

## Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

### STORY

#### **Polar Bear Listed As Threatened Species, 05/14/08**

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/jan-june08/pbear\\_5-14.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/jan-june08/pbear_5-14.html)

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

### PROCEDURE

#### **1. WARM UP**

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

#### **2. MAIN ACTIVITY**

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

#### **3. DISCUSSION**

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

### INITIATING QUESTIONS

**1. What is the Endangered Species Act?**

**2. What does it mean if an animal is listed under the Endangered Species Act?**

**3. Where do polar bears live and what do they eat?**

### READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

**1. What did the U.S. government decide about the polar bear?**

#### ANSWER

Polar bears are now on the threatened species list after the Bush administration ruled Wednesday that their habitat near the Arctic Circle is deteriorating due to global warming.

**2. What did wildlife activists hope would happen as a result of the listing?**

#### ANSWER

Wildlife activists hoped the decision would require the government to protect the bears' habitat, including curbing greenhouse gas emissions and oil drilling in the Arctic.

**3. What provisions were put on the decision?**

#### ANSWER

But Wednesday's ruling, which came after months of delays, included provisions to prevent such measures, claiming that sea ice is melting because of global influences and that specific facilities or power plants could not be linked as the cause of the ice decline.

"Listing the polar bear as threatened can reduce avoidable losses of polar bears. But it should not open the door to use of the [Endangered Species Act] to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles, power plants, and other sources," said Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne.

**4. What is happening to Arctic sea ice?**

**ANSWER**

The summer of 2007 saw record melting of sea ice in the Arctic, according to the National Snow and Ice Data Center, shrinking more than 1 million acres. The annual sea ice in the Arctic is also melting earlier in the spring and forming later in the year.

**5. Why are polar bears dependent on sea ice?**

**ANSWER**

Polar bears hunt seals, their main source of food, by waiting near holes in ice for seals to come up for air.

When bears get stranded on land, they can't hunt and must live off of body fat, the Washington Post reported.

In 2007, the U.S. Geological Survey released a study concluding that two-thirds of the world's polar bears could be gone by 2050 because of the loss of ice.

"Our results have demonstrated that as the sea ice goes, so goes the polar bear," Steven Amstrup, a wildlife research biologist in Anchorage, Alaska, who led the study told the National Geographic.

**6. Why was there some controversy around the sale of off-shore drilling leases earlier this year?**

**ANSWER**

Just this year, the Department of Interior sold \$2.6 billion worth of off shore oil leases for areas of the Chukchi Sea northwest of Alaska.

The only two polar bear populations in the United States are in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas.

Democratic Senator Barbara Boxer of California, the chairwoman of the Environment and Public Works Committee, accused the department of delaying the polar bear decision to allow the sale of the leases. Interior Secretary Kempthorne denied the accusation, blaming delays on the complicated nature of the decision.

**7. Why are some Inuit concerned about the polar bear status decision?**

**ANSWER**

Some Eskimos, who are now largely known as the indigenous Inuit peoples, in Alaska and Canada argued against listing the polar bear, saying it could endanger their culture and livelihoods.

Inuit guides charge hunters up to \$30,000 for the privilege of shooting a polar bear.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

**1. Do you agree with the polar bear's new threatened status? Why or why not?**

**2. Should the listing force the government to curb greenhouse gas emissions and other causes of global warming, as activists had hoped, or is that outside of the scope of the Endangered Species Act, as the government has said? Explain your answer.**

**3. Should the Inuit be allowed to hunt polar bears? Does it matter if they kill bears for subsistence living or for profit? Why or why not?**

**4. Visit a local nature center or national forest and find out if there are endangered species in your area. What are they? What is affecting their habitats? Is there anything your school can do to help?**

**Extension Activity**

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.