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**Traditional Alaskan Ice Cellars Are Melting; Community Creates New Polar-Bear Resistant Containers**

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This part of Alaska is home to a community of Inupiat people who maintain many of their Eskimo traditions. So to address the first concern, four families worked with the World Wildlife Fund to [create polar-bear resistant food storage containers](#) that can be stored above ground, rather than underground where traditional ice cellars - some more than 100 years old and upwards of 12 feet deep- are beginning to melt and fill with water.

In many remote native communities, such as Kaktovik, families traditionally have harvested and stored large quantities of food in [cellars carved directly into the permafrost](#), where the Arctic temperatures keep it from spoiling -- and kept it out of reach of nosy polar bears, as well as other snooping predators.

The thing is, there are more of those lingering bears right now. An increasing number of polar bears are encroaching on local communities and lengthening their stays because of melting sea ice. [Polar bears](#) are the largest land carnivores in the world, but they are also marine mammals, meaning they spend the majority of their time on Arctic sea ice hunting for ice-dependent ringed and bearded seals to snack on. However, changing climates result in more polar bears visiting coastal communities earlier in the fall each year as sea ice retreats. What's more, sea ice takes longer to reform in warmer temperatures, so the bears have to wait around inland, where smelling unsecured food could prove too great a temptation and create a situation unsafe for them and humans.

That's why native Inupiat people are working with World Wildlife Fund and the U.S. Fish &

Wildlife Service to try out [a new generation of polar bear-resistant food storage containers](#) intended to deter even the most ravenous of polar bears and their cubs. The new and improved storage containers are heavier, larger, better ventilated and more versatile, compared to the first generation containers that failed when a determined mama polar bear turned the containers on their sides, jumped on them to pop the lids open, and made off with the food inside.

While the containers have stood up to the challenge so far, it is still early in the season, so the community is still gathering food for the winter. Finding alternative storage containers is also a concern in shoreline Alaskan communities of Kivalina, Point Hope, Point Lay, Wainwright, [Barrow](#), and Nuiqsut.

Polar bears were actually the [first vertebrate species to be listed](#) under the U.S. Endangered Species Act as threatened with extinction primarily due to global warming. The animals were first listed in 2008, but the animals have become more and more threatened each year as rising ocean temperatures cause sea ice to disappear for longer periods of time. Keeping polar bears away from local communities with prevent any extra unnecessary animal deaths.

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