

The LIA vision

ARCTIC MARINE LIFE NEEDS ICE

A recent Arctic Council report (SWIPA, 2017) concluded that even with effective action on limiting greenhouse gas emissions, the sea ice will shrink in terms of both the area it covers in the summertime, and in terms of how long it lasts in the wintertime. As the sea ice disappears, the Last Ice Area will continue to provide a suitable home for ice-associated life and the people who depend upon these living resources.

About a quarter of the world's polar bears live there, or near there. Most of the world's narwhals spend at least part of the year there, and it is home to the largest breeding colonies of thick-billed murres and millions of little auks. Small but vitally important algae, the tiny engines driving the Arctic food web, turn the underside of the sea ice into a kind of hanging garden where shrimp-like creatures graze. The ice algae eventually drift downward and provide nourishment on the ocean floor. There are even organisms here that only thrive on multi-year ice – for these lifeforms the Last Ice Area may be their last chance for survival.

PROTECTING THE LAST ICE AREA: MANAGING HUMAN ACTIVITIES

In order to maintain the ecosystem health and cultural connections of the Last Ice Area, specific habitats and species must be protected and human activities managed in an integrated manner. WWF is committed to ecosystem-based management of this area by protecting distinctive and representative areas and by developing a marine spatial plan. This form of management takes into account the entire ecosystem rather than focusing on individual projects, activities or species. Marine spatial planning is not about turning the entire area into a park or protected area. Instead, a plan would help prevent or diminish harmful human activities to ensure that sea-dependent wildlife, and the people who depend on that wildlife, can be resilient in the face of change. WWF believes that the people who live closest to the Last Ice Area should lead the development and implementation of such a plan.

Making Progress

The Canadian government has committed to “...explore options to protect the ‘last ice area’ within Canadian waters, in a way that benefits communities and ecosystems.”¹ As part of this commitment, the government identified areas it is considering for conservation northwest of Ellesmere Island. It is also working with local Inuit to complete a national marine conservation area, Tallurutuip Imanga, covering most of Lancaster Sound.

Inuit in Canada and Greenland are looking at the future management of an important feature in the region: the North Water polynya, called in Greenlandic the “Pikialasorsuaq.” A polynya is an area of water that is ice-free in the winter due to wind and water currents. The North Water polynya is the largest polynya in the northern hemisphere, critical to the well-being of many of the birds and animals in the region. The Inuit Circumpolar Council set up the Pikialasorsuaq Commission, which travelled to communities in Canada and Greenland to listen to what people had to say about the polynya and its future management. The Commission recently released a report² that recommended the polynya be declared a protected area under an Inuit-led management scheme. It is important that governments, communities and organizations in and around the Last Ice Area continue to focus on this globally significant region, which may one day provide refuge for sea-ice-associated life.

1 <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2016/12/20/select-actions-being-taken-under-united-states-canada-joint-arctic-leaders-statement>

2 For more on the commission's work, visit <http://pikialasorsuaq.org/en/>

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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LAST ICE AREA

Similijuaq

As climate change reduces the size and duration of summer Arctic sea ice, scientific projections show it will last the longest above Canada and Greenland. This “Last Ice Area,” called “Similijuaq” by local Inuit elders, means “place of the big ice.”

Together, we have the power to safeguard this globally significant region that will be a last refuge for ice-dependent species as the world warms.

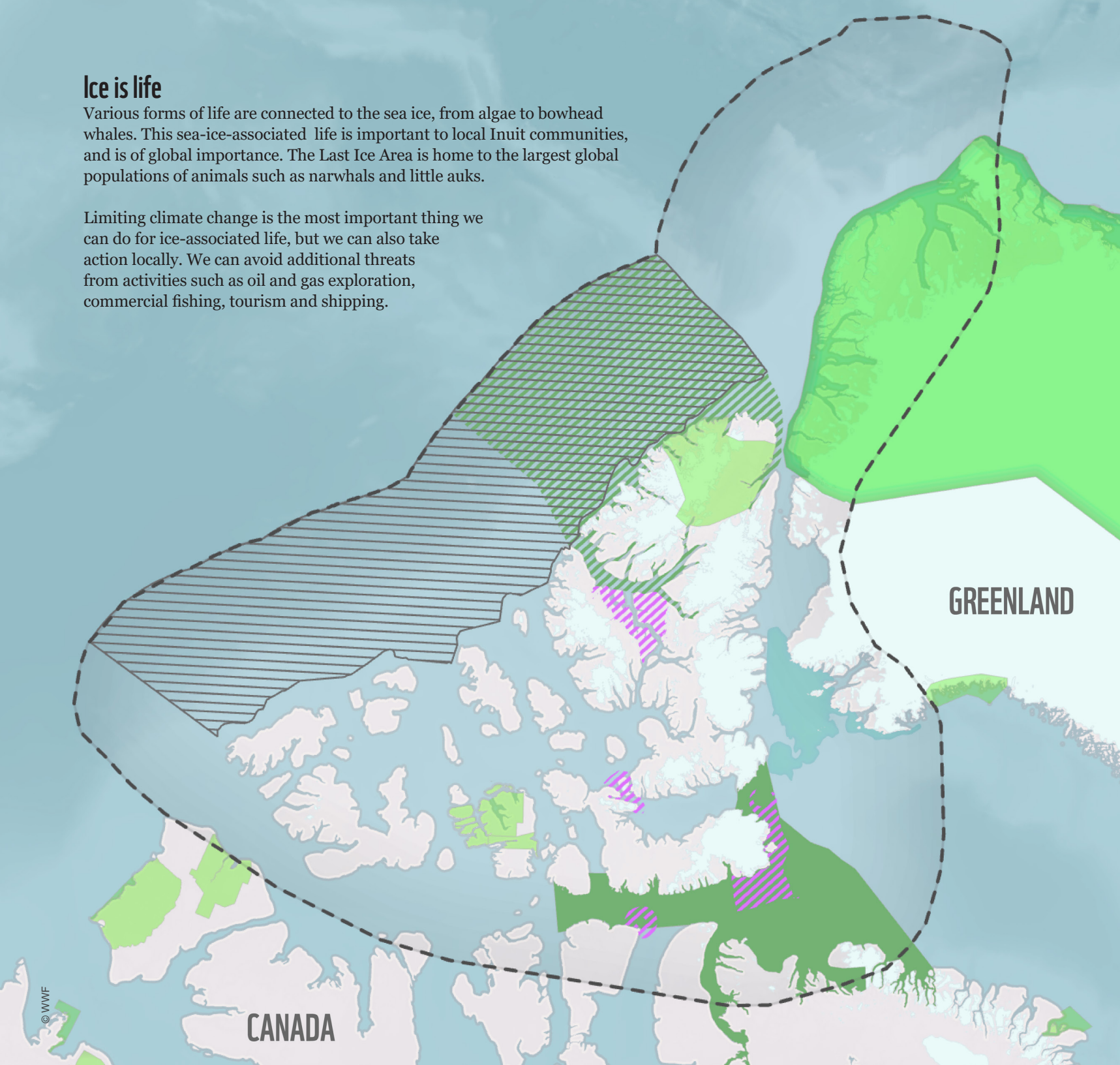


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Ice is life

Various forms of life are connected to the sea ice, from algae to bowhead whales. This sea-ice-associated life is important to local Inuit communities, and is of global importance. The Last Ice Area is home to the largest global populations of animals such as narwhals and little auks.

Limiting climate change is the most important thing we can do for ice-associated life, but we can also take action locally. We can avoid additional threats from activities such as oil and gas exploration, commercial fishing, tourism and shipping.



Last Ice Area legend

-  LAST ICE AREA (LIA) BOUNDARY
-  TALLURUTIUP IMANGA NATIONAL MARINE CONSERVATION AREA (In advanced consideration)
-  PROTECTED AREAS

Areas under consideration for conservation and/or management

-  POTENTIAL NATIONAL MARINE CONSERVATION AREA
-  ARCTIC BASIN MULTI-YEAR PACK ICE ECOLOGICALLY AND BIOLOGICALLY SIGNIFICANT AREA
-  THE PIKIALASORSUAQ (NORTH WATER POLYNIA)
-  DRAFT NUNAVUT LAND USE PLAN: PROPOSED PROTECTED AREAS AND SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREAS