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News

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Polar Bear Conservation Continues This Endangered Species Day

Endangered Species Day is particularly poignant today as we celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Endangered Species Act and recognize the Federal agencies, state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, industry representatives, and private citizens who have worked together under the law to conserve America's most imperiled species.

“In Alaska key partners have come together under the Endangered Species Act to successfully recover the Aleutian Canada goose, the Arctic peregrine falcon and the American peregrine falcon” said Geoffrey Haskett, Alaska's Regional Director. “These are all great success stories. The sobering prospect of extinction motivates us to do all that we can nationally and internationally to conserve remarkable Alaskan species like polar bear.”

Some of those partnerships have focused on better understanding a species and its habitat with the goal of uncovering routes to recovery. Since listing the polar bear under the Endangered Species Act, both the Service and United States Geological Survey (USGS) have increased efforts to collect scientific information on the status and trends for polar bear populations in Alaska and worldwide. The Service recently completed our fifth year of live-capture research in the Chukchi and Bering Seas, and USGS continues over 30 years of research on the Southern Beaufort Sea population. The Service is partnering with the USGS to update sea ice projections and climate models, and to develop population specific models to help strategically prioritize conservation actions. This work greatly enhances our understanding of polar bears and provides insight into potential impacts due to loss of sea ice habitat, an understanding which will be critical for conserving the species.

Other partnerships engage a wide group of stakeholders, who bring unique insights and perspectives to our work identifying creative and effective recovery options. For example, we are reaching out to a diverse group of stakeholders including State and local governments, Alaska Native organizations, non-governmental organizations, development entities, and concerned citizens to inform our draft polar bear Conservation Management Plan. We have held a series of public workshops and look forward to additional input on future drafts.

Along with research and recovery planning, the ESA also engages partners in on-the-ground conservation. We accomplish this through a number of means – consultation on proposed Federal

actions, conservation efforts directed at candidate species, etc. Sometimes we draw on associated laws to help with our conservation efforts such as the Marine Mammal Protection Act. For example, as the length of the ice-free season increases in the Arctic, we continue to work extensively with the North Slope Borough, the oil and gas industry, and local communities in polar bear habitat to minimize human-bear interactions. We have supported the efforts of local communities to increase polar bear patrols, which keep people safe when bears come to shore. Similarly, we have increased efforts to minimize potential impacts to polar bears from industrial activities on the Arctic coastal plain.

For some species, our partnerships extend well beyond state lines. With wide ranging polar bear populations, we work closely with the Russian Federation and Canada through a series of meetings and research initiatives aimed at providing better management for polar bear populations that range across our shared borders. This year also marks the 40th anniversary of the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears, signed by all five nations that have polar bear populations (United States, Canada, Russian Federation, Norway, and Greenland [Denmark]). The Service is actively engaged with these countries and the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Polar Bear Specialist Group, to better understand the circumpolar status of the species and develop an international management plan to protect the polar bear into the future.

For more information on polar bear conservation and recovery visit:

<http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mmm/polarbear/pbmain.htm>

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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