

Project Number: 222-10-01

IQ Implementation on the WHB Polar Bear: Arviat



Arviat Hunters and Trappers Organization
Contact: Alex Ishalook, Chairperson of Arviat HTO

P.O Box 529

Arviat, Nunavut

X0C 0E0

Phone: (867) 857-2636

Fax: (867) 857-2488

Email: arvhto@qiniq.com

Summary:

Arviat HTO hired an interviewer to collect Inuit Traditional Knowledge from hunters and elders of Arviat, Nunavut. A transcriber was also hired to document the interviews in English and Inuktitut. A total of 21 elders/hunters were interviewed.

Each person was asked to describe characteristics/behaviour of polar bears, migratory and denning locations, diet of polar bears, observations and any comments, concerns if any.

Introduction:

Arviat HTO wanted Inuit Qauyimayatuqangit implemented on the Western Hudson Bay polar bear in Arviat as Inuit knowledge should be part of studies conducted on wildlife species and environment.

Project Objective:

The objective of the project was to collect Inuit Qauyimayatuqangit in Arviat. Arviat is a high traffic area for polar bears as the community is on the coast of Western Hudson Bay. Arviat HTO wanted to collect knowledge from elders and hunters to have scientific knowledge and Inuit traditional knowledge combined.

Material

Financial Report

Allocation	Original Proposed budget	Actual amounts spent
Audio/Visuals	\$2545.55	\$1843.75
Human Resources (Interviewer/Transcriber	\$6000.00	\$10150.00
Interviews	\$8000.00	\$2100.00
Mapping Interviews	\$8000.00	\$1600.00
Travel	\$3054.45	6342.00
Accommodations	(3054.45)	1633.40
Per-Diem for 2 x 5 days		1026.00
TOTAL	\$27600.00	\$24,695.15
Difference		2804.85

MAPPING

Locations

Each interviewee was asked if they can talk about the locations known for denning and migration of polar bears. The migratory route of Churchill, Manitoba to Arviat, Nunavut is the coastline, however, most argued that polar bears are now sighted more than 90 miles inland, and on ice pans of the Hudson Bay.

Locations mentioned are as follows:

- Kitikkat, known to be a denning area
- Tikiraarjuk, 5 sighted at one time
- Nunaalaa, major sighting area
- Kuugluk
- Sentry Island
- Nannuvik
- Wolf Esker
- Qikiqtaarjuk
- Tha-Anne River
- Hannirut
- Tuasuk
- I&uuqtuut
- South Henik Lake, denning
- Maguse River
- Kinngarualik
- Padlei

- McConnel River
- Diamond Lake, Manitoba
- Maguse Lake
- Edehon Lake
- Hinitturjuaq
- Qamaniq
- Big River
- Mamaittuq

Collars/Tranquilization

Arviat citizens are concerned about tranquilized and collared polar bears. Most Inuit have lost the appetite of consuming polar bear meat due to the fact that polar bears are tranquilized, they are afraid they will get sick. An elder commented that scientists are telling them not to eat certain country food because they may have chemicals and may get sick or poisoned. Another thing that keeps people from consuming polar bear meat in the modern day is because bears are eating garbage also.

Secondly, Inuit are concerned that polar bears that have been tranquilized and collared lose their ability to hunt. From their observations, collared polar bears appear to be unhealthy; skinny and seem to lose their ability to hunt. Most collared polar bears are seen scavenging garbage dumps and looking for readily available food such as caribou meat caches and dog food. Some elders/hunters also believe that after being tranquilized and studied, polar bears seem to fear humans less.

Behaviour/Characteristics

Females walk with their front legs inwards, males walk outwards. Male bears have dark snouts, where female polar bears have a more narrow face. An aggressive bear walks with a low head, and one elder suspected their ears flick back as to be more aware of the situation. If a human or wildlife runs away from the polar bear, naturally they will prey on it. Some polar bears stay directly in ice pans and the ocean, those polar bears are called “Angugalluit”, and very rarely in coastlines or inland, and those polar bears are known to be larger and healthier. The polar bears that roam in the coastline and inland are called “Nanurluk”.

Elders and hunters have stated their main diet is marine mammals. Polar bears are known to eat arctic char, beluga whale carcasses, walruses, bearded and ringed seals. One hunter stated watching a polar bear dives numerously to bite arctic char; and another hunter watched a polar bear take-down a bull caribou by snatching its neck and diving in the ocean to drown the caribou. An elder also said polar bears eat grass before hibernating to close their digestive tract, and suck the fat off their paws if hungry.

Sub-adult polar bears, as well as collared polar bears are seen scavenging dump sites; most interviewees stated tourism in Churchill, Manitoba is making the polar bears less of hunters by feeding them, and because they are territorial creatures, smaller polar bears have less chance of succeeding in hunts and their food sources taken away by bigger polar bears.

Elders have stated the natural behaviour of polar bears is changing. When Inuit lived in igloos and huts, polar bears would run away even at the scent of a day old human footprints. The polar bears kept away from Inuit where now in the modern day, they are scavenging carcasses and dump sites, and seem to be attracted to the community of Arviat and camping sites.

Deterring Polar Bears

To deter a polar bear; an elder suggests keeping still. He had several close encounters with polar bears and was safe. In one occasion, he was feeding his dog team, a polar bear came close and ate the dog food, and he states when polar bears are eating, they get distracted, he was able to pick up an axe beside the polar bear and hit the legs with a qamutik and was able to deter the polar bear. On another occasion, he was having tea with a son-in-law on a hunting trip, a polar bear with cubs came out of nowhere and was sniffing them away, although his son-in-law was ready to shoot the bear, the elder

told him to keep still, and the only movement should be his mouth. On the two occasions, after the curious bear sniffed at the humans and their surroundings, both polar bears stood up on their hind legs and ran away. Another elder states polar bears are afraid of fire, and if accessible to use fire as deterrent to gain distance.

The interviewees have also stated that youth do not have much knowledge of polar bears and their strength. An elder stated that the younger generation are not taught as much and are feared more because of their sensitivity of discipline and therefore do not know how to deter a polar bear. A recommendation was made by several interviewees to teach children and youth about deterrent to minimize human-bear conflict. Elder also stated polar bears should not be talked about negatively, because there was an Inuit myth that if polar bears are talked of negatively, it will maul the child of the person who said it.

Hunting Polar Bears/Uses

Before quotas were introduced to Inuit, they refrained from hunting polar bears. Inuit never hunted specifically for polar bears when they lived inland. The only polar bears harvested were the ones seen near camp and hunting locations. The people in Arviat belonged to different tribes. Some Inuit resided inland and some by lakes but rarely hunted marine mammals. The elders have stated they only hunted what was needed, mostly caribou and cached caribou meat to last the winter season where hunting is limited because of weather and migration of caribou and trout.

Polar bear hides were used to smooth qamutik bottoms as they were made out of ice and the hide was silky smooth, and used as a platform under their sleeping areas to keep warm. Polar bear meat was a delicacy for Inuit, and was used for dog food. In the modern day, eating polar bear meat is disfavoured by Inuit and is used more for dog food. The liver of polar bears is avoided by Inuit and is consumed by dogs in very small amounts. Inuit used the teeth of polar bears to lure fish to a spot where hunters/Inuit could spear them.

When Total Allowable Harvesting was introduced, people were confused but bided by the law. In Arviat, HTOs use the lottery system of drawing names and persons drawn are given two days to harvest a polar bear. Alternatives are also drawn if the first group of people drawn do not harvest one. The people are drawn during Arviat HTOs annual general meeting with membership, and weather is the main factor that holds people back from harvesting.

The membership of Arviat want the quota back to minimize human-bear conflict as priority; to pass on the knowledge of hunting polar bears to the younger generation, and to make income from polar bear hides.

Concerns

All persons interviewed stated there are too many polar bears in today's day. From their experiences, they heard or seen only a few in the 1960's to the 1980's. People weren't afraid to pick berries or camp in coastlines and now they need to take turns night watching where one hunter sleeps while the other stands guard and take turns through-out the night. Polar bears have lost their fear of humans and the theory behind it is because of too much interference from people; tourists, biologists tranquilizing, tagging and collaring bears, and bears being used to bangers, cracker shells or rubber bullets to scare them off. Polar bears along with grizzly bears have been damaging cabins and meat caches.

Elders and hunters interviewed are concerned that polar bears are now choosing to scavenge readily available food over hunting to sustain themselves and their hypothesis is that tour companies in Churchill are feeding polar bears to stay at sight-seeing locations, and secondly; because cubs learn to scavenge dump sites from their mothers and because mother bears with cubs stay away from male

polar bears while raising cubs have no choice but to scavenge and migrate slower and later than male and sub-adult polar bears.

Elders state the behaviour of polar bears is now unpredictable. They don't know whether they will approach the community or not, and if they are aggressive or not.

Hungry bears are feared. Hungry bears are the ones with no fear of humans, even if they are being shot at or run off, they will return if the polar bear knows of any readily available food source and will do anything to get the food; they are easily agitated when hungry. Hungry bears are often beaten by mature and larger bears away from their hunting and migrating route as they are territorial. Polar bears that aren't hungry will keep away from humans and communities, and will ensure not to have any contact.

Interviewed personnel states Arviat residents are lucky to have no human attacks from polar bears. Most polar bears are scared off, and those polar bears killed in defence are the ones that get too close to humans or destruct property. If every polar bear was killed for entering the community or damaging property, there would be a lot more kills.

Reporting to Communities/Resources

The mapping and oral interviews are recorded into DVDs, along with the report of findings will be submitted and presented to NWMB, people that were interviewed, Rankin and Whale Cove HTOs, NTI, KIA and other Kivalliq communities and the Kivalliq Wildlife Board.

Conclusion

The elders and hunters interviewed concluded there are too many polar bears in the vicinity of Arviat the past several years. Arviat citizens would like the Total Allowable Harvest back for the Western Hudson Bay mainly because there are too many polar bears roaming around the vicinity of Arviat, and they try not to kill any polar bears in defence because there is no quota since 2007 and Arviat citizens try their best to abide by law and only kill polar bears in defence should human life or property are in danger.

Elders would like youth and young adults to be more aware of polar bear behaviour/characteristics, and know how to deter polar bears without having to kill it. The safety of Arviat citizens are put first, each year the residents hope there are no attacks; no humans or dogs killed, and hope there is no destruction of property from polar bears. It would be a good idea to teach students at local elementary, junior high and high schools safety before there are any attacks or if they get too close to polar bears from someone specialized to handle bears it would greatly benefit the community.

If the quota for the WHB is put back in place, elders and hunters would feel more at ease and wouldn't worry about polar bears going into the community of Arviat. The tradition of harvesting polar bears would be passed on from one generation to another; for example where to spot one, where to shoot for kill, and how to skin the hide. The hide is the most valuable part of a polar bear to the citizens of Arviat, some use the hide to make hunting gear such as mitts, wind pants or use the hide as a platform for camping trips but from the findings, residents prefer to sell the hide as it makes good income for their household/family.

Arviat HTO and Department of Environment have been working together to minimize human-bear conflict by hiring patrollers, purchasing deterrents like cracker shells and rubber bullets. There have been occasions like Halloween trick-or-treating where the Canadian Rangers took turns patrolling the coast, dump site and complex to keep parents and children safe. Arviat/WHB having no quota has dramatically impacted the community of Arviat, as it has for Rankin Inlet and Whale Cove. Arviat HTO has worked with determination and passion to bring the quota back to the residents of Arviat.