Annual Report to Members 2015

Your impact on polar bear conservation

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Your Impact: A Year of Hope

2015 may go down in the history books as the turning point for polar bears, the Arctic, and all of us. World leaders came together at the Paris Climate Talks on a shared ambition to limit climate warming to 1.5°Celsius—a bold and historic step that offers hope for polar bears and their melting sea ice habitat.

Your voice and your support contributed to this global, people-powered milestone. And for that we thank you.

But sustaining a future for polar bears didn’t end in Paris. To limit climate warming to safe levels, world leaders must honor the pledges made and then go beyond them—and we’re grateful we can count on you to help to make this happen.

In fact, we’re thankful for all you do for polar bears and the Arctic. Thanks to your generosity, we’re able to fund critical scientific research related to polar bear conservation, from den and sensory studies to census counts.

Your donations make it possible for us to step up efforts related to reducing human-polar bear conflicts in a warming world, keeping bears and people safe. And your support helps us develop key polar bear conservation and management plans, working with our Arctic partners.

And, finally, your belief in us makes our global education and outreach efforts possible—from our Climate Alliance training to our top-ranked website, iTunes U channel, and Tundra Connections webcasts.

All these efforts, together, are making a difference for polar bears and their threatened ecosystem. And for that we’re grateful to you every single day.

Sincerely,

Krista Wright
Executive Director

Our mission is to conserve polar bears and the sea ice they depend on. We also work to inspire people to care about the Arctic and its connection to our global climate.

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2015
Winter for PBI is a busy time. It’s a season of snow and cold. But it’s also a time of heartfelt gratitude—inspired by your commitment to stand with us in the year ahead.

You make it possible for PBI field crews to repair, clean, and pack equipment before leaving for the maternal den study in Alaska.

You support staff scientists as they analyze data, write papers, and talk about their findings with the press and the public. And you enable us to take part in meetings on polar bear conservation and ways to reduce human-polar bear conflicts.

Your contributions also lend a helping hand to our communications and education teams as they prepare for the year ahead—beginning with our International Polar Bear Day celebration on February 27th. Together, we’ve grown awareness about this day and our Thermostat Challenge into an event with worldwide press and participation.

This is also the time of year when your support allows us to develop training sessions for outreach educators. These courses focus on polar bears, climate change, and the community and policy-level solutions needed to conserve polar bears and their sea ice home.

“You are the reason we can work in the polar bear’s world. Our hands feel the cold, but yours are doing the work, supporting our den studies and other crucial projects.”

~ BJ Kirschhoffer, Director of Field Operations

**Highlights**

**Polar Bear Protection**  
President Obama recommends protection for the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, a key polar bear denning area.

**Maternal Den Study**  
PBI heads to Alaska’s North Slope for the Maternal Den Study, part of an ongoing research project on den emergence behavior.

**Climate Change Training**  
PBI educators begin a year-long training course on climate change messaging and the impacts on ocean ecosystems through NINCCIL, integrating new strategies learned into our community action campaigns.

**International Polar Bear Day**  
PBI’s February 27th awareness day attracts worldwide press. It also generates numerous outreach events and global participation in our Thermostat Challenge.

**Polar Bear Recovery Team**  
Our senior director of conservation joins this U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service task force, embarking on a year-long effort to develop a recovery plan for Alaska’s polar bears.

**Reducing Human-Polar Bear Conflicts**  
PBI is invited to chair the Polar Bear Range States Conflict Working Group, an ongoing effort to keep bears and people safe.

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~ BJ Kirschhoffer, Director of Field Operations
Longer daylight hours return to the Arctic in spring, bringing the seal pupping season—a time of plenty for polar bears. Your support at this time of year includes field research focused on polar bear families as they emerge from their snow dens, along with population studies that track changes over time. It includes scientific papers that add to our understanding of polar bears in a warming world, and a packed schedule of lectures, workshops, and speaking engagements to diverse audiences. And it means conferences of polar bear and conservation experts, along with special climate-focused projects like our CO2-reducing Project Polar Bear contest and our Earth Day Transportation Challenge. You make PBI’s spring outreach possible, too, as we stay focused on our goal of conserving polar bears and the sea ice they depend on by achieving the reductions needed in greenhouse gas emissions.

“Polar bears on the sea ice don’t realize how much you’re helping them. But we know. And we’re grateful every day.”

– Alysa McCall, Director of Conservation Outreach and Staff Scientist

Highlights

Terrestrial Feeding Paper
Our chief scientist, Dr. Steven Amstrup, co-authors this research paper, showing that land-based foods are not the answer for polar bears. The findings are featured in media stories around the world.

Arctic Ambassador Centers
Working with zoo leaders and biologists, we co-host training and special events throughout the year focused on education outreach, animal well-being, and how zoos can further support field-based conservation.

Earth Day Transportation Challenge
PBI’s partners join us in promoting the Transportation Challenge on Earth Day and every day, calling for community solutions to reduce transportation-related emissions.

Project Polar Bear Winners
Year after year, young people who take part in our CO2-reducing Project Polar Bear contest make impressive strides in igniting community change. Our 2015 teams continue that tradition.

Bear Safety Training
PBI staff take part in a polar bear safety and deterrents training session in preparation for fieldwork and the polar bear season in Churchill.

Climate Hope
Pope Francis issues an encyclical on the environment and climate change, calling action to reduce carbon emissions a moral issue—and providing hope for success at the Paris Climate Talks.

photo © Daniel J. Cox/NaturalExposures.com

photo © KT Miller/polarbearsinternational.org
An Arctic summer brings with it warmer temperatures and retreating ice. At PBI, we closely track the sea ice extent during the summer months, sharing this information with the press and public.

In this season, you make our Arctic Sea Ice Day celebration possible—an annual event that draws worldwide attention to summer sea ice losses, why they matter to polar bears, and how we each can help. You also allow us to take part in solutions-oriented conferences and workshops focused on polar bears, the Arctic, and climate change. These meetings help with problems like human-polar bear conflicts and conserving polar bears in a warming world.

And, finally, you make it possible for us to train teachers and zoo professionals on the basics of polar bear science, the warming Arctic, and what classrooms and communities can do to combat climate change. Our zoo partners also help us with vital projects that aid wild polar bear research.

Thanks to you, we are having an impact together—even in the summer months, when most people don’t think about polar bears.
Polar bears in seasonal ice areas begin anticipating freeze-up as the air turns colder in autumn. This is the season when Churchill’s polar bears begin gathering along the coast, offering unparalleled outreach opportunities. As a PBI member, your loyalty helps bring the story of Churchill’s bears to the world—through Tundra Connections webcasts with scientists and educators, through the Polar Bear Cam aired each year with partners explore.org and Frontiers North Adventures, and through major media from the BBC to CBS Sunday Morning.

You also make research possible at this time of year, including den detection studies, a new body condition study, and ongoing population counts. Your dedication supports the development of new educational tools like videos and iTunes U content, used by teachers and students around the world. You also make it possible for us to train our Climate Alliance participants. And you speak up and make your voice heard in support of polar bears by signing petitions, contacting your representatives, and social media shares.

“We asked, and you spoke up for meaningful action on climate change at the Paris talks—for polar bears, the Arctic, and all of us. And for that, we’re deeply grateful.”
— Krista Wright, Executive Director

Highlights

Climate Alliance Training
More than a dozen zoo and aquarium professionals join us in Churchill for a week of training—capping off a months-long online course that focuses on polar bears, climate change, and how to develop community solutions.

Wildlife Society Meeting
PBI helps organize this international symposium and takes part in several sessions related to polar bear conservation and management in a warming Arctic.

Live from the Tundra!
During the annual gathering of Churchill’s polar bears, we connect people around the globe with polar bears, sea ice, and scientists via our Tundra Connections webcasts and the Polar Bear Cam.

Polar Bear Week
People around the world take PBI’s Energy Challenge and sign our Petition for Polar Bears during a week focused on polar bear conservation. CBS Sunday Morning visits, too, filming a session that airs on Valentine’s Day 2016.

Paris Climate Talks
PBI teams up with TakingITGlobal to send three members of the Youth Arctic Coalition to the summit, where they represent Arctic wildlife and Indigenous peoples. Nearly 200 nations pledge to limit climate warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Den Detection Study
In late December, a PBI team launches a pilot project in northern Alaska to test the possibility of using Satellite Aperture Radar for detecting polar bear dens. PBI also supports population studies in Western and Southern Hudson Bay and a cortisol study involving wild and captive bears.

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~ Janet Stringer, Development Associate

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~ Barbara Nielsen, Director of Communications

“Our zoo and aquarium partners greatly expand our reach. Collectively, they reach millions of people every year who care about wildlife and conservation.”

~ Marissa Krouse, Programs Manager

“Your steadfast belief in our critical research adds to our understanding of polar bears and how we can help them. Together, we can assure a future for polar bears and people, too.”

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Sustaining a future for polar bears across the Arctic.

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