

Consultation Guide

Polar Bear Management Plan for Québec, the Eeyou Marine Region and the Nunavik Marine Region



Eeyou Marine Region

Contact Information for Members of the Consultation Group

Primary Contact: **Aurélie Bourbeau-Lemieux**
Wildlife Biologist
Cree Nation Government – Environment and Remedial Works Department
Member EMRWB
(418) 691-1111
ablemieux@cngov.ca

Other Members: **Sophie Fillion**
Wildlife Management Director
Eeyou Marine Region Wildlife Board
(514) 238-2407
SFillion@eeyoumarineregion.ca

Fred Tomatuk
President
Cree Trappers' Association
(819) 865-0055

Samuel A. Iverson
Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment and Climate Change Canada
(819) 938-5467
samuel.iverson@canada.ca

Guillaume Szor
Biologiste
Direction de la gestion de la faune du Nord-du-Québec
Ministère des Forêts de la Faune et des Parcs (MFFP)
(418) 748-7701 ext. 238
guillaume.szor@mffp.gouv.qc.ca

Section 1: Introduction

Context

For as long as Inuit and Cree have inhabited the coastal region of Northern Québec (Nunavik and Eeyou Istchee) polar bears (*Nanuq* in Inuktitut, *Whabhskewh* or *Wâpiskw* in Cree) have been an important part of their cultures and livelihood. Inuit have used polar bear for food and clothing for millennia; the Crees of Eeyou Istchee, although less reliant on polar bear than the Inuit, also place a high value on polar bears as socio-cultural symbols, while cohabiting with the species on the coast and Islands of Eeyou Istchee. Accompanying these traditional usages and views have been traditional harvest management practices that largely remain in place to this day.

On January 10, 2012, the Federal Minister of the Environment requested that the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board (NMRWB) establish a management regime, including a Total Allowable Take (TAT), for the three sub-populations of polar bear that occur in the Nunavik Marine Region (NMR). Given the distribution of polar bears and the jurisdictional complexities of Northern Quebec, it is desirable and practical to have a single management plan that applies to both the onshore portion of Quebec and its adjacent marine regions (the Nunavik Marine Region and the Eeyou Marine Region). This plan is therefore intended to encompass the territories covered under three Land Claims Agreements; the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA), the Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement (NILCA) and the Eeyou Marine Region Land Claims Agreement (EMRLCA); it will not apply beyond the boundaries defined in these Agreements (see Figure 1).

Process

One of the key objectives of all parties involved in the development of this plan is for the QC-EMR-NMR Polar Bear Management Plan to reflect the knowledge, concerns, traditions and principles of the people most affected by it: the Inuit of Nunavik and the Crees of Eeyou Istchee.

In order to attain this objective, members of the Quebec – Eeyou Marine Region – Nunavik Marine Region Polar Bear Management Plan Working Group will visit Chisasibi and meet with Crees, from the 5 coastal communities, who are using the coast in their traditional hunting and fishing activities, to ensure that Crees have been given an opportunity to share their views and knowledge about polar bear management. A separate process has been held in the Nunavik Inuit region.

Recognizing that it would be inappropriate to arrive in communities with a finished product, it was decided from the start that the first draft would be no more than an overview of the legal context within which this plan will operate and of the existing knowledge on polar bears, their habitat and the threats they face (based on both science and traditional knowledge). Communities will therefore have a meaningful opportunity to shape the management decisions and processes that flow from the Plan.

“the QC-EMR-NMR Polar Bear Management Plan (must) reflect the knowledge, concerns, traditions and principles of the people most affected by it: the Inuit of Nunavik and the Crees of Eeyou Istchee”

Section 2: What is in a Management Plan?

Contrary to popular belief, management plans are not just a list of all the regulations and harvest limits that apply to a particular species. Rather, they describe the biology of a species, explain how it has been used and managed and the legal context within which it is managed. More importantly, management plans identify any threats and concerns related to the species and establish a framework within which a suite of short-, medium- and long-term actions to address these conservation issues are to be implemented. Although they are sometimes included within these actions, quotas and other harvest limitations will not be included within the present management plan since such decisions must be made in a separate process and in accordance with the processes outlined in the NILCA, EMRLCA and JBNQA.

“Management plans are not just a list of all the regulations and harvest limits that apply to a particular species.”

Section 3: The Community Consultation Process in Eeyou Istchee

The consultation team that will conduct the Cree consultation will consist of representatives from organizations involved in the development of this management plan (i.e. Cree Trappers’ Association, Cree Nation Government, Makivik, Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Quebec Government).

Prior to the consultation tour, key local organizations (Coastal Cree communities, and local CTAs) will be contacted to make necessary arrangements in preparation for the consultation, by making sure they will have representatives to participate in the process. The consultation team will meet with a focus group composed of Cree representatives from each of the coastal communities. Those representatives will be the local CTA EMR officer, or another local CTA representative if not available, as well as an active Cree hunter whose harvesting activities take place on the coast or islands and who has knowledge of polar bears. (Cree interpretation will be available throughout):

- The group will meet with CTA and any key hunters that have been identified by their community. This meeting will be an opportunity to discuss the intent of their visit, the management plan itself and listen to each community’s main concerns;
- A public session will be held for all community members in the meeting location (Chisasibi) to express their knowledge, concerns and recommendations on the polar bear management plan;
- There will be an attempt to broadcast the public session on the Cree Regional radio. If this is not possible, there will be at least a session on the regional radio;
- Before leaving the community, the group will reconvene with the CTA EMR officers to ensure that it has taken the correct messages away from the public meeting and that the views of their constituents have been accurately recorded.
- Once the consultations have been completed, a report summarizing the input of Crees will be prepared and shared with all communities.
- The information gathered through this consultation process will be integrated into the Polar Bear Management Plan before it is submitted to the approval process.

Section 4: Questions to develop the polar bear management plan

The questions that follow have been developed to guide discussions during the public consultations as well as to help ensure that community members and organizations are prepared for these events and that their input will provide the information necessary to complete the management plan.

Please note that these questions may not all be specifically raised during the consultations, but are provided here to encourage discussion. We encourage anyone who wishes to submit written answers to these questions to do so; their responses can be sent to the primary contact person, identified at the beginning of this document.

Fundamental Questions about the plan:

- We have tentatively proposed four main objectives for the polar bear management plan as follows (more information about each one of these is presented in the Draft Management Plan):
 1. Establish a management system based on the best available information, and adapt it as necessary, in order to ensure the long-term persistence of healthy polar bears in the management plan area.
 2. Collect traditional and scientific knowledge of polar bears to inform management decisions.
 3. Encourage wise use and stewardship of polar bears
 4. Establish strategies to minimize the effects of human activities on polar bears and their habitat, without compromising public safety
- Do you disagree with any of these objectives?
- Do you feel that this set of objectives will lead to a good polar bear management plan?
- Which aspects of Cree values and wildlife management principles are particularly important and must be integrated in the management plan? In other words, how do Crees deal with wildlife differently from other people?
 - o How does this help to maintain wildlife populations?

Questions related to Objective 1: Establish a management system based on the best available information, and adapt it as necessary, in order to ensure the long-term persistence of healthy polar bears in the management plan area.

- What factors affect the number of bears that a hunter observes in the course of the year?
- Is it important to maintain the right to sell polar bear skins to the international market?
- Should polar bear cubs, females with cubs and bears in dens be protected? When a quota is implemented:
 - o On what basis should it be established (for example: the number of polar bears needed by Inuit, the number of bears killed by Crees for defense of life and property, the number of polar bears that can be hunted sustainably, harvest levels that are acceptable to the International forums, etc.)?
 - o How often should it be re-evaluated?

Should sport hunting of polar bears be allowed? Under what conditions?

- Do the Crees still harvest polar bears solely in defence of life and property or is there an interest to also hunt polar bears for other reasons?
- If there are to be consequences for going against the management plan, who should apply them (e.g. financial penalties by government vs. traditional discipline by CTA)?
- Do you think it is important to keep a registry of all the polar bears killed (including in defense of life and property) in the EMR?

Questions related to Objective 2: Collect traditional and scientific knowledge of polar bears to inform management decisions:

- What are your main concerns regarding the future of polar bears?
 - o How can these concerns be addressed?
- Do polar bears appear to be healthy in your region?
- What is your view about the number of polar bears present in your region?
 - o More / less than in the past? How do you know this?
 - o Too many / not enough / numbers are ok?
- Is it acceptable to put collars on even a small number of polar bears?
 - o What are the concerns related to collaring of bears?

It is not the intent of the management plan working group that an answer be provided to each of these questions.

As mentioned previously, they are offered simply as a way to encourage discussion on subjects that must be addressed within the management plan.

All respondents will remain anonymous, unless they have expressly requested that their contributions be recognized in the management plan.

- How can we ensure that polar bear research is designed in collaboration with Crees before proceeding?
 - o Who has this responsibility? (CTA, CNG, communities)?
- How familiar are you with research methods currently used to study polar bears? Do you support these methods? How confident are you in their results? If you are not confident, why not? What improvements can be made?
- Would you agree to provide samples from all polar bears killed for research and management purpose?
- What is the best way to ensure that Cree Knowledge and local observations are considered in research (during planning, field work, interpretation of results, etc.) and management?
- Are there particular aspects of hunters' knowledge that should be gathered periodically to inform management decisions?

Questions related to Objective 3: Encourage wise use and stewardship of polar bears:

- Has the relationship between Crees and polar bears changed compared to the past?
- Are people killing polar bears more/less than in the past (for defense)?
 - o Are they using deterrent methods before shooting?
- When a bear is killed, what is usually done with the meat and fur?
- Do Crees know how to prepare Polar Bear fur, and are they willing to do it in order not to waste the fur?
- Would the Crees be willing to prepare and conserve the meat of a polar bear killed in defense of life and property, in order to make arrangements with the Inuit, to give it to them as it is part of their traditional food resources?

Questions related to Objective 4: Establish strategies to minimize the effects of human activities on polar bears and their habitat, without compromising public safety

Industrial Activity and Tourism

- If there are industrial development (e.g. mining) projects proposed, what aspects must we pay particular attention to in order to minimize impacts on polar bears (shipping, noise, etc.)?
- What are the human or industrial activities that you think have an impact on Polar bears? Why?
- What do the Cree communities feel about Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association's (COTA) polar bear tourism objectives?
 - o Is there an interest from Crees to develop tourism opportunities related to polar bears: Are there any negative and/or positive aspects related to polar bear tourism?
- Are there any areas that are particularly important for polar bears and which should be protected? e.g. areas that are important for denning, feeding, etc.?

Pollution/Contaminants

- Are you concerned about the level of pollution or contaminants in polar bears?
- Do you have all of the knowledge you need on the subject, as it relates to polar bear?

Parasites & Disease

- Have you noticed any changes in the health of polar bear?

Climate Change

- Have you noticed any changes in the timing of freeze-up and ice-out or in the thickness/texture of sea ice in your region?
 - o If yes, how could this affect polar bears?
 - o If yes, could there be impacts on other species that polar bears rely on?
- Have you observed any changes in weather patterns compared to the past?
 - o If yes, what impacts could this have on polar bears, or the species they rely on?
- Has the behaviour of polar bears changed in response to climate change? What could this mean?
 - o Changes in movements or location of bears?
 - o Changes in diet?
- Should the anticipated effects of climate change on polar bears be taken in consideration when setting harvest restrictions?

Defense of Life and Property:

- Are there any issues with bears coming into communities/camps?
 - o If yes, do you think this is due to behavioral changes by bears or simply due to an increase in their number?
- Are bears more dangerous than in the past?
 - o If yes, what factors might explain this?
- Is there a need to establish deterrence programs?
 - o What kind of program/tools do you think would lead to a reduction in the number of bears killed in defense of life and/or property?
- The EMRLCA requires that the valuable parts of any polar bear killed in defense be forfeited to the EMRWB and a Government Designated Organization (Cree Nation Government). What should these entities do with them?
- Is there any need to put in place a training program, about polar bear safety, for the Crees as well as people visiting from the South (e.g. teachers, workers, etc.)?

The Last Question:

- What is the most important question that we've forgotten to ask you / is there anything you would like to add???