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## **ALLIANCE URGES ACTION TO HELP PROTECT POLAR BEARS**

### *Marine Animals Threatened by Melting Sea Ice*

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – The Alliance of Marine Animal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA) is encouraging the U.S. government and the public to act now to protect polar bears from the life-threatening effects of melting sea ice in the arctic. In a letter to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the Alliance supported the FWS’ proposal to list polar bears as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

“The polar bears’ home is literally melting away. As a voice for the protection of marine mammals, we feel strongly that polar bears deserve the added protections provided by the Endangered Species Act,” said Alliance Executive Director Marilee Menard. The Alliance also offered the FWS its members’ collective expertise in polar bears and education resources. “We encourage the agency to take every step necessary to ensure polar bear populations remain healthy in to the future.”

The threat to polar bears is very real. For example, ice on the Hudson Bay is melting an average of three weeks earlier than it did in the mid-1970s. The early melting and decrease in the amount and the thickness of sea ice is having a devastating effect on polar bears by limiting their access to food, which can lead to reproductive problems, unhealthy offspring, and even starvation and drowning. Already the Hudson Bay polar bear population has declined 22 percent. An estimated 20,000 polar bears live in the wild.

“Alliance members are a critical link to educating the public about polar bears and other marine mammals,” Menard said. “We promote wildlife conservation by connecting people to animals cared for in our facilities. We feel strongly that the plight of polar bears must be addressed quickly and be based on scientific research.”

Menard said the Alliance also is concerned about other marine mammal species, including whales, seals and walrus, if the ice cap continues to disappear. “Studies indicate that continued climate change will not only have a negative impact on additional species of marine mammals, but also species of turtles, penguins and many other marine life forms,” she said.

Every year, more than 40 million children and adults visit Alliance member institutions around the world. “People only care about what they understand. Having a personal experience with a living, breathing animal is a powerful, proven way to promote conservation about polar bears and other marine mammals, as well as their habitats,” said Menard. “The education programs at

Alliance institutions inspire guests and promote conservation awareness and action, which are key elements in protecting polar bears at this precarious time.”

The Alliance also encourages concerned citizens to get involved and take action. The public can voice support for listing polar bears as a threatened species and initiating a scientific review of wild polar bears by sending comments to [polar\\_bear\\_finding@fws.gov](mailto:polar_bear_finding@fws.gov).

The Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums is an international association of marine life parks, aquariums, zoos, research facilities, and professional organizations dedicated to the highest standards of care for marine mammals and to their conservation in the wild through public education, scientific study, and wildlife presentations. For more information, visit the Alliance Web site at [www.ammpa.org](http://www.ammpa.org).

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