

Summary of Substantive Changes between Proposed and Final Polar Bear Conservation Management Plans

December 20, 2016

Climate Change

In response to concerns that the Plan did not sufficiently emphasize the threat to polar bears posed by climate change, the Recovery Team made the following changes:

- Highlighted the climate threat throughout the document by adding text and figures and moving explanatory information about other stressors, e.g. harvest, to an appendix.
- Reorganized the *Conservation & Recovery Actions* to emphasize the need to address anthropogenic causes of Arctic warming.
- Declined to include specific emission/concentration targets as recovery criteria but added information regarding the importance of attaining RCP 2.6/2 degrees C Paris Agreement goal.

ESA Recovery Criteria

In response to concerns that the ESA Recovery Criteria were too permissive, the Team highlighted the requirement that all three criteria tiers must be met to constitute recovery: fundamental, demographic and threat-based. We also revised one of the demographic criteria to better reflect the uncertainty surrounding anticipated distribution and connectivity needs as polar bear populations decline.

MMPA Criteria

In response to concerns that the MMPA criteria were too lenient and overlooked habitat loss caused by climate change, the Recovery Team made the following changes:

- Swapped the order of the MMPA criteria to better emphasize concerns over habitat loss.
- Revised the habitat demographic criteria under MMPA to specify a threshold of 70% of the historical carrying capacity as the standard by which to judge the “stability of the marine ecosystem”

Harvest

In response to concerns over the Plan’s emphasis on the importance of continued subsistence harvest of polar bear for nutritional and cultural reasons, the Team made the following changes:

- To eliminate confusion over the meaning of the word “sustainable”, we removed nearly all uses of the term when referencing subsistence harvest.

- Moved technical detail regarding harvest management to a new Appendix (Appendix C) and, instead, focused on the rationale and philosophy behind the harvest management guidelines in the Plan.
- Added a graph to illustrate the three-level framework for harvest -- how management of human-caused removal would respond to changes in population size, carrying capacity, and intrinsic rate of growth.