

2020



POLAR BEARS
INTERNATIONAL

Annual Impact Report





A time of innovation and reimagination.

2020, the year of the pandemic, began for our team with field staff working in remote Svalbard, Norway, on a polar bear den study just before the world began shutting down. At the same time, our senior director of conservation, Geoff York, was also in Norway, joining other delegates from the five polar bear nations at a meeting of the Polar Bear Range States.

All managed to squeak home just before borders started to close around the world. The 12 months that followed were challenging and unusual, leading us to change and innovate across the board as we adapted our conservation efforts in the face of COVID-19 restrictions, while also feeling deep compassion for the many people impacted.

Here are 10 highlights of our progress during that most extraordinary of years, accomplishments made possible because of your steadfast commitment to polar bear conservation.

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Global Connections

Igniting Curiosity, Inspiring Action

Our digital outreach allows teachers, students, and lifelong learners to follow their curiosity and become inspired to get involved. Through live broadcasts, educational webinars, and interactive events, we connected people around the globe with scientists and the Arctic ecosystem. Together, we built understanding and motivation to protect polar bears and their sea ice home.





GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

As schools closed in response to COVID-19 and teachers and students found themselves working from home, their screens lit up around the world as more and more tuned in to our [Tundra Connections webcasts](#). Thanks to your generosity, we were able to meet the huge surge in demand for online learning, rolling out a **new series of spring programs on polar bears** and the Arctic with partners including Discovery Education and Microsoft Education.

We also invested in new software to produce **live, television-quality broadcasts**, allowing us to mix in video clips, photographs, and panelists in multiple locations. This innovation will forever change the way we produce our Tundra Connections broadcasts. In 2020, **viewership of our educational programs skyrocketed by 900%** and watch times grew by over 1,000%.

TUNDRA CONNECTIONS & LIVE CAMS

In connection with [explore.org](#) & [Frontiers North Adventures](#):



13.4m

People reached via
Facebook Live

187k

Views of webcasts
and live chats

12.7m

Views of all
streaming content

30k

Registered
viewers

Youtube views were up over 500% in 2020. We posted and created 250% more videos than the previous year.

First Polar Bear Safe Community

Coexisting for the Future

© Tim Auer

In 2020, the community of Churchill, Manitoba, became the world's first certified Polar Bear Safe Community. Through collaboration with residents, government partners, and wildlife officers, we developed strategies to reduce conflict between people and polar bears. This milestone marks a hopeful path forward for coexistence across the Arctic.





FIRST POLAR BEAR SAFE COMMUNITY

Just before lockdowns prevented in-person gatherings, your support allowed us to take part in the first of several meetings in Churchill, Canada—the polar bear capital of the world—to help create the world’s first [polar bear safe community](#).

The new Polar Bear Safe Working Group is led by the town of Churchill, with strong support from our team. Its goal is to set recommendations and establish protocols that will **minimize encounters between polar bears and people**, allowing both to thrive. The framework will help other Arctic communities become “polar bear safe,” too, reducing conflict and helping humans and bears coexist.

Among the measures you helped fund in 2020 to enhance Churchill’s already robust safety measures were:

- Purchasing **15 polar-bear-safe waste bins** for deployment around town, a proven way to reduce visits from curious bears—with future purchases slated for other Arctic communities.
- Producing a **“polar bear safety” coloring book**, specific to Churchill, to help kids learn to live safely around bears; the [coloring books](#) are part of our wider conflict-reduction efforts, with versions tailored to Alaska, Greenland, and Russia to date, with more in the works.



Our SpotterRF Artificial Intelligence in Churchill now has the ability to identify polar bears with 90% confidence at ranges less than 200 meters.



Arctic Inspiration

Stories That Spark Action

Our storytelling efforts in 2020 helped share the beauty, resilience, and challenges of life in the Arctic. From films and photography to firsthand accounts from scientists and local experts, we brought the Arctic to audiences around the world. These stories inspire collective responsibility and remind us that protecting polar bears protects us all.

ARCTIC INSPIRATION

Our live cams of polar bears, beluga whales, and northern lights in partnership with explore.org regularly reach hundreds of thousands of people around the globe every year. Viewership soared even more due to pandemic lockdowns.

Because of you, we were able to ignite a sense of wonder and expand our community through **live footage showcasing the beauty of polar bears and their world**. In 2020, the cams reached an amazing 12,720,168 people, with the [Northern Lights Cam](#) becoming the third most popular cam on the explore.org website.

We also created a **“polar bear self-care”** series on our social channels to help relieve lockdown stress and provide inspiration, sharing polar bear photographs and calming messaging. As one follower said: “Thank you for providing such soothing content during this challenging time. Your posts bring a smile every day.”





Innovative Tracking Tags

Technology for Conservation

We advanced the development of non-invasive tracking technology to better monitor polar bears in a rapidly changing Arctic. These innovative tags allow researchers to collect valuable movement data without traditional collaring, improving animal welfare while deepening our understanding of behavior and habitat use. Every advancement brings us closer to safeguarding polar bears' future.

INNOVATIVE TRACKING TAGS

Sticking a GPS tag to a polar bear's fur: now there's an idea worth exploring. Thanks to your generosity, this novel approach to tracking polar bears moved **out of the lab and into the Arctic**.

3M, the company that invented Post-It Notes, worked in partnership with our research team to create **four prototype Burr on Fur tags**. We began field-testing them last autumn on a sample of wild polar bears in Western Hudson Bay.

Tests are continuing this year with polar bears in zoos that belong to our [Arctic Ambassador Center](#) network. Not only is the approach **minimally invasive**, but it will also allow scientists to study two important age/sex groups—adult male polar bears and young polar bears—that can't be tracked with traditional collars.

Five wild polar bears *were tagged in the fall of 2020 with Burr on Fur prototypes.*



WATCH OUR BURR ON FUR VIDEO



*Polar Bears International's Arctic Ambassador Centers include more than **50 zoos and aquariums** from 24 U.S States, 4 Canadian provinces, Austria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, and Belgium. We welcomed two new AACs in 2020, **Zoo De La Fleche** in France and **Pairi Daiza** in Belgium.*



Policy Meetings

Science at the Table

Our team shared critical research findings with policymakers and conservation leaders around the world. From Arctic Council meetings to climate forums, we ensured that polar bear science remained central to discussions about climate action and wildlife management. Your support gave polar bears a voice where it matters most.



POLICY MEETINGS

As a science-based organization with staff scientists renowned in the polar bear world, Polar Bears International regularly **participates in international meetings** related to polar bear conservation, joining other representatives from the five polar bear nations (Canada, Greenland, Norway, Russia, and the U.S.). These groups **help set research and conservation priorities** for polar bears across the circumpolar Arctic.

In 2020, your support allowed our team to take part in a key meeting of the [Polar Bear Range States](#), including a break-out group on reducing conflict between polar bears and people. A second meeting, a gathering of the [International Union for the Conservation of Nature Polar Bear Specialist Group](#), was originally scheduled for the summer of 2020 but postponed due to the pandemic. It was held instead as a virtual gathering in June of 2021, with two of our **staff scientists playing an active role in discussions and policy goals**.



Svalbard Den Study

Uncovering the Secrets of Maternal Dens

In collaboration with Norwegian partners, our researchers used advanced thermal imaging technology to locate hidden polar bear dens under the snow. This work helps identify areas needing protection and informs best practices for industry operating in polar bear habitat. Each discovery strengthens efforts to safeguard mothers and cubs during their most vulnerable time.





SVALBARD DEN STUDY

For more than a decade, our team has **studied polar bear moms and cubs at den sites**, first in Alaska and more recently in Svalbard, using solar-powered cameras to record the behavior of newly emerged families. Denning is the most vulnerable time in a polar bear's life, and researchers hope to better understand the needs of moms and cubs to aid in their conservation.

In 2020, our den fieldwork took place in February just before the world began shutting down, but our 2021 season was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. Thanks to your generosity, our team used the time to focus their efforts on **improving the cameras and software used to run the den-study cameras**. The goal was to build a small, lightweight system that field staff anywhere in the Arctic could deploy after some very basic training.

As staff member BJ Kirschhoffer said, "By the end of this year, we should have a **custom-built recording system that could be sent to any denning area**, from Russia to Canada to Greenland and Alaska—and I definitely consider that time well spent."

[See our Q&A on these Innovations](#)

290k

Video files & images taken by
our four Mini Den Cam systems
& Backup Reconyx trail cameras
at the four sites

4

Maternal den sites
monitored

WATCH OUR
MATERNAL DEN STUDY VIDEO



Vote for Polar Bears

Your Voice, Their Future

Through our “Vote for Polar Bears” campaign, we encouraged individuals to consider climate action at the ballot box. By providing tools and resources, we empowered supporters to advocate for policies that protect sea ice and the Arctic ecosystem. Every vote for the planet is a vote for polar bears.



VOTE FOR



POLAR BEARS



polarbearsinternational.org

VOTE FOR POLAR BEARS

The fall of 2020 brought key elections in many countries around the globe, giving us an opportunity to reimagine our future. Your generosity allowed our communications team to **launch a [Vote for Polar Bears campaign](#)** to encourage voting and remind moms, dads, grandparents, and young people of the importance of voting with the climate in mind.

So what does “Vote for Polar Bears” mean? It means casting our votes for leaders who will prioritize action on climate warming, ensuring a better future for polar bears and all of us. It means **voting in every national, regional, and local election, no matter how small**. And it means voting for and supporting leaders who will make policy decisions that put us on a **swift transition to renewable energy** and away from a reliance on fossil fuels.

The campaign proved so popular that we plan to pulse it out at regular intervals. We’ve also added a new staff position focused on advocacy and policy to step up engagement in this area.

Graphic: © Peppermint Narwhal, Top Photo: © Emily Ringer / Polar Bears International, Bottom Photo: © Søren Koch



Key Research Papers

Science That Drives Solutions

Our scientists published groundbreaking studies on polar bear health, maternal dens, and the impacts of sea ice loss. These peer-reviewed papers form the foundation of global polar bear conservation strategies. By sharing data openly, we help ensure decisions are guided by the best available science.



KEY RESEARCH PAPERS

Polar Bears International's renowned scientists regularly publish papers that add to our understanding of polar bears and help inform policy decisions, a unique approach in the nonprofit world.

In 2020, your commitment to polar bear research led to the **publication of six papers co-authored by staff scientists and partners**, including a study examining noise transmission into polar bear maternity dens.

Four of the six research papers have direct implications on the last-minute attempts by the former U.S. administration to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—a critical polar bear denning area—to oil and gas development. Another showed [the effectiveness of bear spray](#) under Arctic conditions. The last publication was **a study that answered the key question of when polar bears in different parts of the Arctic will start to disappear** unless we greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions; this paper garnered global media coverage.

All were excellent examples of Polar Bears International's strong partnerships with government, academic, and zoo partners, as well as our **focus on research with conservation impacts**.



Graphic: © Peppermint Narwhal, Photos: © Jenny Wong



WATCH MORE



Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Defending a Sacred Landscape

We joined conservation partners in advocating for the protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—one of the most important polar bear denning areas on Earth. Our science and outreach efforts highlighted the ecological and cultural value of this irreplaceable place. Together, we stood for the wild heart of the Arctic.

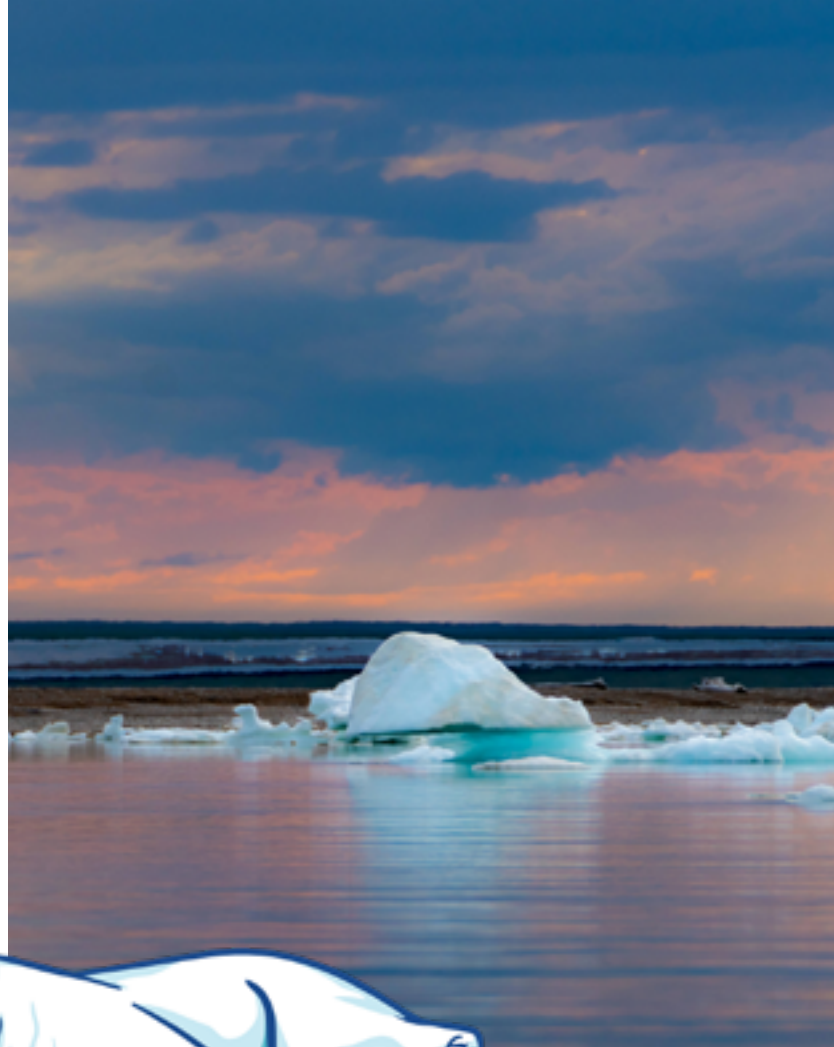


ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Sea ice loss from climate warming is the single biggest threat to polar bears but we must also do all that we can to ensure as many bears as possible thrive now. That's why we focus efforts on protecting moms and cubs during the risky denning period, giving every single cub the best possible chance of survival.

Thanks to your support, our **staff scientists provided in-depth commentary to U.S. government agencies on the threats posed to denning polar bear families** from proposed oil and gas activity in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, based on our [decades-long history of den research](#). The refuge is a key denning area for the threatened Southern Beaufort Sea population; this is critical habitat where every den counts. The data gained over years of fieldwork will be a major factor should companies push to open the refuge to drilling despite the established risks to moms and cubs.

In 2021, we plan to **focus efforts on working to ensure the Arctic Refuge is forever protected** as a wilderness area, safeguarding moms and cubs for generations to come. We are also developing [new den-detection technology](#) to help keep moms and cubs across the Arctic out of harm's way.



Media Outreach

Raising Awareness, Amplifying Impact

Through press coverage, interviews, and partnerships with major outlets, we brought polar bear conservation to millions of people worldwide. Our experts provided trusted, science-based information on climate change and Arctic ecosystems. Every story shared helps build the public will to act for polar bears.

MEDIA OUTREACH

In 2020, Polar Bears International appeared in over **2,000 unique publications**, including BBC News, CNN, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Guardian, Reuters, Smithsonian, and more.

The press coverage added to our reputation as a global leader in polar bear conservation and helped bring the polar bear's story—including the threats the bears face and the solutions at hand—to a worldwide audience.

From interviews with staff scientists on research findings and conservation threats to features on awareness campaigns like our Polar Bear Week, the media stories helped **keep polar bears and the Arctic top of mind**.

In 2021, we **plan to launch a new website** with a section that highlights recent press coverage, further expanding our impact and reach.

Read some of our stories here: [BBC World News](#), [Smithsonian Magazine](#), [The Washington Post](#), [The New York Times](#), [Reuters](#), [Lonely Planet](#), [Euronews](#), [The Times](#), [Yale Climate Connections](#), [The Economic Times](#), [CBS News](#)

Polar Bears International appeared in 2,054 unique publications, including BBC, NY Times, CNN, and more. Estimated aggregate readership / media value: 5.9 billion / \$20.13 million.

Climate change: Two polar ice caps revealed to have completely melted in a span of three years

Arctic Sea Ice Fails to Refreeze by Late October, Setting a New Record

At this rate, the Arctic will experience its first ice-free summer as early as 2035

Global Warming Is Driving Polar Bears Toward Extinction, Researchers Say

By century's end, polar bears worldwide could become nearly extinct as a result of shrinking sea ice in the Arctic if climate change continues unabated, scientists said.

This live-cam helps scientists in the Arctic study beluga whales

SCIENCE

Climate change on track to wipe out polar bears by end of century, study warns

Climate and Environment

Arctic drilling operators can't accurately pinpoint polar bear dens — which means they can't avoid destroying them

A study determined surveys using aerial imaging are unreliable and could lead to the deaths of Alaskan polar bears, threatened on the endangered species list

Remote Canadian town programs radar to spot approaching polar bears

Climate change: Polar bears could be lost by 2100

Testimonials

Voices of Hope and Action

Supporters, scientists, and community members shared how Polar Bears International has inspired their commitment to conservation. Their words reflect the power of collective effort and the ripple effect of education and empathy. Together, these voices create a chorus for change in a warming world.



"You don't need to end things with just one study. We need to commit to a particular aspect of research for 10, 20, 20 years because you need to have that duration to get a reliable result" -Dr. Ian Stirling, Scientific Advisor

"I love and admire polar bears and their Arctic habitat. I am also alarmed by the climate crisis. Because of Polar Bears International's research, outreach and action, it is the perfect organization for me."
- Leslie Ewy, Donor

"We respect and appreciate Polar Bears International's focus on research and action to sustain polar bears and preserve their habitat for future generations. We appreciate that Polar Bears International, unlike many other not-for-profits, utilizes a majority of our giving to fulfill its primary mission."
- Carlton and Leslie Williams, Donors

"Simply put, if the conservation of polar bears and the effects of climate warming are a concern for you, there is no more effective organization anywhere that you can support, at whatever level that you are comfortable with, than Polar Bears International." – Dr. Ian Stirling, Professor Emeritus, University of Alberta and Research Scientist Emeritus, Environment and Climate Change Canada

"A donor can make a difference, I feel I make a difference." -Freddy Gamble, Board Member

A photograph of two polar bears on a snowy, icy surface. One bear is sitting upright in the background, looking towards the camera. The other bear is lying down in the foreground, also looking towards the camera. The bears have thick, white fur and black noses. The background is a soft-focus view of the icy terrain.

Arctic Circle Legacy Protectors

Ensuring a Future for Generations

Our Arctic Circle Legacy Protectors are a dedicated community of supporters who have included Polar Bears International in their long-term plans. Their commitment helps secure lasting funding for research, education, and advocacy. Through their legacy, the Arctic—and the polar bears that call it home—will be protected for years to come.

ARCTIC CIRCLE LEGACY PROTECTORS

Polar Bears International has launched a new program called the Arctic Circle—a legacy giving program that ensures your investment in the Arctic continues for generations to come.

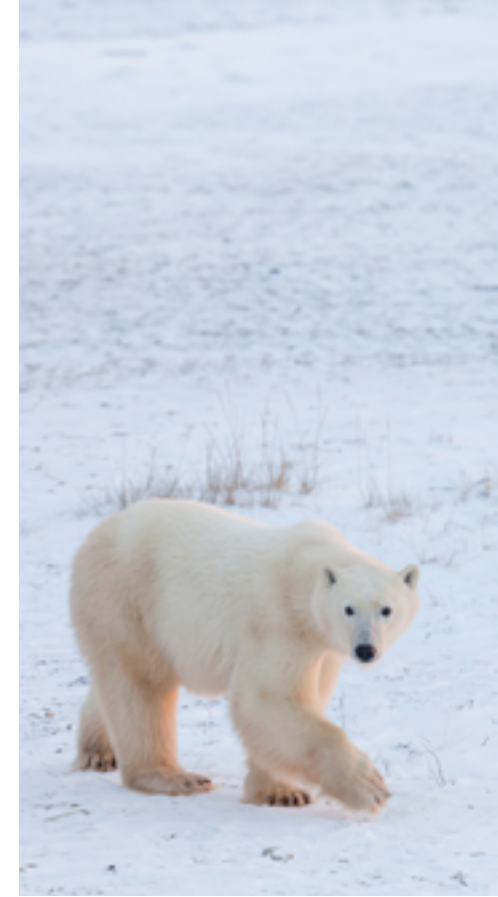
Make a lasting impact on the Arctic by supporting Polar Bears International through:

- Appreciated securities
- Gifts in your will
- Retirement funds
- Life insurance payments

If you have already included polar bears in your legacy giving, please let us know. We'd like to include you in our Arctic Circle where you can stay informed about special events and news about the progress we're making together on behalf of the world's polar bears.

For more information contact our development staff at fundraising@pbears.org or at 406-586-9416.

Provide for an inheritance that your family can live on—a **sustainable planet**. As part of the Arctic Circle, you can make an impact for generations to come.



“Dick and I don’t have children. But the legacy we want to leave to the world of your children and theirs is one that supports healthy ecosystems for all species—including humankind. We have seen for ourselves the ominous link between the survival of polar bears as a species and our own. That’s why our estate plans include a bequest to Polar Bears International. We believe that preserving polar bears is about more than saving an especially impressive species. It’s also a critical step toward preserving the planet for generations to come.”

- Valerie Beck Polar Bears International Board Member

2020 Financials

Leading by Example

Your generosity makes so much possible for polar bears—
now and in the future. Every dollar you give is used
thoughtfully and strategically to maximize impact for polar
bears, people, and our planet.





REVENUE

Contributions – with donor restrictions: \$30,792

Contributions – unrestricted: \$1,438,510

In-Kind: \$265,280

Grants: \$1,465,906

Events – net of donor benefits: \$178,358

Total Revenue: \$3,378,846

EXPENSES

Programs: \$1,840,089

Management and General: \$271,821

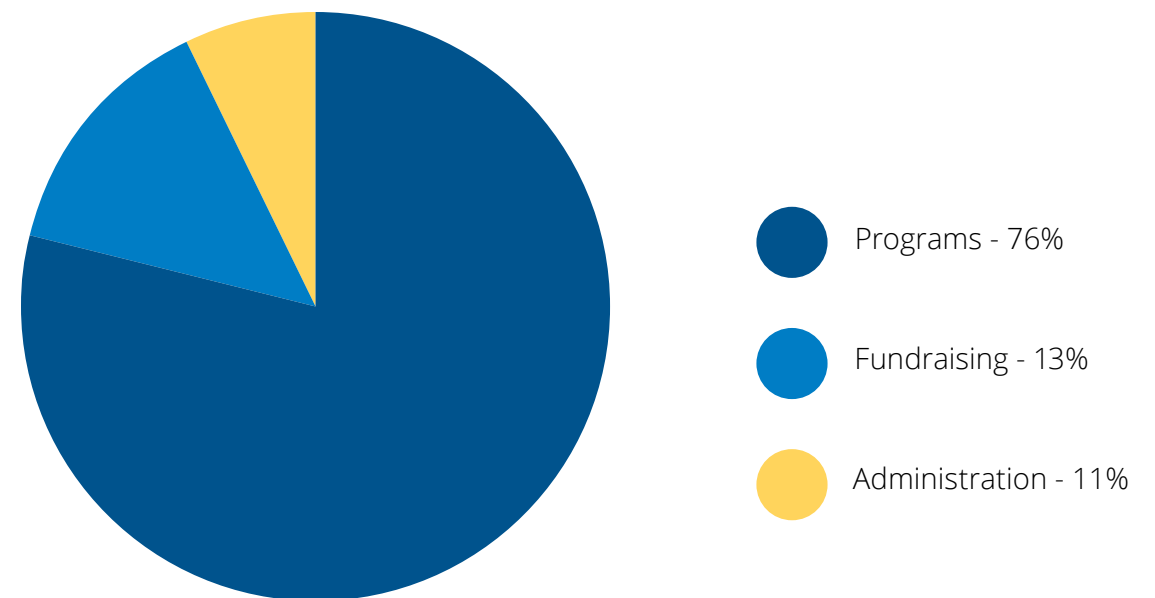
Fundraising: \$303,743

Total Expenses: \$2,415,653

Other Income (Expense): \$58,866

Changes in net assets: \$1,022,059

Net assets at the end of the year: \$5,314,005



For any research projects that Polar Bears International helps fund, we do not pay overhead costs, a policy that ensures funds go directly to the projects and polar bear conservation.

Note: Our program expenses were down in 2020 due to pandemic-related restrictions on field research and other initiatives requiring travel, but our administrative and development numbers stayed roughly the same compared with previous years. This impacted the ratio of our expenses for programs versus administrative and fundraising costs.

2020 Board of Directors

Leading by Example

We could not do the work we do without those that guide Polar Bears International. Our Board of Directors help guide our strategic direction, work with management, and represent the best of us.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

John Kelleher – Chair

Amy Moore – Vice-Chair, Secretary

Steve Dolman – CFO

Richard P. Beck

Valerie Beck

Kristin Biniek

Federica Gamble

Patrick Keeley

Dani Reiss

Kevin D. Spreekmeester



Sponsors & Donors

Making Our Work Possible

Recognizing champions for polar bears—honoring those who make our work possible. We are deeply grateful to all our donors, including our Polar Bear Patrons, Arctic Ambassador Centers, corporate sponsors, foundations, fundraisers, zoos, and partner organizations, who powered our work in 2021. Your generosity sustains a lasting impact for polar bears and the Arctic they call home.

PLATINUM

CANADA GOOSE®



SILVER



NORTHERN LIGHTS



FRIENDS OF THE BEAR

Cloversoft
David Yurman Enterprises LLC
Polar Bear Products



POLAR BEAR AFFAIR

Air Canada
Barclays Capital Canada Inc.
Canada Goose Inc.
Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC)
CJ Graphics
David Yurman Enterprises LLC
Deloitte
Feather Industries
Frontiers North Adventures
IGan Partners
Mantella Corporation
Maple Leafs Sports and Entertainment
National Post
Northwood Family Office
Harry Rosen
Sporting Life
Torkin Manes
The Toronto-Dominion Bank (TD Bank)

FIELD SUPPORT

Calm Air International Ltd.
Canada Goose Inc.
Churchill Northern Studies Centre
Town of Churchill
explore.org
Frontiers North Adventures
Holz Construction
Hudson Bay Helicopters
Hudson Bay Port Company
Lakeview Signature, Trademark Collection by Wyndham – Winnipeg
Manitoba Sustainable Development
MTS Allstream
Norwegian Polar Institute
San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance
Sea North Tours
Tamarack Rentals
Tundra Inn
The University Centre in Svalbard
Wapusk Adventures
Wapusk National Park
Wa'tchee Lodge



FOUNDATIONS & INDIVIDUALS (\$25,000+)

The Annenberg Foundation
Benevity Community Impact Fund Donors
Burns Foundation Fund – The Winnipeg Foundation
Sunir Chandaria and Charissa DeKoninck-Chandaria
Facebook Fundraisers and Donors
Ms. Frederica Gamble
Google Adwords
The LaFetra Foundation
Dani Reiss
Rosen/Jackson Charitable Fund, The Jewish Foundation of
Greater Toronto
San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance
Small Business Administration Payroll Protection Program
Wildlands Nature and Education Fund



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Thank you for all that you do for polar bears.

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