 2007; Peacock et al. 2010; Stapleton et al. 2014). The body mass of solitary adult female polar bears has declined over the past 40 years, which has likely contributed to declining reproductive success (Derocher and Stirling 1995b; Stirling et al. 1999; Sciullo et al. 2016; Lunn and McGeachy 2020; Molnár et al. 2020).

Lunn et al. (2016) evaluated the demography and status of the WH subpopulation for the period 1984–2011 using a Bayesian implementation of multistate capture-recapture models coupled with a matrix-based demographic projection model to integrate several types of data and to incorporate sampling uncertainty and demographic and environmental stochasticity across the polar bear life cycle. Their analysis resulted in an estimate of 806 bears (95% CI = 653–984) in the core area of study north of the Nelson River in 2011. Although the abundance estimates from the aerial survey and capture-recapture model are broadly similar with overlapping confidence intervals, it is difficult to make direct comparisons because the studies differed with respect to spatial and temporal perspectives and the assumptions of each method (Lunn et al. 2016). The aerial survey provides a snapshot estimate of the total number of polar bears in the WH management at the time of the survey, whereas the point estimate of abundance from the capture-recapture model is based on the number of bears that moved through the smaller capture-recapture sampling area over multiple years.

The most recent estimate of abundance for the WH subpopulation comes from a mark-recapture distance-sampling study in 2016 (Dyck et al. 2017). Pre-survey consultations with Nunavut Hunters’ and Trappers’ Organizations, Kivalliq communities, and with the Manitoba Department of Sustainable Development were conducted to include local and traditional knowledge in the study design. Dyck et al. (2017) estimated there to be 842 bears (95% CI =
562–1121) that, although not significantly different from the previous aerial survey estimate, represented an 18% decline in abundance between 2011 and 2016. Over the same period and using similar methods, Obbard et al. (2018) estimated a 17% decline in abundance for the neighboring SH subpopulation. Similar to observations from the 2011 survey, cubs-of-the-year and yearling cubs comprised a small proportion of the sample size (Dyck et al. 2017), suggesting that low reproductive performance of the WH subpopulation has continued.

From the 1930s through the 1960s, encounters with polar bears in the interior of the Kivalliq mainland and along the Kivalliq coast of Hudson Bay were rare (Nirlungayuk and Lee 2009; Tyrrell 2009). Within the last few decades, encounters with polar bears in the Kivalliq region have increased, resulting in more bear-human encounters and increased concerns for human safety and property damage (Tyrrell 2006, 2009; Henri et al. 2010).
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### Status Table for the World's Polar Bear Subpopulations

#### IUCN/SCC Polar Bear Specialist Group

**July 2021**

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Method and type of evidence</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subpopulation size</td>
<td>Most recent year of estimate, and status</td>
<td>Long-term (32 polar bear generations [124 yr];)</td>
<td>Short-term trend: Change in date of spring ice retreat (days per decade)</td>
<td>Change in date of fall sea-ice advance (days per decade)</td>
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<td>Arctic Basin</td>
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<td>Data deficient</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baffin Bay</td>
<td>3284 (95% CI: 3039–3530)</td>
<td>Genetic capture-recapture (estimated)</td>
<td>2013 (IGS 2016)</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrow Sea</td>
<td>2064 (95% CI: 1889–2050)</td>
<td>Distance sampling (projected)</td>
<td>2008 (Kuijper et al. 2008)</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chukchi Sea</td>
<td>2657 (95% CI: 1552–3046)</td>
<td>Physical capture-recapture with density extrapolation (estimated/projected)</td>
<td>2014 (Negrepont et al. 2016a)</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis Strait</td>
<td>2158 (95% CI: 1853–2452)</td>
<td>Physical capture-recapture (estimated)</td>
<td>2007 (Peacock et al. 2013)</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Greenland</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Data deficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fosse Basin</td>
<td>2943 (95% CI: 2906–3188)</td>
<td>Mark-recapture distance-sampling (estimated)</td>
<td>2003 (Griffin et al. 2006)</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gulf of Boothia</td>
<td>1525 (95% CI: 989–2891)</td>
<td>Genetic capture-recapture (estimated)</td>
<td>2017 (Devlin et al. 2009b)</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kane Basin</td>
<td>367 (95% CI: 321–400)</td>
<td>Genetic capture-recapture (estimated)</td>
<td>2016 (Wynne et al. 2006)</td>
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<td>Data deficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kara Sea</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Data deficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lancaster Sound</td>
<td>2041 (95% CI: 1759–2321)</td>
<td>Physical capture-recapture (estimated)</td>
<td>2017 (Taylor et al. 2008b)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptev Sea</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Data deficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Chukchi Channel</td>
<td>714 (95% CI: 645–781)</td>
<td>Genetic capture-recapture (estimated)</td>
<td>2006 (Devlin et al. 2009b)</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Beaufort Sea</td>
<td>488 (95% CI: 405–515)</td>
<td>Physical capture-recapture (estimated)</td>
<td>2006 (Lair et al. 2011)</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian Bay</td>
<td>203 (95% CI: 115–290)</td>
<td>Physical capture-recapture (estimated)</td>
<td>2007 (Taylor et al. 2008)</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Beaufort Sea</td>
<td>~100 (95% CI: 68–121)</td>
<td>Physical capture-recapture (estimated)</td>
<td>2000 (Bruggemann et al. 2015)</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern Hudson Bay</td>
<td>780 (95% CI: 548–920)</td>
<td>Physical capture-recapture (estimated)</td>
<td>2018 (Woodard et al. 2016)</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verner Melville Sound</td>
<td>161 (95% CI: 99–220)</td>
<td>Physical capture-recapture (estimated)</td>
<td>1992 (Taylor et al. 2002)</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Hudson Bay</td>
<td>882 (95% CI: 642–1132)</td>
<td>Mark-recapture distance-sampling (estimated)</td>
<td>2006 (Ray et al. 2007)</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
<td>Data deficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Comments, vulnerabilities, and concerns**
  - The MGR subpopulation is a geographic designation to account for polar bears occurring in the most northern areas of the Canadian arctic coast and are not directly part of other subpopulations. The total numbers of bears that can occur at the northern limit of the distribution are not well known due to large areas of the Arctic Ocean and other territories.
  - Data show that despite changing climatic and environmental conditions, arctic bears appear to be well-adapted to the cold and ice conditions.
  - Recent Ice conditions indicate that bears in the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Canada) and the Beaufort Sea (Alaska) face high risks of habitat loss and decline.

- **Recent harvest**
  - There has been no legal hunting of polar bears in Russia since 1957 and in Norway since 1973. Recent habitat decline has led to increased movement in polar bears, particularly in summer and autumn during ice retreat.

- **Sea-ice metrics**
  - Changes in the date of spring and fall sea-ice retreat (days per decade) and sea-ice area (5-year mean potential to 14 (NU:5+GL:9) in July 2018) are provided.

- **Population trends**
  - There has been a noticeable decline in the number of polar bears in the Eastern and Western Beaufort Sea subpopulations.

- **Estimated abundance**
  - Estimated abundance from Bromaghin et al. (2015) reflects the previous SB-NB boundary at 122° W. Determine of subpopulation trend reflected information through Atwood et al. (2011). Projections of decline were also high because of small sample size. Current data are >15 years old; small population.

- **Harvest**
  - Declines in sea-ice habitat and observed and predicted declines in the health and abundance of ringed seals are of concern. Harvest is currently managed using the subpopulation boundary at 122° W.

- **Future changes**
  - Future changes in the date of spring and fall sea-ice retreat are expected to result in changes in the health and abundance of polar bears.

- **Declines in body condition**
  - Declines in body condition and increased frequency of fasting periods are identified in studies based on the previous eastern SB-NB boundary at 133° W between the Southern Beaufort Sea and Northern Beaufort Sea subpopulations. Current harvest rates are based on a managed subpopulation size of 1,710 bears to the east of the subpopulation boundary.

- **Productivity**
  - Productivity at present.

- **Interpretation of population growth**
  - An additional estimate of abundance based on a springtime 2014 aerial survey in KB was 190 bears (95% lognormal CI: 87 – 411; Wiig et al. in review).

- **Subpopulation assessment**
  - There has been no legal hunting in the US subpopulation since 1977. Amount of illegal hunting unknown.

- **Demographic data**
  - There has been no legal hunting in the US subpopulation since 1977. A federal survey (in collaboration with the University of New Mexico) was conducted by a diverse group of the Future Polar Foundation.

- **Potential for shipping activities**
  - Potential for shipping activities.

- **Interpretation of population growth**
  - An additional estimate of abundance based on a springtime 2014 aerial survey in KB was 180 bears (Wiig et al. in review).

- **Subpopulation assessment**
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