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Circumpolar Action Plan for Polar Bears

Peter Hale

September 15, 2014

**Presentation to the Nunavut Wildlife
Management Board**

Iqaluit, Nunavut

Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears

- In the mid-1960s the populations in some portions of the range had become severely depleted due to high levels of unregulated hunting in some areas (e.g., US - Alaska and Norway)
- Recognized need for improved management based on scientific knowledge
- Agreement signed by the Polar Bear Range States in 1973:
 - Canada
 - Norway
 - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Russia)
 - Greenland (Denmark)
 - United States
- Facilitates coordinated management, research and conservation
- One of the most successful species-based conservation initiatives worldwide as evidenced by recovered/increased polar bear subpopulations and ongoing collaborative action by all Parties

By 2009 the polar bear situation had changed significantly...

- Harvest was no longer the most significant threat
- Hunting had stopped in Norway and been significantly reduced in Russia and the United States
 - Poaching reported to be an issue in Russia
- Greenland and most of Canada had implemented sustainable harvest management systems

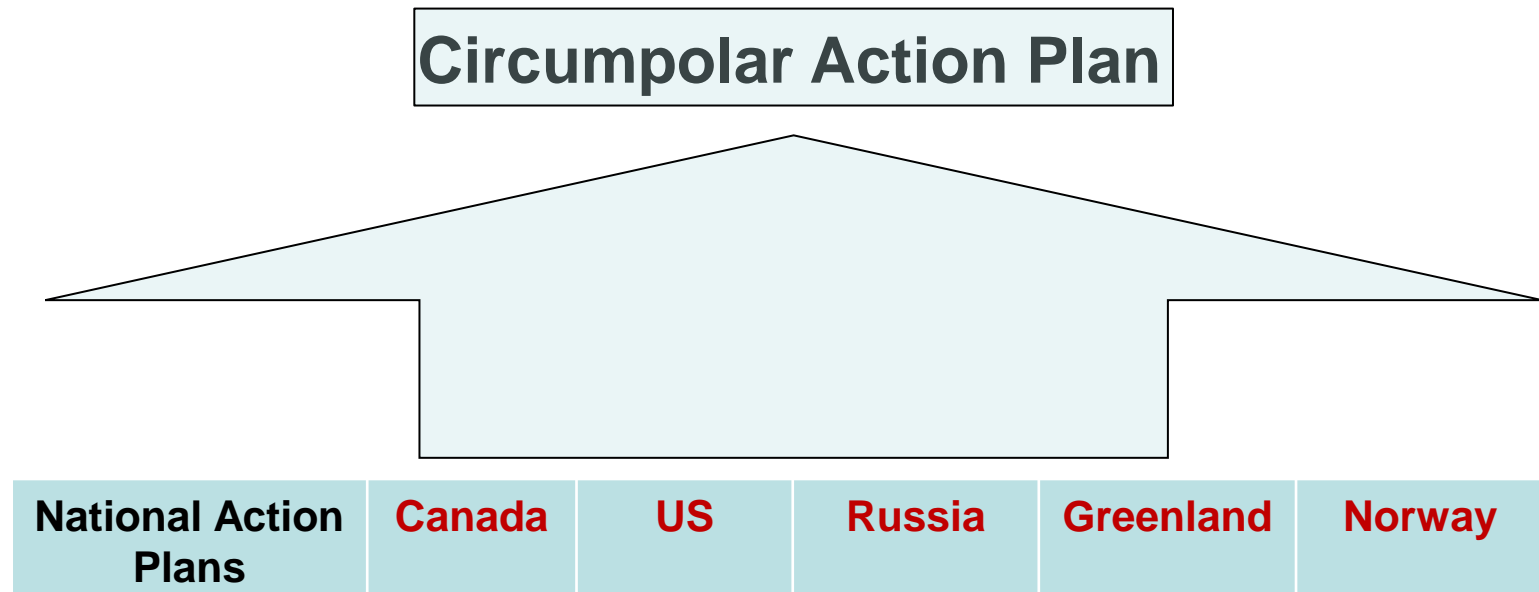
At the 2009 Range State meeting participants recognized:

- that climate change and the associated loss and fragmentation of sea ice was the most important long term threat
- that parties needed to look to national and international mechanisms to take appropriate action to address climate change
- the cultural and nutritional importance of subsistence harvest to Native peoples of the north

The Need for a circumpolar action plan emerged in 2009...

Concerns were raised related to climate change and other emerging issues (e.g., contaminants and pollution, industrial development, shipping & tourism)

Parties agreed to develop a coordinated approach to conservation and management strategies between the parties



Canada hosted a Range States meeting in Iqaluit in October 2011...

- 5 countries, 70 participants, 2.5 days
- First time meeting held within the polar bear range
- High level of Inuit attendance and participation



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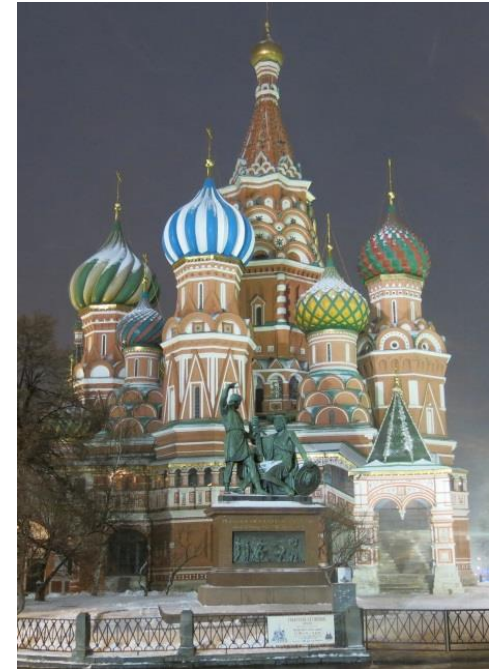
Russia hosted an International Forum on the Conservation of Polar Bears in December 2013...

- Forum commemorated the 40th anniversary of the Agreement & celebrated the cooperation of the range states to further the international conservation & management of polar bears
- In addition to Range States, the meeting was attended by:
 - Key multi-lateral organizations (e.g. CITES, INTERPOL)
 - Conservation & animal rights organizations (e.g. Gates Foundation)
 - Major funders
 - Private sector (e.g. oil and gas)



Ministers at the International Forum issued a Declaration...

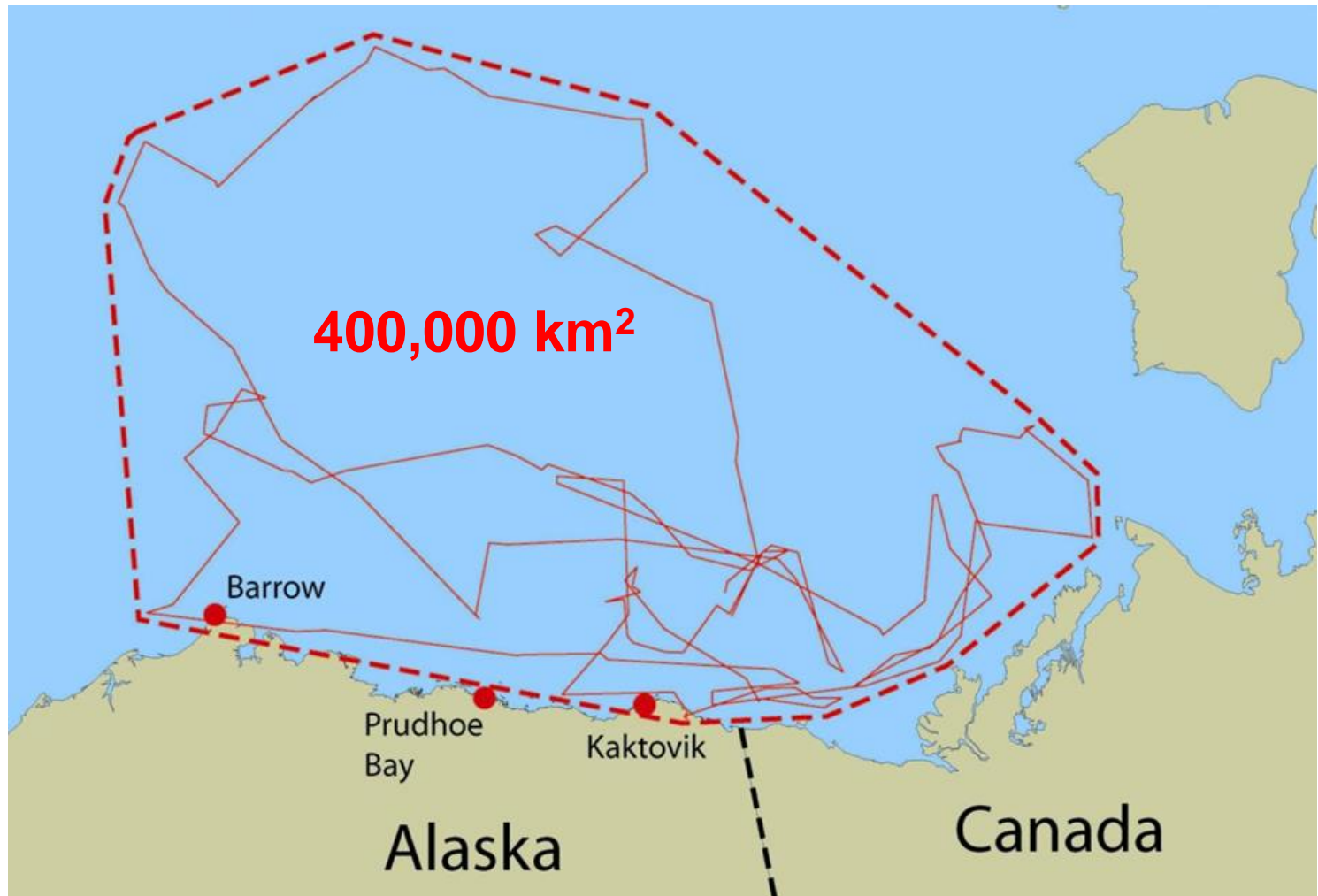
- Renewed commitment to the 1973 *Agreement*
- Noted that each range state is developing & implementing its own national polar bear action plan & that these will form the basis for the Circumpolar Action Plan
- Identified the Circumpolar Action Plan as the appropriate mechanism for international cooperation in managing & reducing stressors on polar bears & their ecosystems
- Stated the intent to finalize & adopt the Circumpolar Action Plan, accompanied by an implementation plan, at the 2015 Range States meeting



Elements in the Declaration of interest to Wildlife Management Boards & co-management partners...

- Range states are the appropriate stewards & protectors of the polar bear within their countries
- Polar bears are facing challenges as a result of a warming Arctic & associated changes to sea ice habitat
- Human-polar bear interactions are increasing & of concern
- Conservation requires adaptive management in response to climate change
- Need to manage economic activities to minimize their impact on polar bears
- Need for comprehensive & coordinated monitoring/research on the effects of contaminants
- Effective management & conservation depends upon the participation of Arctic indigenous people
- Traditional Ecological Knowledge is important for informed management decisions – need to promote the collection & maintenance of this information
- Encouraged Polar Bear Specialist Group to use Traditional Ecological Knowledge in its assessments of polar bears
- Essential to have up-to-date information on the status & trend of each subpopulation for effective management & conservation

Polar bears move over large distances – some cross international borders...

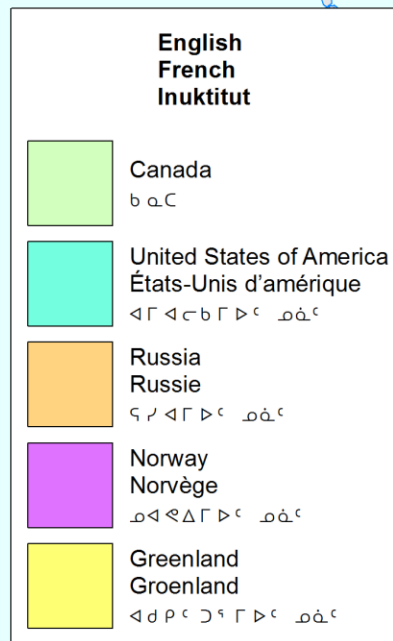


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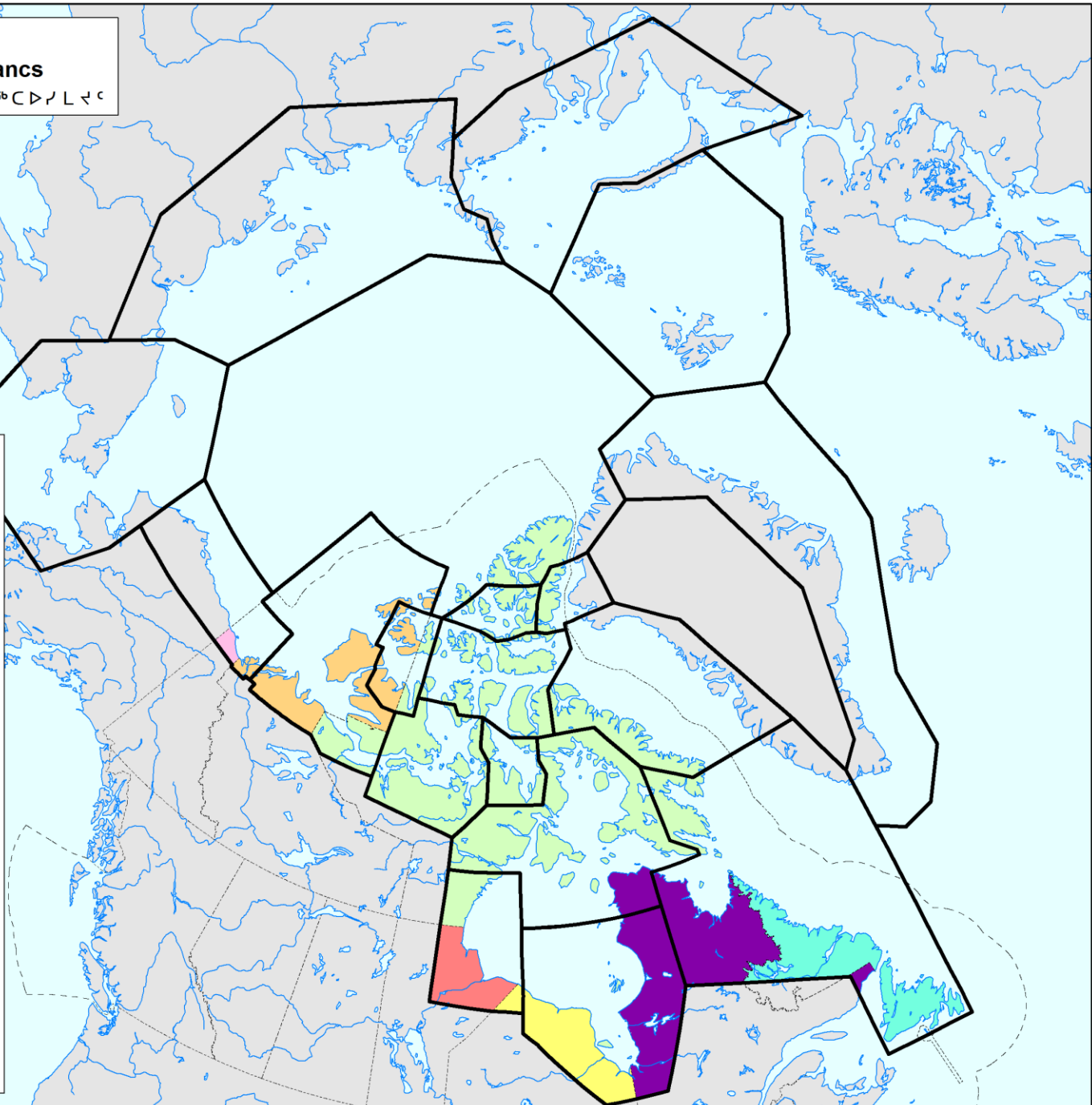
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What is the Circumpolar Action Plan for polar bear?

- A plan to avoid & mitigate threats, & ensure the persistence of the species throughout its historic range
- It focuses on issues that benefit from international coordination – it does not address issues that are better managed at national or lower levels
- Environment Canada represents Canada on the Range States Committee
 - Officials are consulting with wildlife management boards, co-management partners & government departments on

Part I

- Vision and Goals
- Information about the species
- Threats
- Management overview



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What is the Circumpolar Action Plan?

- **Part II** details actions that could be taken by the Range States to document the population status & trends, mitigate the threats, & evaluate the success of the measures taken
- It will also describe the biennial reports that will be produced to report on progress made
- The Plan will be updated as necessary - a full review will be undertaken by the Range States every 10 years
- Consultations on **Part II** (Action plan & mitigation measures, evaluation) will occur in Winter 2014/2015 &/or Spring, 2015
- Plan will be adopted at the Fall 2005 Range States Meeting

Threats identified in the CAP

Threats most likely to have an impact over the next 10 years, or that need to be addressed in the next 10 years in order to avoid a longer-term effect

- Climate change & the extent/composition of sea ice
- Disease
- Human-caused direct mortality
- Oil & gas activities
- Mining
- Toxic chemicals
- Shipping
- Tourism

The **impacts** vary across the north - some threats are best handled nationally, others are best handled internationally

Part I: Management...

- Adaptive management
- Involvement of indigenous people incorporation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in polar bear conservation
- Circumpolar cooperation
 - IUCN/SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group
- 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears
- Managing inter-jurisdictional populations
 - Bilateral cooperation
 - National management systems
- Protected areas & land-use planning

Your questions or comments are welcome...

- Comments on the draft Circumpolar Action Plan (Part I) would be appreciated by November 28th
- We will also be seeking your views on Part II in Winter 2014/2015

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Example of Circumpolar actions



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Programs to reduce human-caused polar bear mortality are under development...

- Primary goal is to ensure the safe co-existence of polar bears and humans – want to reduce human-bear interactions and defense of life and property kills
- Range States recognize that in order to reduce the occurrences of human-caused mortality it is important to document incidents and analyze what can be done to avoid such situations in the future
- Have developed a circumpolar Polar Bear-Human Information Management System to house all human-polar bear encounters
- Coordinated research into deterrent measures will be planned and undertaken