

# Species at Risk Act (SARA) Consultation, Cooperation and Accommodation Project

Polar Bear Conservation and Recovery Workshop for:

Environment and Climate Change Canada –  
Canadian Wildlife Service; Environment and Climate Change Canada  
– Science and Technology Branch; and Government of Manitoba

*Internal Summary Report*

Created by:  
The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER)

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**CIER**  
Centre for Indigenous  
Environmental Resources

# Acknowledgements

The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER), the Government of Manitoba, and Environment and Climate Change Canada would like to thank the participants that attended the *Species at Risk Act (SARA) Consultation, Cooperation, and Accommodation Project* session titled ‘Polar Bear Conservation and Recovery Strategy – ‘Let’s Talk Polar Bears’ Workshop’ in Winnipeg on April 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Sincere appreciation to graphic recorder Aaron Russell of Conference Doodles for transforming the discussion into captivating visuals, adding depth and clarity to the collective understanding. Special thanks are also extended to Dave Daniels (Elder) of Long Plain First Nation for imparting knowledge and wisdom to the workshop delegation.

# Contents

- Introduction .....3
- Participants .....4
- Workshop Purpose .....4
- Graphic Recording .....6
- Overview of Presentations .....6
  - Presentation 1: National Polar Bear Management Plan: Overview of the Federal addition, consultation and engagement efforts, and next steps by presenter Lauren Schmuck of ECCC.....6
  - Presentation 2: Polar Bear Research and Monitoring: Ecological insights from long-term research and monitoring of the western Hudson Bay Polar Bear subpopulations with lead by Evan Richardson of ECCC. ....8
  - Presentation 3: Protecting the Icon of Western Hudson Bay by co-presenters Chris Friesen and Vicki Trim of the Government of Manitoba. ....8
- Key Themes/Discussion Summary .....9
- Visit to the Assiniboine Park Zoo ..... 14
- Conclusion ..... 14
- Appendix A: Polar Bear Session In-Person Agenda .....15
- Appendix B: Organization and Participation .....16
- Appendix C: Theme Sheet Transcript.....16
- Appendix D: Potential Polar Bear Discussion Questions .....19
- Appendix E: Photographs .....21

## Introduction

The purpose of the Polar Bear Conservation and Recovery Strategy 'Let's Talk Polar Bears' Workshop was to inform the Government of Manitoba's Polar Bear Conservation and Recovery Strategy (PBCRS) through engagement. Once completed, the Manitoba PBCRS will form part four of the National Polar Bear Management Plan.

As required under the federal Species at Risk Act (SARA), Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) has drafted the federal component of the National Polar Bear Management Plan, known as the federal addition. The federal addition plan relies on jurisdictional management plans and recovery strategies to address matters that fall primarily under jurisdictional authority, such as harvest management, while ensuring that Indigenous rights are protected. The federal addition links the jurisdictional management plans and recovery strategies together, ensures that all requirements for a national management plan under the SARA are met, and addresses topics that fall primarily under federal authority, such as Canada's action on climate change and arctic shipping. This workshop served as an opportunity to further the engagement of Indigenous peoples in Manitoba on the federal addition. Information from the provincial PBCRS workshop will form the Manitoba portion (part four) of the National Polar Bear Management Plan. ECCC and the Government of Manitoba are collaborating to encourage Indigenous participation in the conservation and management of polar bears (*Ursus maritimus*) in Manitoba's Western Hudson Bay subpopulation.

The PBCRS – 'Let's Talk Polar Bears' Workshop was held at the Wyndham Garden Winnipeg Airport Hotel on the Long Plain Madison Reserve - Treaty 1 on April 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Nineteen (19) participants from six (6) Manitoba Indigenous Nations and organizations attended the event. The workshop was supported by funds from ECCC through the *Species at Risk Act Consultation, Cooperation, and Accommodation (SARA-CCA)* project. The goal was to inform the draft PBCRS and further the engagement of Indigenous peoples in Manitoba on the federal addition, by ensuring that Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and priorities are thoughtfully and respectfully considered regarding polar bears.

The workshop was organized and facilitated by the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) in conjunction with the Government of Manitoba (hereinafter Manitoba), and ECCC to facilitate Indigenous Nations and organizations participation early on in recovery planning for species at risk (SAR). CIER's role is to support and facilitate a range of activities between Indigenous Nations and organizations, and support ECCC on developing recovery documents, sharing knowledge and language, addressing threats to the survival and recovery of terrestrial species at risk, and land use planning for species at risk on reserve lands and within traditional territories. CIER also manages the provision of funds on behalf of ECCC, including SARA participation fees, capacity funding and Expression of Interest funding for Indigenous-led SAR projects.

There were three key presentations at the workshop. The *National Polar Bear Management Plan: Overview of the federal addition, consultation and engagement efforts, and next steps* with Q & A presented by Lauren Schmuck of ECCC. The *Polar Bear Research and Monitoring: Ecological insights from long-term research and monitoring of the western Hudson Bay Polar Bear subpopulation* with Q & A lead by Evan Richardson of ECCC. The *Protecting the Icon of Western Hudson Bay* with Q & A by co-presenters Chris Friesen and Vicki Trim from Manitoba. Following each presentation there was a fruitful discussion period in which all participants were invited to share their experiences with polar bears, discuss ongoing concerns, and discover other projects of interest brought forth by the various Nations and organizations. The full agenda can be found in Appendix A.

# Participants

The invite list was finalized by Manitoba in discussions with ECCC staff. A total of nine invitations were sent to six First Nations (Figure 1) and three organizations in northern Manitoba. Forty-two (42) individuals attended the PBCRS event and 19 participants (not including the honorary Elder, CIER, ECCC staff, and Manitoba staff) represented three First Nations and three organizations from across northern Manitoba. First Nations and organizations in attendance included:

- Fox Lake First Nation
- Fox Lake Resource Management Board
- Tataskweyak Cree Nation (Split Lake)
- Split Lake Resource Management Board
- War Lake First Nation
- York Factory Resource Management Board

Invited but unable to attend:

- Sayisi Dene First Nation
- Shamattawa First Nation
- York Factory First Nation

The PBCRS in-person workshop incorporated a hybrid virtual ZOOM option for participants unable to make it to the event in-person. Participants from Indigenous Nations/organizations were able to attend in-person; the virtual option was used by some staff from ECCC and Manitoba. Please see Appendix B for a list of all organizations that were invited.

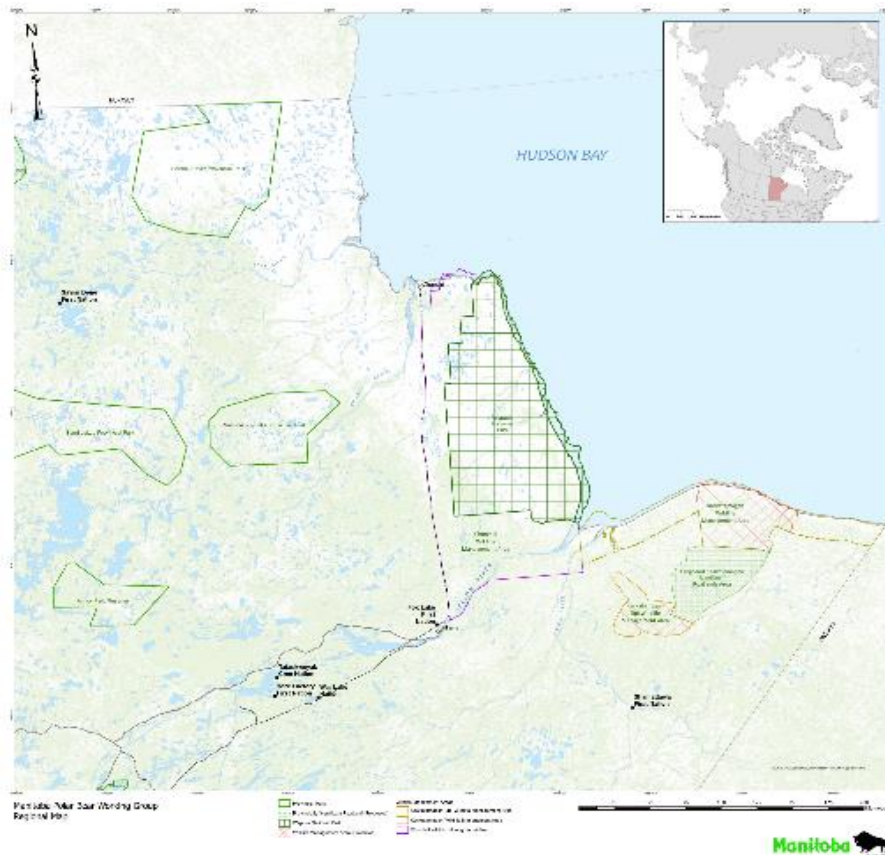


Figure 1. PBCRS First Nations location in Manitoba.

## Workshop Purpose

The purpose of the workshop was for presenters to share background information and listen and learn about any knowledge on polar bears that participants wished to share. The perspectives, concerns, knowledge, and teachings that participants shared will be respectfully considered to inform Manitoba's PBCRS. Once completed, the PBCRS will form part four of the National Polar Bear Management Plan.

Specific objectives of the workshop included:

- Communicate details of the Provincial Strategy and Federal Management Plan including jurisdictional documents on polar bears;
- Discuss the current status of polar bears in Manitoba's Western Hudson Bay subpopulation including threats;
- Give space for participants to speak to the significance of polar bears for their Nations and organizations and voice any comments or concerns about the population status of polar bears in Manitoba;
- Provide a venue to build relationships and start a broader discussion on the management of polar bears in Manitoba;
- Have regional Government of Manitoba and ECCC staff available to engage in a Q&A to clarify the Species at Risk Recovery Process and/or available funding opportunities to support Indigenous participation in this process; and,
- Provide verbal comments or concerns about polar bear, or as discovered through conversation at the workshop, "The White Bear".

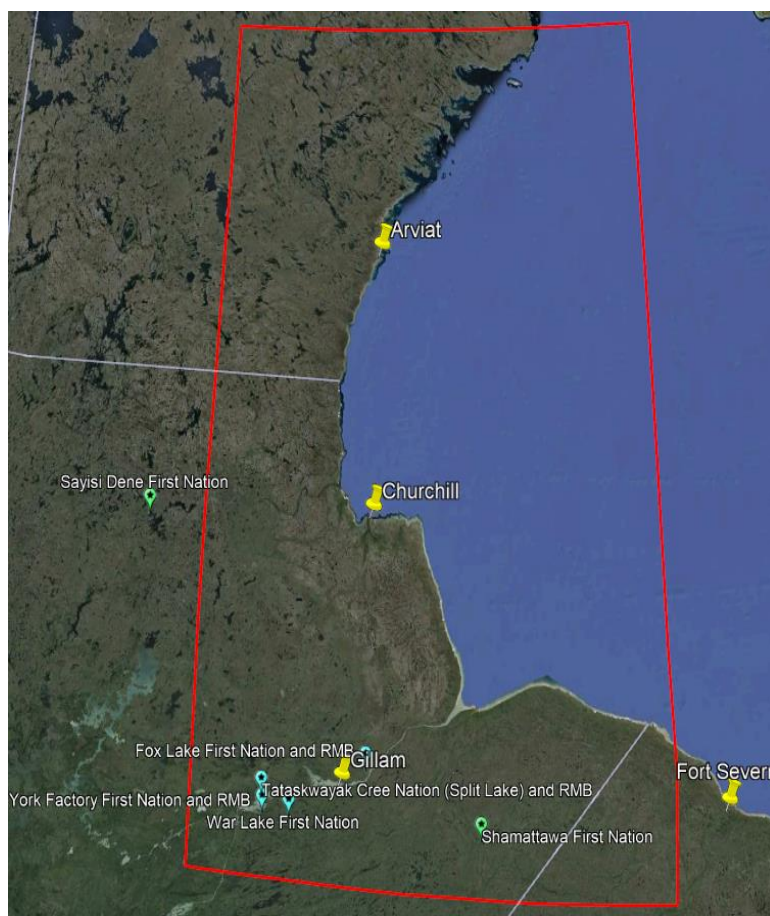


Figure 2. Map of community locations, red outline indicates the Polar Bear Recovery Strategy boundary. All Indigenous Nations indicated were invited, those with the blue icon were in attendance.

The two-day event aimed to create a safe, respectful space for participants to provide input and voice comments or concerns for inclusion in the PBCRS.

## Graphic Recording

A graphic recording (Figure 3) was designed by Aaron Russell of Conference Doodles during the workshop to highlight key themes that were iterated and highlighted as significant by participants. Workshop participants had the opportunity to review the graphic recording in real time and provided feedback during and at the conclusion of the workshop.



Figure 3. Graphic Recording created by Aaron Russell of Conferences Doodles.

## Overview of Presentations

CIER, ECCC, and the Province of Manitoba were appreciative of the support of Elder Dave Daniels of Long Plain First Nation who provided opening and closing prayers and perspectives throughout the sessions. Accompanying Elder Daniels was his sister Anna Neil, who provided drumming and singing during the opening and closing of the session.

Following the opening there was a welcoming address from Maria Arlt, Director of the Wildlife Branch for the Province of Manitoba. Director Arlt opened with a territorial acknowledgement followed by a greeting on behalf of the province and Premier Wab Kinew. Director Arlt spoke to Manitoba's commitment to the conservation of Threatened and Endangered species including the development of the PBCRS in conjunction with the national Polar Bear Management Plan. Noted was the importance of increasing partnerships and collaboration with Indigenous communities to advance reconciliation as a key priority for the government of Manitoba.

CWS Director, Wildlife Management and Regulatory Affairs Caroline Ladanowski joined virtually and provided opening words on behalf of ECCC followed by a territorial acknowledgement. Director Ladanowski spoke to ECCC's commitment to advancing shared understanding of the threats polar bears face and are working with Indigenous, provincial, territorial, and international partners to ensure polar bears thrive for future generations to come. Director Ladanowski stated ECCC's excitement to support the province and the development of the PBCRS and how it will inform the national Polar Bear Management Plan. Noted was the federal government's commitment to reconciliation and the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, including the importance of working as full partners to protect the lands, waters, and species in Canada.

Presentation 1: National Polar Bear Management Plan: Overview of the Federal addition, consultation and engagement efforts, and next steps lead by Lauren Schmuck of ECCC.

The presentation focused on the development and structure of the National Polar Bear Management Plan. This plan encompasses various critical elements, including federal additions, engagement with Indigenous communities, and coordination with co-management partners in Manitoba. The document provides an overview of the plan's structure, key information, and outlines next steps for its implementation. Additionally, it emphasizes the significance of engaging with Indigenous Peoples and stakeholders to ensure effective co-management practices.

The plan is structured into six jurisdictional documents, each tied together by a federal addition. Please see Figure 4 below for the framework of the plan.



Figure 4. National Polar Bear Management Plan Framework.

#### Key sections within the Federal Addition:

- Threat assessment borrowed from the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC)'s November 2019 status report;
- Geographic scope: all polar bears within Canada;
- Contains all sections of a federal management plan that are required by the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA);
- Critical habitat not identified for Special Concern species;
- Conservation actions within the federal mandate (e.g., climate emissions, arctic shipping regulations) and refers the reader to jurisdictional documents for matters under provincial and territorial (P/T) authority (e.g. harvest management is generally under P/T authority and is addressed in jurisdictional management plans and recovery strategies);
- Work with Canadian partners to co-manage and conserve polar bears and their habitat;
- Work with international partners to manage and conserve polar bears on a circumpolar scale;
- Conduct scientific and Indigenous Knowledge research and monitoring in Canada and internationally;
- Promote and support public outreach and education related to polar bear management and conservation;
- Key Takeaways:
  - **Management Objective:** Maintain the resilience, redundancy and representation of the population in the species' known range in Canada;
  - **Broad Strategies and Management Actions:** Limited to matters under federal jurisdiction; actions that most directly impact subsistence access are generally in the jurisdictional management plans and recovery strategies);
  - **Measuring Progress:** Identifies how success will be measured every five years, based on the goal stated in the Management Objective; and,
  - **Effects on the Environment and Other Species:** Identifies whether outcomes of the document could be harmful to the environment or other species.

#### Next Steps:

- Post the proposed National Management Plan to the SAR Registry for public comment; and,
- Complete engagement with Indigenous Peoples;

Presentation 2: Polar Bear Research and Monitoring: Ecological insights from long-term research and monitoring of the western Hudson Bay Polar Bear subpopulations lead by Evan Richardson of ECCC.

The presentation provided an overview of ECCC's role in polar bear research and management, particularly focusing on the impact of climate change on Western Hudson Bay polar bear subpopulation in Manitoba.

### **Research and Conservation Mandate**

- ECCC conducts polar bear research as part of international agreements, including shared research among polar nations and conservation efforts under SARA.
- The department's involvement in CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna) oversees international trade concerning polar bear hides.

### **Long-Term Study in Western Hudson Bay**

- A longstanding study initiated in 1980 by Dr. Ian Sterling in Churchill, Manitoba monitors polar bear demography, ecology, and threats, including contaminants and disease.
- The study assesses population status, survival rates, reproductive success, and movement ecology using satellite tracking and genetic analysis.

### **Impact of Climate Change on Polar Bears**

- The presentation highlighted the significant impact of climate change on polar bear habitat, specifically sea ice conditions.
- Sea ice:
  - Data shows earlier sea ice break-up and later freeze-up, resulting in longer periods of time spent by polar bears on land without access to food (seals);
  - Climate-related changes in sea ice impact polar bear behavior, leading to increased human-polar bear interactions in Churchill, Manitoba particularly when bears spend more time on land;
  - Population estimates suggest a decline of 20-30% in polar bear abundance in Manitoba, largely attributed to reduced sea ice availability affecting hunting and survival rates;
  - Thinner polar bears, especially females, face challenges in reproduction and survival due to reduced access to food and longer fasting periods; and,
  - The decline underscores the urgent need for conservation measures to mitigate the impact of climate change on polar bear populations.

Presentation 3: Protecting the Icon of Western Hudson Bay by co-presenters Chris Friesen and Vicki Trim of the Government of Manitoba.

The presentation focused on the development of a draft Polar Bear Conservation and Recovery strategy in Manitoba within the context of provincial endangered species legislation. It highlighted the cultural and ecological significance of polar bears in the region, particularly the Western Hudson Bay subpopulation, which faces threats from climate change, development, pollution, and human disturbance.

The objective of the recovery strategy is to preserve and conserve polar bear populations as mandated by provincial law and to engage various stakeholders, including Indigenous communities, in this conservation effort.

The framework of the recovery strategy involves several key components. It aims to describe the species and its habitat needs, identify specific threats to polar bears and their environment, prioritize conservation objectives and goals, and outline actionable steps for recovery. Emphasis is placed on gathering comprehensive information to address



knowledge gaps and guide effective conservation strategies. Implementation will require extensive collaboration among stakeholders to ensure the strategy's success.

There are current programs and initiatives aimed at polar bear conservation in Manitoba including coastal surveys to monitor polar bear distribution, den surveys to document denning activity, and GPS ear tagging for tracking bear movements and reducing negative human-polar bear interactions. The Polar Bear Alert Program in Churchill was discussed, focusing on human-polar bear safety and management during the ice-free season, and tourism operations in Churchill are regulated to ensure safety for both humans and polar bears.

The presentation emphasized the importance of ongoing community engagement and collaborative efforts in refining and finalizing the recovery strategy. Future steps involve further development of the strategy in partnership with Indigenous groups and stakeholders followed by public consultations to gather additional input and support. Overall, the goal is to implement effective measures that will protect and sustain the Western Hudson Bay polar bear subpopulation in Manitoba amid growing environmental challenges.

## Key Themes/Discussion Summary

On the first day, the workshop started by asking workshop participants were asked, "What does Polar Bear mean to you and your community?" Their responses were captured in a WordCloud (Figure 5), which transforms audience responses into a colourful, animated graphic in real time.

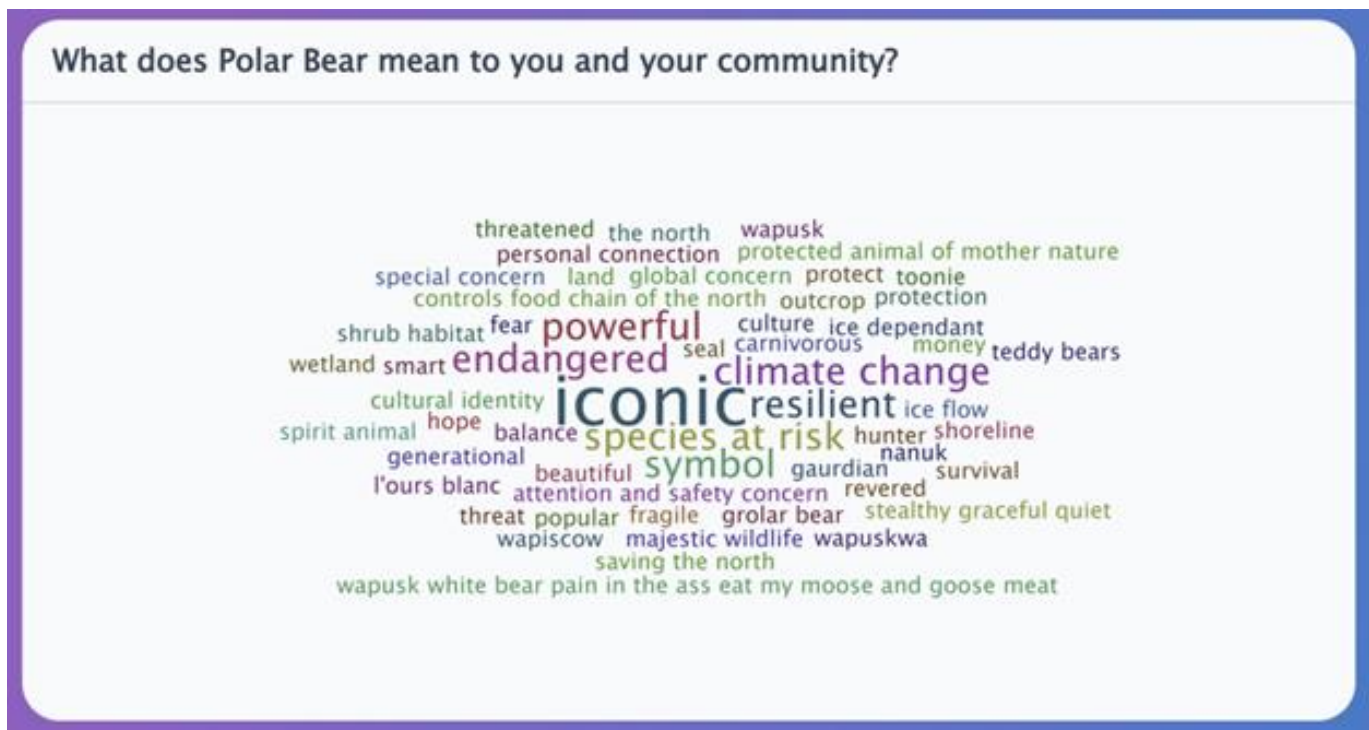


Figure 5. WordCloud exercise.

The most frequent word in the WordCloud exercise was *Iconic*. Participants also conveyed *Endangered*, *Powerful*, *Climate Change*, *Species at Risk*, and *Symbol* as important words or phrases to describe polar bears and what they mean to participants and their communities.

The agenda setting exercise on the first day was a success. CIER placed six proposed themes on poster paper which were hung on the room's walls. The themes were suggested to guide conversations for the duration of the meeting based on previous discussion by the planning team. Participants were then asked to indicate which themes are most important and to add thoughts, questions, or sub-topics to the theme boards, or suggest their own theme. The poster

paper was not removed from the walls until the closing of the workshop on day two. The themes suggested to guide the polar bear conversations over the two days are listed below. For further transcripts from each theme, refer to Appendix C.

- *Threats*
- *Cooperation and Collaboration*
- *Education and Monitoring*
- *Significance*
- *Habitat Protection*
- *Other Themes*

CIER, Manitoba, and ECCC staff helped ensure participant thoughts were reflected respectfully and appropriately by recording notes and providing the *Potential Polar Bear Discussion Questions – Food for Thought* document as a reference. A copy of the *Food for Thought* questions can be found in Appendix D.

### **Quotes, Comments and Queries about Polar Bears:**

The discussion and comments from participants on day one covered the various proposed themes. The following are quotes, comments, and queries from the initial discussions on polar bears of the Western Hudson Bay on day one:

#### **York Factory Resource Management Board - Askiy Nanakacihtakewin Monitoring Program**

*“Askiy Nanakacihtakewin” in the Cree language means “Looking after Mother Earth.”*

#### **Tataskweyak Cree Nation**

*“When you work on the land and you're born on the land, and you depend on the land, you will see that the polar bear is like the canary, an indicator species.”*

#### **Fox Lake Resource Management Board**

*“We'll learn from each other.”*

#### **York Factory Resource Management Board - Askiy Nanakacihtakewin Monitoring Program**

*“The problem that we're dealing with is that people don't listen. They think they know better; they got an education/certificate. As people that lived off the land and walked the land we listened to our Elders.”*

*“After the closure of the Churchill dump those polar bears were coming in town. They fly them out and they come right back. This is danger. Where their dens are, where they have their young, People go there. You shouldn't go there.”*

*“We didn't need a Polar Bear National Park. We knew. We were taught by our Elders. You don't fool around where their habitat is. But nobody listened they went ahead and build these things. And they set up tourists' companies. What do those tourist companies give back in return? They don't give nothing back. They just come in. They don't even live there. They should be forced to put some money into trying to save the polar bears.”*

*“Climate change is very hard right now. Unless polar bears adapt and adapting means they're going to have to come inland. If they come inland, it's going to create a lot of problems. I see that already. A heard of some coming up inland already. And if they come inland, people don't know how to deal with them, and they'll kill them. They'll become extinct. That's why there must be stricter laws and regulations to try and save them.”*

*"It's very hard to come and tell me what you're suggesting because we ourselves don't know how to deal with climate change. But how are we going to be able to help our polar bears because of climate change? This should have happened a long time ago."*

*"People jump when they think they're going to lose something. Think it a long time ago. Start working on it."*

*"Out of the encounters I had, of course I considered them like human beings. I was taught by people, I guided with Elders and my mom, you can communicate with any animal."*

*"There's a hard task that you're embarking on."*

### **Tataskweyak Cree Nation**

*"Perspective. Right away I seen what was wrong there, because there are two worlds here. That's Western Science and the Askiy Nanakacihtakewin."*

*"The people of the land have been here for a long time and the footprint of a scientist is only tiny compared to it. I remember I told him, you know, sometimes I think that the people of this land are your parents. You know, no matter what we say, we tell you not to do, you go ahead and do it and you break it. And I'm sorry, it doesn't mean a damn thing after it's broken."*

*"It's so funny how a person 1000 miles away can say that this is a protective area."*

*"Indigenous protected and conserved areas, they wanted us to select certain parts of our resource, you know, to protect and gain from the land. I was thinking not one part of this resource area or Northern Manitoba was less important than the other."*

*"Sometimes you have to listen."*

*"Our need for our future is as important as your need for your survival and how do we deal with it? This pertains to polar bear and all the other species that breathe out there. That's why we cannot afford to have a tunnel vision. Everything is as important as the next."*

*"Whatever we do it has to be for the future generations. Not for today."*

*"How do we work on it rather than out of sight out of mind? And out of all people here today if we put all those minds together, I bet you we can do something."*

### **Fox Lake Resource Management Board**

*"Habitat Protection. Do you think polar bear needs to be protected? Yes, they need to be protected."*

*"Have the Province to consult the First Nations and review any applications for development before they issue the work permits. The areas around here, the polar bear, some of that is in our RMA [Resource Management Area], which is around here, and the Wapusk National Park. These are denning areas."*

*"I think the First Nations should be consulted first, ask for their input before you issue any permits. Work permits for development to me is No."*

*"No work permits allowed that is in our Resource Management Area (RMA) because the future generation of the polar bear is at risk due to climate change. Climate change, the ice is melting more, and more of the water is rising and polar bears can't really hunt in late October when they go into the ice because there's no formation of ice yet. It's the late*

*development of the ice, the freeze-up. The polar bears are coming further and further inland in order for them to hunt. Seals have been seen as far as the Wier River, Deer Island, and Limestone Generating Station. Polar bears are coming further and further inland, which puts them in danger, and danger to the people, especially a female with cubs. With a female having cubs, it puts the humans in danger or any other species.”*

### **Fox Lake First Nation**

*“If you see something, leave it alone, keep it in nature, keep it clean. Leave it a nice clean footprint. You do not have to disturb anything. Do not be greedy with them. The land will provide you everything that you have.”*

*“How would you like it if I came into your room. We’ve got to give animals their space. We are in their domain. To us we’re making the problem not them.”*

*“What can we actually do to prevent this from all going down?”*

*“If polar bear cubs see humans they can get adapted to them.”*

*“It all comes down to respect for the land.”*

### **York Factory Resource Management Board - Askiy Nanakacihkewin Monitoring Program**

*“Every time I hear that word consultations, I think of the way the government operates, because of consultation they think consultation is just Chief and Council. It isn’t, it’s the grassroots people.”*

*“I refer to our animals, fish, birds are as our money. Its development and so-called progress that is taking our money away.”*

*“We couldn’t fit in our pockets cause our animals are money.”*

*“We have to be consulted. The federal government is famous for that when all of a sudden, they realize they don’t have the answer they come to the people. The ones given the responsibility of looking out for Mother Earth.”*

*“Sit down with those people that have to live and use that land.”*

*“There has to be information given to the government where the contact is, the people. That’s one suggestion. I would get as many contacts as you can on the band office and their communities and send that information to them.”*

### **Tataskweyak Cree Nation**

*“One thing to remember is it’s not evolution, its creation.”*

*“You have to listen to the people. The people will tell you what to do.”*

*“Ask the question, who do we really work for?”*

### **Environment and Climate Change Canada**

*“ECCC want to express sincerely that the view and the view of the team is that Indigenous Peoples are the eyes and the ears of their land. They are the caretakers, and they have a lot of important knowledge to share. Please know that that is valued. We’ve tried our best to incorporate Indigenous perspectives in this document.”*

*“A strategy that we did, for the entire federal document is to try to meet with Indigenous Peoples at the same time as the provincial or territorial government. I’ve found that it’s important to have all the key players at the table to really have a thorough and important conversation and we wanted to be able to do it with the Government of Manitoba. That’s why the engagement is happening at this time.”*

*“The federal document really has the capacity to be a great tool. The document is going to be shared with Canadians across the country. I think Canadians, especially, maybe Southern Canadians, are not necessarily as aware of Indigenous or traditional knowledge with polar bears as they could be, and I think this document could be a great tool to really communicate the Indigenous perspectives about polar bear and the Arctic too.”*

## **Manitoba**

*“Polar bears are listed as threatened under the Provincial Endangered Species and Ecosystems Act. That piece of legislation compels the province to produce a recovery strategy. Manitoba is legally required to do it but ultimately, we are doing it because we care about polar bears and want to preserve and conserve polar bears in Manitoba.”*

*“What the strategy may result in, is it could lead to more habitat protection, species protection for the polar bears, monitoring, research, gathering (i.e. gathering additional information where it’s needed). Taking some management actions or other actions to mitigate the threats to polar bears and their habitats and promoting education and outreach amongst the many people and communities that both inhabit polar bear country and those who visit polar bear country. Expanding knowledge and working together in an open and collaborative way to make this work.”*

## **Theme Discussion:**

On day two participants had the opportunity to discuss the themes in breakout groups. The participants were divided into three groups and each group rotated through three stations to have an opportunity to discuss the themes in further detail. The complete transcription of the theme sheets can be found in Appendix F. Included here is a summary of the theme sheets from the workshop.

## **Threats**

Commonly shared concern among participants was climate change, which can affect polar bear habitat and prey availability due to the later ice freeze. Human interactions and disturbances such as tourism and development are forcing polar bears to relocate, and pollution from mining and development are destroying their habitats. Ice breakers and shipping disruption to ice conditions were also noted as key threats.

Addressing climate change, responsible human behaviour and careful management practices is crucial to alleviating threats to Polar Bears.

## **Cooperation and Collaboration**

Collaboration between governments, communities, NGOs, and Indigenous Peoples is crucial for effective management and conservation. Involvement of local communities and Indigenous Peoples in decision-making processes from the start is essential for building trust and achieving successful outcomes. Integration of Western Science (WS) and Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is necessary for comprehensive understanding and effective solutions. Tourism should be managed carefully to minimize harm to polar bear habitats and contribute positively to local communities.

## **Education and Monitoring**

More education is needed on how to interact with polar bears without disturbing their habitats. Lack of listening and consultation with Indigenous Peoples leads to ineffective policies and management. Indigenous-led monitoring and involvement in recovery plans and education are essential. Bridging the gap between Western Science and Indigenous Knowledge is crucial for effective conservation efforts.

Education efforts should focus on listening to Indigenous voices, involving First Nations in development projects, implementing Indigenous-led monitoring, and integrating land-based education in Indigenous schools to educate younger generations on bear safety and conservation. Additionally, addressing challenges related to inland bear encounters requires proactive measures and community engagement.

### **Significance of Polar Bears**

Polar bears should be treated with the same respect and care as humans and protecting polar bears is essential for the wellbeing of both species. Climate change, displacement of prey, human interactions, and industrial activities pose significant threats to polar bears. Disturbances from human activities are causing polar bears to adapt and normalize interactions with humans. Destruction of habitat, pollution, melting ice, and human disturbances are key threats. Emphasis on the need for conservation efforts, Indigenous protected areas, banning immobilization of bears in research, and integrating research into conservation and management strategies are recommendations for moving forward. Culturally, polar bear “the White Bear” relates to the north star ‘Polaris’.

### **Habitat Protection**

Protecting polar bear habitat involves reviewing permits for development projects to prevent unregulated habitat destruction, regulating tourism to minimize disruption to polar bear habitats, and consulting with First Nations on provincial permits. Protecting prey habitat was noted, in particular the ringed seal (*Pusa hispida*) haul-out and pupping areas.

Expanded monitoring and the creation of additional protected areas, such as Resource Management Areas (RMAs), Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) were also suggestions for habitat protection. Also stressed was sensitivity and awareness to the life cycle of polar bears as crucial in habitat protection strategies.

### **Other Themes**

Additional participant-led themes include exploring non-disruptive monitoring methods like fixed-wing drones, recognizing the value of Indigenous Knowledge in understanding polar bear habitats, and understanding the interconnectedness of species conservation such as caribou and polar bears. In addition, addressing concerns about decision-making in Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas by those outside the community, advocating for laws to protect polar bears, prioritizing consultation with First Nations in development applications, and ethical considerations such as banning immobilization in polar bear research. Finally, understanding how research informs polar bear conservation and management.

## **Visit to the Assiniboine Park Zoo**

On day two the participants were invited on a field trip to the Assiniboine Park Zoo to meet with biologists who focus much of their time and effort on polar bear science, research, and conservation. Following a behind-the-scenes tour the participants were invited to view a training program with a polar bear and a zookeeper. A lunch was provided following the tour in a location that looked out over the polar bears while eating. All participants were invited, most of whom opted to attend the event.

## **Conclusion**

The next steps, or three main project goals toward completion, were shared at the conclusion of the workshop:

- 1) To engage with Indigenous communities on what is needed including in-community meetings (winter 2022 – spring 2024) and develop a draft strategy with Indigenous partners and interest holders (2024 – 2025);

- 2) To revise Part 1 of the Management Plan based on comments received (2024 – 2025); and,
- 3) To develop the 'proposed final' federal addition and seek Wildlife Management Board (WMB) approval to post as final on the SAR Registry (2025 – 2026).

The planning team wish to thank the participants once again for their time and knowledge shared during both days of the workshop. The insights captured will support Manitoba's Polar Bear Conservation and Recovery Strategy and form the relevant section of the National Polar Bear Management Plan. Specific, detailed information shared by participants will be kept confidential and only used to support the development of the Strategy/Plan. It is with great hope that ongoing conversations will occur with all interest groups to work toward a mutual understanding of conservation priorities for polar bears.

## Appendix A: Polar Bear Session In-Person Agenda

Day One - Tuesday, April 16	
8:30	Registration & Breakfast
9:00	Elder Prayer & Opening Words
9:15	Welcome from the Province of Manitoba
9:20	Welcome from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)
9:25	Polar Bear Circle of Introductions
9:35	Opening Remarks from Indigenous Nations
10:15	Break
10:30	Agenda Setting Exercise
10:45	<b>Presentation (ECCC)</b> Polar Bear Science & Federal Management Plan
11:30	Discussion and Questions
12:00	Prayer & Lunch
1:00	<b>Presentation (MB Government)</b> Protecting the Icon of Western Hudson Bay
1:30	Discussion and Questions
2:00	Break
2:15	Breakout Groups
3:30	Group Circle Discussion – Word Clouds
3:45	Graphic Recording Review
4:00	Closing Words
5:30	Supper (on your own)
Day Two – Wednesday, April 17	
8:30	Breakfast
9:00	Recap of Previous Day
9:10	Contributing Presentations
10:15	Questions & Discussion

10:30	Depart Hotel - Shuttle to APZ
11:00	Welcome & Tour (Journey to Churchill)
12:00	Lunch (Tundra Grill)
1:00	Depart APZ - Shuttle to Hotel
1:45	Breakout Groups
3:15	Final Group Discussion
3:45	Prizes, Farewell and Final Remarks
4:00	Closing Prayer

## Appendix B: Organization and Participation

The contact information from participants has been left out of this public document. Individual contact information is considered confidential.

Organization	Participation
CIER	In-person
Government of Manitoba	In-person
Government of Manitoba	Virtual
Government of Canada - ECCC	In-person
Government of Canada - DFO	In-person
Government of Canada - ECCC	Virtual
Long Plains First Nation	In-person
Fox Lake Resource Management Board	In-person
Fox Lake First Nation	In-person
Split Lake Resource Management Board	In-person
Tataskweyak Cree Nation (Split Lake)	In-person
York Factory Resource Management Board	In-person
War Lake First Nation (Ilford)	In-person
Sayisi Dene First Nation (Tadoule Lake)	Invited – Not in Attendance
Shamattawa First Nation	Invited – Not in Attendance
York Factory First Nation	Invited – Not in Attendance

## Appendix C: Theme Sheet Transcript

### Threats

- Climate change is a threat to the bears;
- Freeze up is taking longer so they are traveling further south and have followed the river into Fox lake communities more often;
- Displacement of prey (ringed seal) due to climate change shipping;
- Tourism operators and visitors disrupt habitat don't help give back;
- Polar bears are being forced to move because of human interactions, especially along the coast;
- Humans are in polar bear's domain need to respect their home;
- PB act differently = something is wrong;



- Disturbances from human interaction is causing the PB to change and normalize human interactions;
- Mining and development can cause a lot of destruction for the sake of progress;
- Tailing ponds are polluting the waters without being monitored properly;
- Ice is melting and the polar bear are unable to hunt in October due to the late freeze;
- Can't have tunnel vision on just polar bears need to incorporate all species as they all depend on one another;
- If we take care of everything, we take care of polar bears;
- Destruction of prey (pupping), molting habitat (ringed seal);
- Icebreakers > shipping deterioration ice conditions. \* DFO Kivalliq Workshop;
- Pollution;
- Climate change, winter roads less reliable. Make all season road > additional effects for wildlife;
- Decreasing it is in the news;
- Problem bears;
- Funding;
- Bear proof cabins;
- Protocol on orphan bears;
- Water level changes due to Manitoba hydro affecting local ecosystem including polar bears may affect freeze up speed; and,
- Careful/cautious use of tourism.

### **Cooperation and Collaboration**

- Regulations for (Wapusk), WMA's;
- Knowledge exchange/mobilization>TK: Denning areas, behavior, areas of use;
- Bigger conference (Churchill);
- Acknowledgement for contributions. Sharing of knowledge;
- Collaboration between communities;
- Kitaskiinan;
- Manitoba First Nations can learn from James Bay and NU folks and Manitoba government can learn to for the recovery document;
- More eNGO involvement;
- How do we build trust between government and community?;
- Put minds together to fix problem;
- How to braid western science and knowledge of the land (IK);
- Out of sight, out of mind put minds together;
- Go to the communities and sit with the people that live and use the land;
- Is there a role for tourism or is it incompatible with conservation?;
- Consult we grassroots folks right from the start;
- Better management between ECCC and DFO on ring seal and polar bear. Linked species. \*Comments from DFO Kivalliq Region;
- How does this work with all these different jurisdictions involved;
- Tourism more harm than good;
- Grassroots consultation a start;
- Go to reserves and visit people who live and use land;
- Government consults at start, not end;
- Who do you really work for?;
- First Nations involved in provincial permits right from start; and,
- Tourism to give back to the community.

### **Education and Monitoring**

- Need more education on people interacting with polar bears on not disturbing their homes;
- Lack of listening on the government and public realms;
- First nations people have been here forever, need to listen as they are the original stewards;
- Need to be active and not out of sight, out of mind;
- How do we work on what's out of sight, out of mind?;
- Bears coming inland and people don't know how to deal with them;
- First Nations need to be consulted on development projects or permits are moved forward;
- Recovery plan to land based education in First nations schools;
- Education young Gen students and First Nations land-based education;
- Perspectives. Western science versus Inuit knowledge. First nations – People of land;
- Indigenous led monitoring Lucassie-Sanikiluaq;
- App for monitoring wildlife and ice conditions;
- Education is key to keeping bears safe and people safe;
- Proper disposal of animal waste, carcasses, plastics;
- Bring in James Bay guys even Inuit;
- Bigger conference;
- Develop outreach products (coloring books);
- Website on polar bears social media content for youth;
- Less invasive monitoring. Depth/level of monitoring;
- Community does not agree on methods;
- incorporating land guardians' programs. Increase education. Increase job numbers;
- Polar bear awareness, especially for polar bears & cubs – territory; and,
- Fixed wing drone monitoring.

## Significance

- Treat them like a human being;
- What we are doing for future generations, humans and bears;
- Wildlife fish in the land are the money of the grassroots people. Need to respect and protect their way of life;
- People need to care for the bears the same way we care for ourselves;
- Polar bears are a part of the circle, just as we are;
- Fox Lake Elders now don't talk too much about polar bear. But the Elders used to;
- The ways to protect polar bears are the ways to improve human wellbeing;
- We have to make space. We are in their backyard;
- Important for future generations;
- Protect bears to protect the food chain;
- Take care of animals like we take care of ourselves;
- Emphasize Inuit stories;
- Healthy bears, healthy land;
- Emphasis on human safety in Manitoba document look to NU document;
- Bears mean balance. They maintain balance;
- Polar bears were held in high regard and are powerful spirit animals. Only in self defense was one taken. Prayers and tobacco were offered to honor the spirit, and everything was used and shared. It has powerful medicine (Elder Flora beardy YFFN);
- Important food source;
- Bear is keeper of the lodge;
- Bear clan police force (medicinal bear);
- Various uses (bear claws bear paws);
- Grizzly bear was called prairie bear;

- Polar bear relates to northern star Polaris “the white bear”; and,
- Ecotourism - source of income.

### Habitat Protection

- Manitoba should look at permits before development (mining, Port Nelson);
- Land would go to waste if development was unpermitted and unregulated;
- Tourism disrupts habitat of polar bears and needs to be regulated. Need to think of polar bear first!;
- Borders of IPA’s redrawn because of hydro work is frustrating. No land is more important than others need to respect the land;
- people 1000 miles away is dictating the protected areas and creating the borders;
- Protections in National Parks versus Wildlife Management Areas versus Indigenous led area-based conservation areas;
- First Nation needs to be consulted on provincial permits;
- Protect prey habitat. Ringed seal haul out and pupping habitat. \* DFO KP;
- More industry. More roads. All season roads;
- Mining in Split Lake - habitat destruction;
- Ice can be landmass;
- Corridors and exclusion zones;
- Global warming equals less ice. Polar bears spend more time on land;
- Dispersed to new areas;
- Expand on the monitoring;
- RMAs (Resource Management Areas);
- IPCA (Indigenous Protected Conservation Areas)>additional protection?;
- MPA (Marine Protected Area);
- Thorough review of permits; and,
- Sensitivity to life cycle.

### Other Themes

- What are some non disruptive monitoring methods > Fixed wing drones?;
- How can local knowledge contribute to better understanding?;
- **Caribou**. If taking care of them, taking care of all species;
- Indigenous protected areas decisions made by others who don't live there;
- Need laws to save and protect polar bears;
- First nations should be consulted first to review applications for development before issuing work permits;
- Banning immobilizing of bears in polar bear research;
- How does research inform conservation and management of polar bears?;
- Is this consultation.

## Appendix D: Potential Polar Bear Discussion Questions

### Potential Polar Bear Discussion Questions – Food for Thought

#### Habitat Protection:

- 1) Do you think polar bear habitat needs to be protected?
- 2) Where is the habitat that needs to be protected?
- 3) How do you want to see it protected (park, IPCA, etc.)?

#### Threats to Survival:

- 1) Are the number of polar bears in Manitoba increasing or decreasing?

- 2) Are there things that are causing the number of polar bears to decrease? If so, what are they?
- 3) Do you want to see the number of polar bears increase? If so, what needs to be done to accomplish that?
- 4) What role do you see your community playing in shaping and implementing initiatives for the long-term conservation and well-being of polar bears?

#### **Education and Monitoring:**

- 1) How can we share more information on polar bears? What do you think people want to know?
- 2) Do you think we need to monitor polar bears? If so, what do we need to learn/monitor? What type of monitoring/studies should be done?
- 3) What are your thoughts on the current strategies in place for polar bear conservation?
- 4) Do you believe they adequately address the needs and concerns of your community?
- 5) Are there any challenges or barriers that your community faces in participating or engaging with polar bear conservation efforts?
- 6) How do you think Indigenous knowledge and practices within your community can contribute to conservation initiatives for polar bears?

#### **Significance of Polar Bears to you:**

- 1) How are polar bears culturally significant to your community?
- 2) Can you share examples of traditional stories, ceremonies, or practices that involve polar bears within your community?
- 3) How do these cultural representations of polar bears contribute to the overall identity and values of your community?
- 4) In what ways do younger generations in your community learn about the significance of polar bears?
- 5) How have you lived with polar bears?
- 6) What is your connection with polar bears?
- 7) What do polar bears mean to you?

#### **Cooperation and Collaboration:**

- 1) How should we all work together to protect polar bears?
- 2) How should we all work together to protect polar bear habitat?
- 3) How do you see the relationship between your community and polar bears evolving in the future?
- 4) Are there opportunities for collaboration with the province that would like to explore?

#### **Other Questions:**

- What are your hopes and priorities for the future of polar bears in Manitoba?
  - Are there conservation goals or outcomes that you would like to see achieved?
- Can you recount any specific historical interactions or stories involving polar bears within your community?
  - How have these interactions shaped the relationship between your community and polar bears?
  - How have polar bear-human interactions changed over time within your community?
    - Are there any notable shifts in these interactions?
  - How has traditional knowledge and practices within your community influenced how people react with polar bears?
    - Are there local protocols or teachings that guide these interactions?
  - How do you see the past interactions with polar bears informing current approaches to polar bear conservation and management in your community?
- From your perspective, what ecological roles do polar bears play in your community's ecosystem?
  - How do polar bears contribute to the balance of the ecosystem?
  - Can you describe any interconnected relationships between polar bears and other species of the north?
    - How are these relationships important for the overall health and resilience of the ecosystem?
  - Considering the interconnectedness of ecosystems, how might changes in polar bear populations or habitat affect other regions beyond the north?

- Are there potential impacts that could be significant to your community because of these changes?

## Appendix E: Photographs



*Figure 6: CIER facilitating on Day One.*



*Figure 7: Kate Hewitt, CIER, leading a discussion session on Day Two.*



Figure 8: Participants in their seats on Day One.



Figure 9: Aaron Russell of Conference Doodles working on the graphic recording on Day Two.



*Figure 10: Group picture upon arrival at the Assiniboine Park Zoo where the zoo biologists started the tour.*



Figure 11: Participants meeting polar bears behind the glass.



Figure 12: A polar bear coming to greet a participant.



Figure 13: Final group picture upon leaving the Zoo.