

CANADA 11: POLAR BEAR PASS NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA, NUNAVUT TERRITORY

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

Effective Date of Information: The information provided is taken from the List of Canadian Wetlands Designated as of International Importance, May 1982 and updated by the Canadian Wildlife Service – Prairie and northern Region in October 2001.

Reference: 11th Ramsar site designated in Canada.

Name and Address of Compiler: Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada, Suite 301, 5204 50th Avenue, Yellowknife, N.W.T., X1A 1E2.

Date of Ramsar Designation: 24 May 1982.

Geographical Coordinates: 75°43'N., 98°40'W.

General Location: Situated on Bathurst Island, Queen Elizabeth Islands, Nunavut Territory; northwest of the settlement of Resolute.

Area: 262 400 ha.

Wetland Type (Ramsar Classification System): Marine and coastal wetlands: Type D: rocky marine shores; Type G - intertidal mud, sand, and salt flats. Inland wetlands: Type N - seasonal and irregular rivers and streams; Type O - permanent freshwater lakes; Type Sp - permanent freshwater ponds, marshes, and swamps; Type Ss - seasonal freshwater ponds and marshes; Type U - peatlands; Type Vt - tundra wetlands.

Altitude: Range is from sea level to 60 m.

Overview (Principal Characteristics):

Physical Features (Geology, Geomorphology, Hydrology, Soils, Water, Climate): Maximum water depth of lakes is 2.0 m.

Ecological Features (Habitats, Vegetation): Wetland habitats in the site are small inlets, lowland rivers, brooks, fresh oligotrophic lakes, peat bogs and temporary waters from snowmelt. Marshes, meadows and adjacent slopes provide feeding sites for birds and other wildlife.

Land Tenure:

(a) **Site:** The area is federal Crown land.

(b) **Surrounding Area:** Federal Crown land.

Conservation Measures Taken: Designated as a National Wildlife Area in 1990 and protected under regulations of the *Canada Wildlife Act*.

Conservation Measures Proposed: The boundaries of the area are under review.

Current Land Use/Activities in:

(a) Site: Mining, oil exploration and drilling permits were issued many years ago. Surface and subsurface rights to exploration and development were withdrawn prior to the area being created a national wildlife area. The area is subject to co-management agreements under the *Nunavut Land Claim Agreement*. Land use permits are issued by the Canadian Wildlife Service under the National Wildlife Area Regulations of the *Canada Wildlife Act*. Studies of Peary caribou in this area have been conducted by the Canadian Wildlife Service. A long-term ecological research station is situated on the site but is not active.

(b) Surrounding Area: Territorial Land Use Regulations are in effect on federal Crown land. Screening of projects under the Nunavut Impact Review Board is undertaken with certificates issued by the Nunavut Planning Commission. Permission is required to gain access to Inuit-owned lands.

Threats to Integrity of:

(a) Site: None at present.

(b) Surrounding Area: None at present.

Hydrological/Physical Values:

Social/Cultural Values:

Noteworthy Fauna: At least 53 species of birds, 30 nesting, occur in the region including important populations of King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*, Greater Snow Goose *Chen caerulescens atlanticus*, gulls, jaegers and shorebirds, particularly Sanderlings *Crocethia alba*. Atlantic Brant *Branta bernicla brota* that breed here, winter in Ireland after staging in Iceland. Abundant insects provide food for large numbers of shorebirds including *Pluvialis squatarola*, *Calidris canutus*, *Calidris alba*, and the most abundant species *Phalaropus fulicaria*. Other nesting birds include *Gavia stellata*, Greater Snow Goose, Atlantic Brant, King Eider, *Clangula hyemalis*, and three species of *Stercorarius*.

The area contains eight species of mammals, the most numerous being lemming *Lemmus* and *Synaptomys* spp., Arctic fox *Alopex lagopus*, muskox *Oxibos moschatus*, wolf *Lupus arcticus* and Peary caribou *Rangifer pearyi*. Polar bear *Ursus maritimus* regularly use the area in the spring and summer, and occasionally den here. Both Peary Caribou and Polar Bear are species recognized with some level of concern by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Offshore are also found marine mammals such as Ringed Seals *Phoca hispida* and Walrus *Odobenus rosmarus*.

Noteworthy Flora:

Current Scientific Research and Facilities: The National Museum of Natural Sciences in Ottawa, with the assistance of the Polar Continental Shelf Project, has operated a research station in the area since 1968 to study the life histories and behavioral adaptations of Arctic animals. Over 100 publications on the research of the area have been completed.

Current Conservation Education:

Current Recreation and Tourism:

Management Authority:

Canadian Wildlife Service
Environmental Conservation Branch
Environment Canada
P.O. Box 1714
Iqaluit, Nunavut
X0A 0H0

Jurisdiction: Federal - Environment Canada.

Selected Bibliography:

- Nettleship, D.H. and P.A. Smith. 1975. Ecological sites in Northern Canada. Canadian Committee for the International Biological Program, Conservation Terrestrial Panels. Ottawa, Ontario. 330 p.
- Sutton, G.M. 1971. High Arctic. Fitzhenry and Whiteside Ltd. Don Mills, Ontario. 119 p.

Reasons for Ramsar Designation: A rare High Arctic wetland environment rich in wildlife and habitat for migratory waterfowl and other bird and wildlife species.

Status of Management Plan: The *Polar Bear Pass National Wildlife Area Management Plan* was developed in draft form in April 1989 and was released by Environment Canada and the Polar Bear Pass Advisory Committee in February 1990.