



# Arctic

## *National Wildlife Refuge*

### Timeline: The development of community-based polar bear management in Kaktovik

#### Pre-history to the Present

- Traditional hunting by Inupiat residents.
- In 1972, the Marine Mammal Protection Act is established to protect marine mammals including polar bears, with an emphasis on co-management with Alaska Native Organizations.
- 1990s
  - More polar bears are observed coming into the community.
- 2000s
  - In 2002, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) polar bear biologists begin to study the polar bears congregating near Kaktovik. Three factors are found to be attracting bears near the community: a bone pile of portions of unused whale carcasses left after Inupiat subsistence whale hunting; the presence of seals in the area; and the absence of nearby Arctic Ocean sea ice.
  - Around 2004, USFWS polar bear biologists and Arctic Refuge staff begin coordinated outreach with residents of Kaktovik about human-polar bear conflicts. Staff offer services and technical advice for addressing problems in the community related to wildlife, polar bears and other environmental issues.
  - In 2004 and 2005 Arctic Refuge offers funds for the community to create information kiosks that address safety in the presence of polar bears.
  - By 2005, monitoring of polar bears is in place including documentation of polar bear interactions with other bears and with humans. This information allows for a better understanding of what is needed to develop effective human-polar bear safety guidelines.
  - By 2006, Community Open Houses are conducted annually, during which residents share their bear observations and management concerns, and biologists explain the results of their monitoring activities.
  - In response to community concerns for youth safety, Arctic Refuge staff and Kaktovik leaders organize a polar bear coloring contest to convey key safety messages to Kaktovik children.
  - A local Kaktovik artist is contracted by Arctic Refuge to create original artwork. Posters about polar bear safety are made using her drawings. The end product demonstrates a growing collaboration.
  - Local efforts are made to improve safety where polar bear viewing from land is increasing. An *ad hoc* Kaktovik Polar Bear Committee constructs barriers to the whale bone pile which warns polar bear viewers not go any closer than the barrier.
  - National discussions start about listing polar bears as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.
  - In 2007, USFWS conducts outreach about the potential listing of polar bears under the Endangered Species Act.
  - Arctic Refuge clarifies that the Refuge has management responsibilities for the waters surrounding Kaktovik.
  - USFWS awards a Tribal Wildlife Grant to the Native Village of Kaktovik to develop a community human-bear safety plan. The grant funds three years of work to meet the following goals:
    - Establish authorized village patrols to deter bears from the village.
    - Minimize attractants in and around the village.
    - Develop educational materials (including initial guidance for visitors viewing polar bears on land).
  - In 2008, polar bears are announced as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. There is a worldwide increase of awareness of the plight of polar bears, and more visitors begin coming to northern Alaska to view bears.

Continued on the back.

## 2010s

- In response to community interest in guiding polar bear viewers, Refuge staff begins work with the community to establish an authorized boat-based viewing program.
- In 2009, Arctic Refuge staff coordinates funding for a commercial guide workshop for viewing polar bears. Local residents are provided training in laws protecting polar bears, Coast Guard licensing, safety best practices, small business development, and the Refuge permit authorization process.
- In 2010, an official guide permit authorization program is launched by the Refuge for boat-based viewing. The Refuge issues its first guide authorization for polar bear viewing on Refuge waters.
- In 2010 to 2012, Arctic Refuge staff works with local guides to be safe, legal and professional.
- In 2011, community leaders envision a Kaktovik Youth Ambassador (KYA) program to address community concerns about safe practices by youth to avoid polar bear encounters, and concerns about visitors arriving without clear guidance for respectful behaviors. Arctic Refuge helps fund the program.
- At least four commercial businesses have Coast Guard OUPV 6-Pack credentials and are authorized by Arctic Refuge to operate.
- 2011-2013 The Refuge's guide authorization program continues to evolve. A core group of local boat guides begin to work with tour operators from around the world to provide access to Refuge waters.
- Increasing numbers of visitors arrive in Kaktovik. They receive outreach from youth volunteers, but the need for local guidance to land viewers increases.
- In 2013, Refuge staff responds to community members' requests for enforcement of the Refuge's guide permit requirements.
- In 2014, all operating guides meet Refuge permit requirements. (There are no unauthorized operations on Refuge waters.)
- Local partners and Arctic Refuge staff coordinate intent to seek grant funding to address community issues emerging from increasing numbers of polar bears and visitors coming to Kaktovik during the fall open-water period, and to envision a method for responding to the emerging polar bear viewing tourism industry.
- In 2015, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) awards Arctic Refuge, and five partners with responsibility for managing people and polar bears at Kaktovik, a large grant to address the needs to:
  - Increase the role of local Alaska Native youth in polar bear conservation, and fund the Kaktovik Youth Ambassador program.
  - Support the ability for the local community to manage the emerging polar bear viewing tourism industry on non-Refuge lands at Kaktovik.
- In 2015, after a delay in initial grant funding, and personnel changes at the City of Kaktovik, the City Council votes to depart from the grant team, with a narrow majority asserting that coordinating efforts with the Refuge to address increasing community concerns about managing the emerging polar bear viewing tourism industry is not in the City of Kaktovik's interest (with a caveat for continued support of the KYAs).
- In 2016, Arctic Refuge, USFWS Polar Bear Program, U.S. Air Force, North Slope Borough's Ilisagvik College, and Native Village of Kaktovik staffs continue progress on grant goals.
- Local benefits for polar bear conservation continue through the NFWF grant but it becomes clear to Refuge staff that the grant will not unify local management of the emerging polar bear viewing tourism industry on non-Refuge lands adjacent to Refuge waters.
- Arctic Refuge acknowledges an exponential increase in visitors viewing polar bears on both non-Refuge lands and on Refuge waters in Kaktovik, and, with that, an urgent need to act to insure it can provide quality polar bear viewing opportunities on Refuge waters while minimizing threats to public safety, minimizing potential disturbance to polar bears, and minimizing boat-viewing visitor conflicts with local residents.
- In 2017, the Refuge responds to this urgent need by temporarily freezing the number of authorized guides.
- Refuge staff begins a multi-year plan for managing polar bear viewing on Refuge waters, considering the extensive input received over the past years from individual community members and others, and providing opportunities for continued input.

