

Polar Bear Five-Year Status Review Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a five-year review and why are they done?

A five-year review is a review of the status of species listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, that is conducted at least once every five years. The purpose of a five-year review is to ensure that listed species have the appropriate level of protection under the act. The reviews assess each threatened and endangered species to determine whether information gathered since the time of the species' listing or last status review suggests that the species' classification as threatened or endangered should be changed. Any change in federal status requires a separate rulemaking process which is open to public comment.

2. What are the potential outcomes of a five-year review?

After reviewing and considering the best available scientific and commercial data regarding the species, we recommend whether a change in the federal status of the listed species is warranted. We could make one of four possible recommendations:

- Reclassify the species from threatened to endangered (uplist);
- Reclassify the species from endangered to threatened (downlist);
- Remove the species from the list (delist); or
- Maintain the species' current classification.

If a recommendation is made to reclassify or remove the species from the list, a proposed rule would be published for public comment.

3. What is the outcome of the polar bear five-year review?

After thorough data review and analysis, we concluded that the polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*) continues to meet [the definition of threatened](#) (likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future). As a result, we recommend no status change at this time. New information continues to support the conclusion that polar bears rely heavily on sea ice for survival and that increasing atmospheric levels of greenhouse gases are contributing to Arctic warming and continued loss of sea ice habitat. Although the global population of polar bears is currently estimated to be approximately 26,000 (Wiiig et al. 2015), we anticipate that the continued loss of sea ice will cause the population to decline (Atwood et al. 2016).

4. What did we consider in our review?

A five-year review begins with gathering the best available scientific and commercial data regarding the species. To initiate this process, we published a notice in the *Federal Register* to let the public know that we were reviewing the status of the polar bear and requested any relevant information we should consider, in particular, any information that had become available since polar bears were listed as threatened in 2008 (80 FR 61443). Such information included:

- Species biology, including but not limited to population trends, distribution, abundance, demographics, and genetics;
- Habitat conditions, including but not limited to amount, distribution, and suitability;
- Conservation measures that have benefited the species;
- Threat status and trends; and

- Other new information, data, or corrections, including but not limited to changes in taxonomy or nomenclature and identification of erroneous information contained in the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants.

5. Why is the polar bear listed as threatened under the ESA?

Using the best-available science, the Service determined that the polar bear is not *currently* in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. In our analysis, we considered all the threats to the polar bear, including habitat, principally sea ice, which is declining throughout the species' range and is expected to continue to decline for the foreseeable future. We also considered utilization and subsistence harvest of the species and determined that they do not threaten the species. However, we found that if these factors are not carefully managed, they could exacerbate the effects of habitat loss for several populations and become a threat within the foreseeable future. Further, we considered disease, predation, contaminants and other stressors and determined that while they did not threaten the species, they may within the foreseeable future become more significant stressors on polar bear populations, especially those experiencing nutritional stress or declining population levels.

6. Will the public be given an opportunity to provide comments on the five-year review?

The five-year review is an internal agency staff analysis which makes a classification recommendation. As such, it is not a decision document nor is it a proposal for change. We solicit information from the public to inform our recommendation, but we do not solicit public comments on the recommendation itself. If the recommendation were to reclassify polar bears or remove them from the list, we would have initiated a regulatory process that involved public comment. However, because we are recommending no change in the status of polar bears, no further action will be taken.

7. Where can I find more information about polar bears?

Additional information on polar bears can be found at:

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

https://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/mmm/polarbear/pdf/PBRT_Recovery_%20Plan_Book_FI_NAL_signed.pdf