



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Polar Bears and the Endangered Species Act

## *Proposed For Listing as Threatened*

### **Polar Bears and the Endangered Species Act**

Polar bears are the largest members of the bear family, found only on the Arctic ice cap in the Northern Hemisphere. Their total number is estimated to be 20,000-25,000 worldwide, in 19 populations. Abundance estimates include 1500 bears in the Southern Beaufort Sea population, and 2000 bears in the Chukchi Sea population. The primary habitat for polar bears is sea ice, from which they hunt, feed, seek mates and breed, den, and rest when traveling long distances. Most polar bears remain on the sea ice year-round or spend only limited time on land.

### **Threats to Polar Bears**

Loss of sea ice due to climate change is the primary threat to polar bears. Recent climate data document a rapid and unprecedented retreat of Arctic sea ice (earlier spring melt, later fall freeze-up and overall thinner ice). The subsistence harvest of polar bears in Alaska is not considered a major threat to polar bears and, like the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Endangered Species Act allows

for a continued subsistence harvest of listed species. Oil and gas development, contaminant exposure, and disease are not thought to currently be significant threats to polar bear populations, but could become more significant in the future in combination with climate change effects.

### **The Endangered Species Act Listing Process**

On February 16, 2005, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was petitioned to list the polar bear as threatened under the Endangered Species Act throughout its range. In response, the Service did an in-depth status assessment of polar bears, using the best available scientific and commercial data, and consulted with climate specialists to evaluate the material presented in the petition. Based on this assessment, the Service proposed the species for listing as threatened on January 9, 2007. Critical



Scott Schliebe/USFWS

*Photo of mother and cub taken in the denning area.*

habitat for the polar bear has not been proposed.

In the next 12 months the Service will gather more information and conduct additional analyses before making a final decision whether to list the species. USGS will conduct additional analyses of population and climate models. We will accept comments on the proposal through close of business April 9, 2007. Comments may be hand delivered, submitted by regular mail, email, or in person at a public hearing.

### **For More Information**

Copies of the proposed rule and the status assessment, information on where to submit comments, and details about the public hearings are available at <http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mmm/polarbearissues.htm>. The Marine Mammals Management office may be reached at 1-800-362-5148.

1980



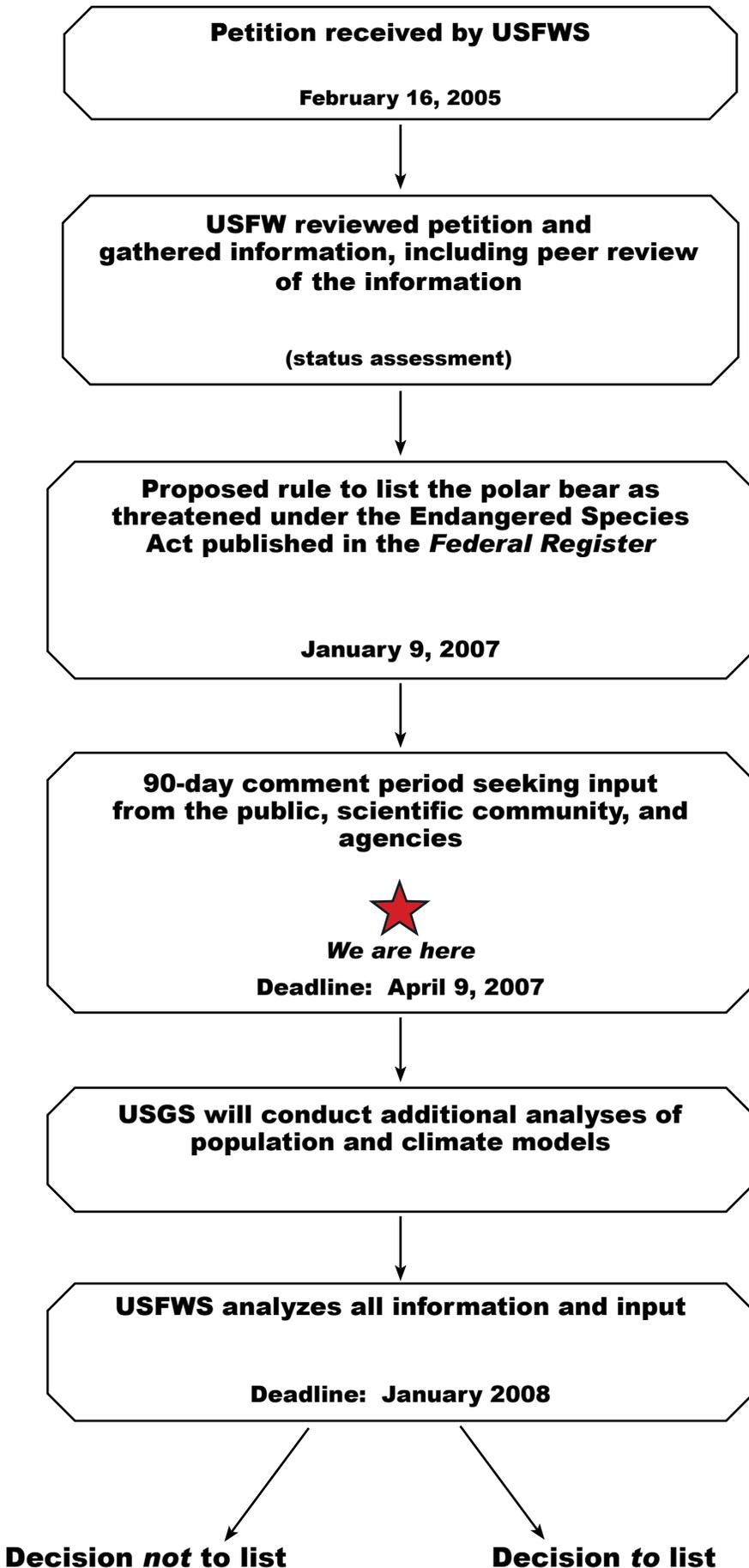
2003



*These images illustrate the decline of ice between 1980 and 2003. Please note that the areas of greatest reduction are in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas.*

J.C. Comiso/NASA

# Polar Bear Listing Process



## Ways to Submit Comments

**Deadline is April 9, 2007**

### Written

You may submit written comments to the Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Marine Mammals Management Office, 1011 East Tudor Road - MS 341, Anchorage, Alaska 99503.

You may hand deliver written comments to the Marine Mammals Management Office at the above address.

### Electronically

You may send your comments by electronic mail (e-mail) directly to the Service at: [Polar\\_Bear\\_Finding@fws.gov](mailto:Polar_Bear_Finding@fws.gov) or to the Federal eRulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

### In Person

You may provide oral comments at a public hearing.

### For more information:

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

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Marine Mammals Management Office  
1011 E. Tudor Road - MS 341  
Anchorage, Alaska 99503  
<http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mmm/polarbearissues.htm>

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