

Aerial Survey of Chukchi Sea Polar Bears

15 March – 2 April 2026



Scientists are studying polar bears on the sea ice in the Chukchi Sea. This will help the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and partners obtain an updated abundance estimate and identify sustainable harvest levels.

We will coordinate with local communities to avoid subsistence activities such as whaling, sealing, and caribou hunting.

- Polar bears will be surveyed from two fixed-wing Partenavia P-68 aircraft (tail numbers N701 and N17ZX) that will be based out of Kotzebue.
- Aircraft will fly along transects 500 feet above the sea ice and observers will count bears visually.
- Aircraft will avoid villages by 10 miles.
- This work is supported by the Bureau of Land Management.
- For questions or concerns about this study please contact:
 - Ryan Wilson or Erik Andersen (USFWS) at (907) 786-3800.



P-68 aircraft



The general area that flights will occur over the sea ice for the purpose of locating and biopsy darting polar bears (cross-hatched area).