

Request for Concept Notes for Field Research

POLAR BEAR RESEARCH & CONSERVATION—PROJECTS BEGINNING IN 2028

OVERVIEW

Climate change is affecting the terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems of the Arctic and subarctic faster than in any other region on the planet, affecting soil, vegetation, wildlife, and human communities in unprecedented ways. Among the species most sensitive to these changes are polar bears, which rely on both land and sea and, above all else, on the sea ice that has covered the Arctic waters for millennia. That ice is disappearing, reducing polar bears' ability, as apex predators, to access the seals that comprise up to 90% of their diet, depending on the region.

Earthwatch, now **Earthwatch Expeditions by Nat Hab**, has supported research and data collection on all eight bear species—including polar bears—throughout our 55-year history. We seek to bring a long-term polar bear research project back into our portfolio in areas of the polar bear range that would allow for our model of 'expeditionary citizen science' to operate safely, beginning in 2028. We invite scientists to submit initial concept notes for research addressing under-supported polar bear research and conservation needs (see below) as part of our mission to connect people with science and inspire action for a sustainable planet.

PRIORITY POLAR BEAR RESEARCH AREAS

- Polar bear body condition (photo-based or in support of AI tools for categorizing body condition)
- Helicopter-based surveys (at research-permitted elevations) to assess:
 - Population/demographics metrics
 - Polar bear hunting/foraging
- Survival rate (adults and young)
- Recruitment rate
- Polar bear behavior, including:
 - Interactions with other bears
 - interactions with scavengers
 - interactions with tourism vehicles
- Human-polar bear conflict mitigation work
- Braided knowledge systems, incorporating Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), Western science, & participatory engagement in conservation solutions.

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS AND RESEARCH PROJECT CONTEXT

Scientists conducting polar bear research in Northern Scandinavia, Greenland, Alaska, northern Canada - particularly the greater Churchill, Manitoba region of western Hudson Bay are invited. Priority will be given to research that:

- Addresses critical conservation challenges;
- Offers strong, authentic, and engaging field-based research opportunities for participants;
- Integrates the research strongly within local communities, engages stakeholders where possible, and involves local emerging or established scientists in the research;
- Can be implemented consistently within a field research expedition model with appropriate risk mitigation and safety protocols.

WHY APPLY

- **Advance your research** through a scalable, field-based model that expands scientific output and conservation impact.
- **Increase data collection capacity** by working with multiple field teams per year, without adding operational complexity.
- **Focus on scientific design, fieldwork, and analysis**, while Earthwatch Expeditions manages the majority of project logistics, including accommodations, meals, transportation, and the participant experience.
- **Broaden the impact of your work** by engaging citizen-scientist participants and community members in data collection.
- **Strengthen local capacity** for long-term environmental management and stewardship.

ABOUT EARTHWATCH

Earthwatch has been a pioneer and leader in the field of expeditionary participatory science since 1971, funding scientists in over 130 countries. Our model pairs researchers with citizen-scientist participants, advancing both conservation outcomes and public understanding of science. Projects we fund produce rigorous, relevant, and impactful science. Incorporating participants from the public into fieldwork broadens the impact of the research we fund by increasing their scientific awareness, understanding, and commitment to a conservation-minded, sustainable lifestyle.

In 2026, Earthwatch entered into a long-term licensing agreement with *Natural Habitat Adventures (Nat Hab)*, a conservation travel company whose values strongly aligned with our own. In this new iteration of the Earthwatch model, we will be known as **Earthwatch Expeditions by Nat Hab**. We will take direct responsibility for most project logistics (including accommodations, food, and transportation), freeing scientists to focus on leading field research and data collection.

FUNDING MODEL

- **Per-team field support model**, where research funding is generated through each expedition team and directly supports field execution and data collection.
- **Annual Amount**: Financial support ranges from USD \$20,000–\$80,000 (based on team size and participant numbers)
- **Duration**: Target of 5+ years, with long-term program development, annual review, and approval
- **Covers**: Field expenses during Earthwatch groups (equipment, permits, transport, field staff stipends). We will also cover food, accommodations, and transportation for scientists and field staff to research sites.
- **Excludes**: Salaries, tuition, overhead, capital equipment

ELIGIBILITY

- Hold a Ph.D. (or equivalent expertise) and affiliation with a recognized university, government, tribal agency, or science-focused NGO.
- Demonstrate capacity for long-term field research (5+ years preferred).
- Demonstrated and/or planned collaboration with local scientist(s) and/or community required.
- Prioritizes diverse representation and inclusion within research groups.

PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

- Include field-based, participatory research where recruited participants collect data;
- Host 6-10 teams per year (with typically 8–15 participants per team), with participants providing 2-5 days of research support/fieldwork per team;
- Include educational components connecting research to the global context and issues;
- Teams to be run in English;
- Prioritize sustainable local vendors and community partnerships;
- Share data with local stakeholders and, where possible, open datasets;
- Maintain at least one other source of financial or institutional support.

SELECTION PROCESS

- Scientific merit and alignment with the Earthwatch Expeditions by Nat Hab mission;
- Feasibility of the field model & participant involvement;
- Field safety paramount (including geographic location and research activities in the field);
- Conservation impacts and potential for measurable outcomes and outputs;
- PI qualifications and partnerships;
- Engagement of emerging or established scientists local to where the research takes place.

Selected concept notes will be invited to submit full proposals, including detailed methodology, budget, and safety plans.

How to Apply: To submit your concept note, please follow this link: [APPLY HERE](#)

For questions or more details, please email the [Director of Research](#) or call +1 303-222-3711