

# SEA ICE, POLAR BEARS & ACTION!

**L**ast week world media was abuzz with none other than the polar bear. Reports claimed that this is our last chance to save the polar bear from extinction. The connection between the Paris COP Agreement, Climate Change and effect on their population around the world has resulted in a renewed polar bear Recovery Plan.

During my years in Chicago, polar bear cubs reached star status on tabloids and trendy magazines. The fuzzy, pristine white fur of cuddly wooly cubs have long fascinated people of every age. Unless we win the fight against climate change, polar bears could well become extinct soon.

Polar bears range across the Arctic Ocean, parts of Canada, Alaska, Russia, Greenland and Norway. They have a strong cultural significance among people of the Arctic environment where they dominate as top predators. Declining numbers would tip the balance of the Arctic ecosystem. Protecting



bears ensures a healthy food chain, which nurtures wildlife and people in and beyond the Arctic. Europe depends heavily on Arctic fisheries, so actions that affect their numbers produces a ripple effect on humans!

The listed threats by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to the existing polar bear population include climate change, human-bear conflicts, unsustainable hunting and

other industrial impacts related to shipping, tankers and oil spills.

Let us consider some of the facts in play — Fact 1: Global temperatures have risen in the last 20 years causing Arctic Sea ice to be lowered drastically. Fact 2: In 2008, polar bears became the first animal listed under the Endangered Species Act. Fact 3: The only way to control global temperature rise is to control global greenhouse

gas emissions. Fact 4: Polar bears depend on sea ice as a platform from which to hunt seals, rest and breed.

It is clear that the lives of the polar bear are inextricable from the state of the Arctic Sea ice! If the sea ice melts, bears come ashore and rely on their fat stores until the ice refreezes. Only then can they go back to hunt and eat. If the ice does not re-freeze, due to warming temperatures, bears

remain malnourished and many females with cubs starve to death.

The number of polar bears in the wild has been fluctuating since the 1960's. Due to hunting bans they have enjoyed some respite from human threats. A recent estimate of the polar bear population is around 26,000 worldwide. However the fragile future of the Arctic causes WWF to still place this species on the 'Vulnerable' list.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions far away prevents Arctic Ice from melting too fast and this saves their habitat. Under the Paris protocol, nearly 200 countries pledged to reduce carbon emissions and keep global temperatures from reaching two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times. You would not choose to hug a polar bear even if you wanted to. It is the largest land based carnivore. But give teeth to the 'awww' you express, the moment you set eyes even on a picture of that hulk. Reduce consumption of grid power, and oh! Say yes to renewables!



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