

Safeguarding the Arctic



Martha Holmes/npl/Minden Pictures

Industrial fishing, offshore oil and gas development and maritime shipping in newly ice-free Arctic seas threaten some of the world's most unspoiled marine ecosystems.

PROTECTING LIFE IN THE ARCTIC

The Arctic is home to some of the Earth's least-disturbed large marine ecosystems. Climate change is rapidly melting the Arctic pack ice, fundamentally altering these natural systems and opening this fragile region to the dangers of unregulated or poorly regulated commercial fishing, offshore oil and gas development and industrial shipping. The race is on to claim and extract these newly accessible resources. Without adequate protections, increased development poses serious risks for the Arctic's spectacular ocean wilderness areas and magnificent wildlife, including polar bears, bowhead whales, narwhals and walrus, as well as 100 species of fish and 50 species of migratory seabirds.

Within a decade, Arctic nations will make vital decisions that will have lasting

impacts on the survival of humans and wildlife in the region and the Arctic's ability to provide global ecosystem services such as climate regulation.

To address these threats, the Pew Environment Group's Oceans North campaign is promoting science- and community-based conservation of the Arctic Ocean in the United States, Canada and among nations in the international Arctic. This program advocates scientifically sound policies consistent with indigenous land claims and traditional practices to:

- Devise precautionary Arctic fisheries plans that prohibit new commercial fisheries until scientific research ensures that such activities will not harm the ecosystem or traditional way of life.

- Ensure that oil and gas development does not take place in sensitive parts of the Arctic Ocean and that drilling does not proceed in other areas until a comprehensive scientific plan is developed and strong spill prevention and response standards are in place.
- Require Arctic shipping standards that minimize impacts to the marine ecosystem and indigenous communities.

Life in the Arctic Ocean has evolved over thousands of years in the shelter of the ice pack. As the ice melts away, protection from ill-considered industrial development is a global necessity.