



BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

PERTAINING TO THE PRESENCE OF POLAR BEARS IN
QUÉBEC NATIONAL PARKS



Photographs : - Larry Master
 - Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs

DIRECTION DES PARCS NATIONAUX
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PREAMBLE

This document applies to the Kativik Regional Government (KRG) and to companies that hold a contract with the ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs (MFFP) for the offer of activities in the national parks of Québec north of 55th parallel. It introduces the basic principles that will allow for maximum safety in case of encounters with a polar bear.

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BACKGROUND

Since April 13, 2017, Section 23 of the Parks Regulation allows employees of the KRG and employees of other companies holding a contract with the Minister of Forests, Wildlife and Parks for the offer of activities in a National park (hereinafter referred to as «contracting party» as defined in Sections 8.1 and 8.1.1 of the Parks Act) to carry a firearm in order to ensure their safety and that of the persons present in a national park in case of a possible encounter with a polar bear. This provision applies only to parks north of the 55th parallel, the polar bear only rarely venturing farther south. At present, four Québec national parks are affected by this regulatory amendment. These are the Pingualuit, Kuururjuaq, Tursujuq and Uliittaniujalik national parks.

Given that the polar bear may pose a threat to human life, it was appropriate to allow and regulate the carrying of firearms for certain persons in a national park in order to prevent the risk of injury or death that may be caused to humans by the polar bear. This guide has been developed to support the KRG and contracting parties in applying this new regulatory provision and to provide preventive solutions. The document sets out, among other things, best practices for minimizing the risk of encounters between humans and polar bears, as well as the actions to be taken if there are encounters.

An animal to be respected

The polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*) is the largest land carnivore in North America. Males can reach a weight of 800 to 1000 kg. Females do not usually exceed 400 kg. The polar bear can measure 3 meters from the muzzle to the tip of the tail. A strong, fast and agile animal on land and on ice, the polar bear is also specialist in swimming. It has an exceptional sense of smell, and its eyesight is comparable to that of humans. Although it is usually fearful by nature, its predators' curiosity sometimes leads it to approach humans and their encampments. Its favourite prey is the ringed seal, but it can also attack birds, mammals or even humans.

Although it is not in danger of extinction, the polar bear has been considered vulnerable since 2009 in Québec and in 2011, obtained, the status of special concern under the Federal species at risk Act. Finally, the polar bear hunt is reserved exclusively for beneficiaries of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA) and the Northeastern Québec Agreement (NEQA) (hereinafter «Northern Québec Agreements»).

The rights and advantages granted to the beneficiaries of these Northern Québec agreements are maintained in national parks. Consequently, the Cree, Inuit and Naskapi beneficiaries are free to travel, hunt, fish and trap in parks located in the areas in which these Agreements apply.



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CONDITIONS TO BENEFIT FROM THE RIGHT TO CARRY ARMS

To take advantage of the right to carry firearms provided for in the Parks Regulation, employees of the KRG or a contracting party must comply with the following conditions:

- Hold a firearms license issued under the Firearms Act of Canada. To this end, the Act requires that all persons who own or use firearms be licensed. In Québec, to complete a firearms possession and acquisition license application form, the hunter's certificate (or certificate of completion) is required. These certificates are only issued upon demonstration of successful completion of the Canadian Firearms Safety Course;
- Be hired and appointed by the KRG or by a contracting party as responsible for their own safety or that of persons present in the park;
- Have read and adhere to the contents of this best practices guide. This guide is available in French, English, Inuktitut, Cree and Naskapi;
- Use an unrestricted firearm. According to the Canadian Storage, Display, Transportation and Handling of Firearms by Individuals Regulations, an unrestricted firearm is a firearm that is neither a prohibited firearm, nor a restricted firearm;
- Use a firearm of a calibre sufficient to provide protection from the polar bear, namely calibres specified for large game by the Regulation respecting hunting and the Act respecting the development and conservation of wildlife, with the exception of shotguns and muzzle-loading rifles:
 - a) shotguns of a calibre equal to or greater than 6 mm (0.243 inch) used with center-fire cartridges;
 - b) 10 and 12 gauge shotgun used with single bullet cartridges.
- Inform national park management in writing before entering a national park;
- Ensure the proper working order of the firearm they intend to use to protect human life against polar bears;
- Comply with the Storage, Display, Transportation and Handling of Firearms by Individuals Regulations.



BEST PRACTICES TO AVOID AN ENCOUNTER WITH A POLAR BEAR

Preventive management aims to reduce the risk of interactions between humans and a polar bear and to use scare tactics or, as a last resort, killing. For this purpose, it is recommended that the KRG employee or a contracting party have taken supervisor training to protect human life against polar bears¹ and be familiar with the territory they will be monitoring.

Whenever possible, the KRG employee or contracting party should avoid places regularly frequented by polar bears. For this purpose, it is strongly recommended to contact the park director be aware of the times of the year when a polar bear encounter is more likely.

A summary of preventive actions is listed here (adapted from Parks Canada, 2017):

- Be knowledgeable about polar bear behavior. To this end, it is suggested that a Polar Bear Safety Information Session be held with visitors so that everyone is aware of how to behave when encountering bears;
- Know where bears or signs of their presence have been seen recently;
- Avoid bear feeding areas;
- Never approach the den of a polar bear;
- Be alert and attentive to what may happen in the surroundings;
- Move in groups and remain close to companions at all times and avoid areas where visibility is limited;
- Never approach a bear for any reason;
- Never approach a carcass or newly killed animal (polar bears protect their food);
- Never feed polar bears;
- Use properly closed bags and containers, or bear-proof containers to store food and garbage. Pack out your garbage;
- Eliminate or reduce to a minimum smells emanating from people or from campsites;
- Choose a safe camping spot. Avoid camping on beaches and islands, along the coasts and in the corridors of travel frequented by bears. Before setting up a camp, check for bear tracks or any other signs of bears in the area. Camp inland, on a hill or cliff from where it is possible to have a clear view of the surroundings. Cook in an area visible from your tent, but at least 50 meters away from it. Set up tents in rows rather than in a circle, at least 5 meters apart from each other. In this way, if a bear enters your encampment, it will not feel surrounded or threatened and it will have a way to escape.

¹ For more information about supervisor training, please contact the KRG.



ACTIONS TO TAKE IN CASE OF ENCOUNTER WITH A POLAR BEAR

In the event of an encounter with a polar bear, the KRG employee or contracting party must do everything possible to make it flee or scare it before deciding to kill it. For this purpose, the diagram in Appendix 2 summarizes the actions to be undertaken.

There are several ways to try to scare a threatening animal: air horns and detonators fired with a gun or a pen-gun, a pepper spraying device, etc.

It should be noted that for that purpose the use of tranquilizers is not authorized in Northern Québec under an agreement entered into in 1984 between the government of Québec and the Nunavik Hunting Fishing Trapping Association.



Photo 1. Larry Master

If, despite scare tactics, an interaction with a polar bear occurs, following these general instructions (adapted from Parks Canada, 2017) is recommended:

- *KEEP CALM and make sure you are safe;*
- *Check if all members of your group are present;*
- *Call for help using a radio or satellite phone (get the relevant contact information from the park management before your visit) and stay on the line to give first responders or managers any other information they might need;*
- *Move away quietly;*
- *Prepare your weapon;*
- *Analyze the behavior of the bear and the environment.*

Polar bear behavior

If the bear is not aware of your presence:

- *Back up without making any noise and leave the area, either by retracing your steps or by giving a wide berth to the area the animal is in. Avoid running, moving fast, or making gestures that may attract the bear's attention;*
- *If possible, stay downwind to prevent the bear from picking up your scent and presence;*
- *Do not take your eyes off of it.*

If the bear has seen you and is curious:

- It moves slowly, stopping frequently;
- Stands on its hind legs and sniffs the air;
- It keeps its head up and its ears forward or to the side;
- Moves its head first to one side, then the other;
- Attempts to pick up your scent by getting around you to place itself downwind and approach you from behind ...

TAKE THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

- Swing your arms over your head and speak in a deep voice;
- Help it understand that you are a human;
- Move slowly upwind so the bear can pick up your scent.

If the bear seems to want to stalk you or hunt you:

- It follows you or circles you;
- Walks straight to you, resolutely, without seeming frightened;
- Returns after you have made it flee;
- Looks hurt, old or thin ...

TAKE THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

- Prepare to defend yourself;
- Gather your group together and make noise;
- DO NOT RUN;
- Prepare to use bear-scaring devices;
- Prepare your weapon.

If you have surprised the bear while it was near to you, if the animal is agitated or seems to feel threatened:

- If it blows, gasps, whistles, grunts or snaps his jaws;
- If it is stamping;
- If it looks someone right in the eye;
- If it lowers its head and lays his ears back ...

TAKE THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

- Avoid threatening actions: Avoid shouting and sudden movements, as this risks provoking the animal. Refrain from whining or whistling in the presence of a polar bear: this could lead it to attack;
- Do not look the bear directly in the eyes;
- Back up slowly. DO NOT RUN;
- Prepare to use bear-scaring devices such as air horns and detonators fired with a gun or a pen-gun, a pepper spraying device.

If a bear rushes you:

- Polar bears rarely pretend to attack, so assume that they will attack and react accordingly;
- Stand your ground and defend yourself. Try to hit or shoot the bear in sensitive areas, especially the face and nose, if possible.



Photo 2. Larry Master



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ACTIONS TO UNDERTAKE WHEN A POLAR BEAR IS KILLED

- The Appendix 1 form must be completed and sent to the National Park management, the Kuujuaq wildlife protection officers and the Nunavik Research Center.
- Under section 68 of the Act respecting the conservation and development of wildlife and the regulation respecting animals that must be declared (C-61.1, r.4), when a polar bear is killed a person shall, without delay, declare the fact to a wildlife protection officer and if he requires, deliver it to him so he may confiscate it.
- Wildlife protection officers can then return the carcass of the animal to Northern Québec Agreements beneficiaries for disposal.
- All carcasses of animals must be relocated to a remote location to avoid attracting scavengers.
- Body parts may be kept for the purposes of demonstration or education in National parks upon approval and after declaration to the wildlife conservation officers.
- No donation of body parts will be carried out, including requests for research purposes, or expert analysis.
- If the person who killed the bear is a beneficiary of Northern Québec Agreements, they may keep the killed animal. However, it is strongly advised that this person declare the animal to wildlife conservation officers.



Photo 3. Larry Master

Annexe 1 FORM

TO BE FILLED OUT WHEN THERE HAS BEEN AN ENCOUNTER WITH A POLAR BEAR IN A QUÉBEC NATIONAL PARK



Identification of duty person

Last and first names of employee: _____ Phone: (____) _____

Name of employer: _____ Employee firearm licence number: _____

Firearm model and caliber: _____



Polar bear sighting or signs of presence

Observe in the National Park: ☐ des Pingualuit ☐ Kuururjuaq ☐ Tursujuq ☐ Ulittaniujalik

Date (YY-MM-DD, HH:MM): _____ GPS coordinates: _____

Description of the place: _____

Description of the observation: _____

Description of animal(s) (include recording information such as markings, radio collar, tattoo, specific designation, etc):



Type of intervention

☐ Observation of the behavior ☐ Scaring action ☐ Use of firearms

☐ The bear has fled
☐ Was injured
☐ Was shot

Likely cause of the attack - (female protecting cubs, bear surprised or protecting a food source, etc.):

Description of injuries (sequence of actions undertaken, number of people involved, injuries to the animal or to humans, damage to infrastructure and to material goods):

Other relevant information (other witnesses):

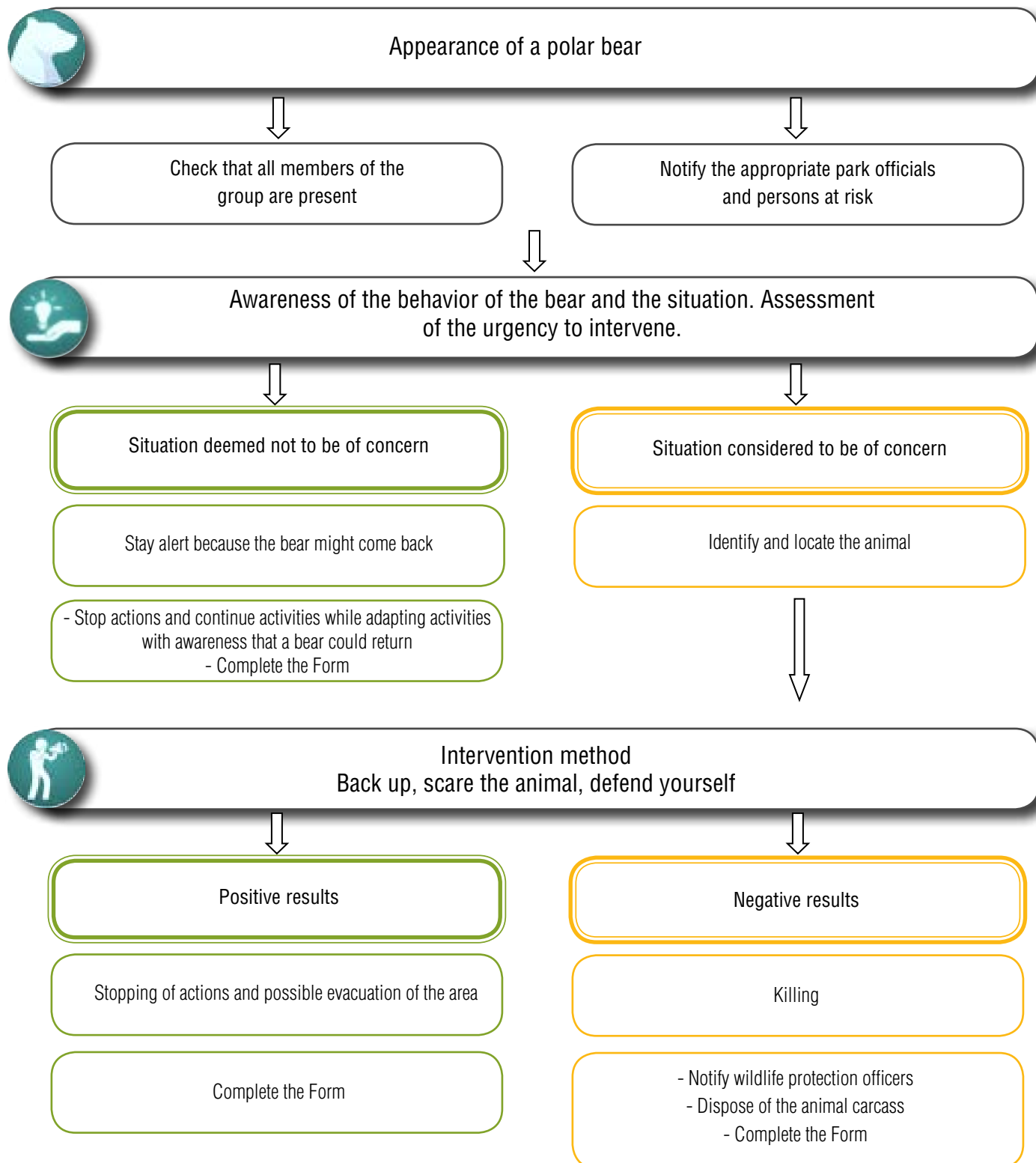
Transmission of the form: 1) to the leadership of the national park in question
 3) to the Nunavik research centre in Kuujuaq

2) to Kuujuaq wildlife protection officers

In all cases, transmit this form to the National park director who will then forward it to the appropriate authorities. The parks may be contacted at the following phone numbers: Parc national des Pingualuit: 819-338-3282, Parc national Kuururjuaq and Parc national Ulittaniujalik: 819-337-5454, Parc national Tursujuq: 819-331-5454, to Kuujuaq wildlife protection officers: 1 866-237-2442. S.O.S. Poaching: 1 800-463-2191, Kuujuaq Nunavik research centre: 819-964-2925.



Annexe 2 STAGES OF INTERVENTION



Annexe 3 FOR MORE INFORMATION...

Contact the following public bodies:

- Kativik Regional Government, Renewable Resources, Environment, Lands and Parks Department, Kuujjuaq. Phone: 819-964-2961.
- Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs, Direction des parcs nationaux, Québec. Phone: 418-627-6356.
- Ministère des Forêt, de la Faune et des Parcs, Direction de la protection de la faune, Kuujjuaq. Phone: 819-964-2791.
- Kuujjuaq Nunavik research centre, Phone: 819-964-2925

Or consult the websites and publications listed below:

BOURBONNAIS, N. (2011). Visite d'un ours blanc (*Ursus maritimus*) à Blanc-Sablon. Ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune, Direction de l'expertise de la faune, des forêts et du territoire de la Côte-Nord. 14 p.

CANADIAN LEGISLATION (2017). www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca

NUNAVUT PARKS SERVICE FIREARMS PERMITTING POLICY (2017). www.gov.nu.ca

PARKS CANADA, (2017). Safety in polar bear country. www.parkscanada.gc.ca

SÛRETÉ DU QUÉBEC (2017). www.sq.qc.ca

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