



## **ENDICOTT CAUSEWAY POLAR BEAR DEN:**

### **Hilcorp's Cooperative Mitigation Effort to Protect Mother and Cub**

*IOGCC Chairman's Stewardship Award Submittal:*

*Environmental Partnership*

Today more polar bear mothers are choosing to den on land. In late fall, pregnant females tunnel into coastal snow banks to claw out dens where they give birth to their cubs. Snow then drifts across the entry holes, in most cases, completely hiding the dens from view. In Alaska, many of the best coastal denning spots are surrounded by industrial activity, and that's exactly what happened in Hilcorp's Endicott Field on Alaska's North Slope.

The effort began back on December 10, 2016 when Hilcorp employees noticed a possible den entrance in a snowdrift under a bridge on an industrial roadway to its production facility at Endicott Island. Using thermal camera technology, Hilcorp field staff confirmed the presence of a polar bear under the snow. Hilcorp personnel immediately closed the road.

Ultimately, what could have been a risky move for the polar bear turned out positively after Hilcorp immediately took action in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to minimize disturbance to the denning polar bear. In addition, Hilcorp welcomed the assistance and involvement of scientists from Brigham Young University (BYU) and the Polar Bears International (PBI) team.

Made-up of a small group of conservationists, scientists, and volunteers, PBI exists to help secure a future for polar bears across the Arctic. They are currently conducting a long-term polar bear behavior study at denning sites that utilizes remote camera systems. The study is supported by Hilcorp.

After closing the road, Hilcorp then issued a slope-wide Wildlife Compliance Environmental Bulletin alerting all North Slope employees and contractors of the situation. The Bulletin (see attached) conveyed our operational commitments aimed to protect the bear, its den and minimize disturbance. Through the entire process, Hilcorp carefully managed their activity and maintained close communications with USFWS.

In fact, Hilcorp was planning two coil tubing operations to boost production during that time. The company utilizes coil tubing to help boost oil production on existing wells at Endicott, and at a time when oil prices are down, every barrel counts. However, the Hilcorp team willingly delayed their coil tubing work to ensure there was no risk of disturbance to the denning mother bear.

The Endicott operators also made the decision to put off repairing two wells. That too could have yielded more oil production in the ageing field. The wells remained shut-in until well after the bears vacated the area.

Most dens that have been studied are far from human activity and don't require real-time observation. However, this den required something new — livestreaming from a remote camera hosted by a Hilcorp facility approximately a mile from the den for round-the-clock monitoring. The initial period after a female polar bear enters her den is important because disturbance may cause her to prematurely abandon the den. Even more critical is the den emergence period in the spring when female polar bears come out of their dens with the new cubs. Disturbance during the emergence period could cause a female polar bear to abandon the den site before the cub(s) are ready to survive out in the harsh Arctic climate. Through the entire process Hilcorp carefully managed its activity and maintained close communications with USFWS.

Polar Bears births typically occur in Mid-January. Emergences from the den have been recorded as early as March 1 and as late as April 7 and have been observed remaining at the den site for up to 2 weeks following their emergence. Throughout February and March monitoring continued and in preparation to fully shut down the causeway, staff stockpiled essential items such as water, food, fuel, etc. All visitors were also informed that the bear's emergence would cause an immediate closing of our road and to be prepared.

The cameras PBI provided ultimately gave Hilcorp personnel the ability to see when the female emerged and when the family left the den site and staff closed the Endicott causeway to all traffic once the mother and her cub emerged from the den. In fact, that much anticipated day was March 18<sup>th</sup>. After months of no activity at the den site, the polar bear and her new cub were spotted on camera.

The common goal was to ensure that the bears were able to stay at the den site as long as they needed and depart only when they were ready. Working together, that goal was accomplished. Mom and cub spent two weeks around the den site before heading off to the sea ice to take advantage of peak spring seal hunting.

Looking ahead, Hilcorp will continue to support PBI and their important research. Overall PBI's aims to provide the best available science to governments, institutions, and policy makers, as well as to the general public, so they can all act in the best interests of the great white bear.

The successful partnership between Hilcorp and the wildlife community created numerous media stories and was celebrated publicly by both Polar Bears International and the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

**Mama polar bear and cub make it through denning season thanks to collaborative work.**

<https://fws.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=6b07fba073c348d4adf21c371bec0805>

**Mama polar bear and cub make it through denning season thanks to collaborative work.**

<http://polarbearsinternational.org/news/article-research/mama-polar-bear-and-cub-make-it-through-denning-season-thanks-to-collaborative-work/>

**Follow-On Media Coverage: National**

***Oil company watches over pregnant polar bear under bridge***

*ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — A pregnant polar bear seeking to dig her maternity den chose an unlikely spot: a snow drift along a bridge leading to an artificial production island off the north coast of Alaska.*

*As a threatened species, polar bears are entitled to peaceful pregnancies and the operating oil company, Hilcorp Alaska LLC, took vigorous measures to make sure that happened. In consultation with federal wildlife authorities, Hilcorp restricted traffic on the causeway, monitored the den and kept things mostly quiet until mother and cub emerged three months later.*

*“The bear, wherever she decided to den, she’s the emphasis,” said Christopher Putnam, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supervisory biologist.*

*Polar bears are listed as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act because climate warming is melting their primary habitat, sea ice. Short of action that effectively addresses Arctic warming, it is unlikely that polar bears will be recovered, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service.*

*Polar bears don’t hibernate, but pregnant females create maternity dens to shelter newborn cubs. If a nursing mother is disturbed, she can abandon a cub. Upward of 50 percent of cubs don’t survive their first year.*

*Oil companies working near known denning areas scout for bears using airplanes equipped with infrared cameras that detect bears in dens.*

*“Typically they pick locations that are away from oil field infrastructure,” said Beth Sharp, Hilcorp’s habitat and wildlife specialist, who has worked on Alaska’s North Slope for nearly two decades.*

*A Hilcorp security officer in December spotted a hole in a snow drift along the 1.5 mile- (2.4 kilometer) causeway leading to Endicott Island, a production island about the size of 34 football fields.*

*The hole looked like a den entrance, but Sharp was skeptical. Workers borrowed an infrared camera from the company fire department to take a photo inside the snow drift.*

*“There was a bear-shaped lightbulb as clear as could be,” Sharp said.*

*Hilcorp and the Fish and Wildlife Service worked out a plan to minimize disturbance. Workers on their way to Endicott were shuttled by bus instead of individual pickups. Hilcorp parked a heavy-duty snow-removal truck. Non-essential traffic stopped.*

*Advocacy group Polar Bear International and Brigham Young University, which are collaborating on a long-term denning study, monitored the den with a remote camera system.*

*Mother and cub stepped out of the den on March 18. They spent two weeks around the den, eventually marching off to sea ice to hunt for seals.*

*U.S. Geological Survey researchers say south Beaufort Sea polar bears increasingly use land for maternity dens as sea ice conditions change. That could mean more cases of polar bears giving birth near oil field infrastructure, Putnam said.*

*"We don't know if it's a trend, but that's why we have these plans," Putnam said \**

*The AP article was published in the [Washington Post](#), [ABC News](#), [U.S. News & World Report](#), [Fairbanks News Miner](#), [KUTV](#), [The Denver Post](#), [San Francisco Gate](#), [The Seattle Times](#), [San Antonio Express-News](#), [Raleigh News & Observer](#), [Waco Tribune-Herald](#), [The Daily Mail](#), [Bakken.com](#), [US News & World Report](#), and [KTAR News](#)*

**Oil company babysits pregnant polar bear's den under bridge - E&E News**

<https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/stories/1060054957/search?keyword=hilcorp>

### **Follow-On Media Coverage: Local**

**Polar bear and cub choose unusual place for den. KTUU – NBC, Anchorage**

<http://www.ktuu.com/content/news/Polar-bear-and-cub-choose-unusual-place-for-den-422451373.html>

**How to protect a pregnant 'momma polar bear' and cub near North Slope oil fields? Very carefully. -Alaska Dispatch News, Anchorage**

<https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/environment/2017/05/29/hilcorp-shows-how-to-protect-a-pregnant-momma-polar-bear-and-cub-very-carefully/>

### **Opinion Pieces/Blogs**

**Can Arctic Energy Development And Conservation Coexist?**

<http://arcticenergycenter.com/can-arctic-energy-development-and-conservation-coexist/>

**The Oil And Gas Situation: Polar Pregnancy, Policy Priorities, And Permian Protraction**

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidblackmon/2017/05/23/the-oil-and-gas-situation-polar-pregnancy-policy-priorities-and-permian-protraction/#55d3d09e385f>

**Polar bears and oil & gas: what they're saying.**

<http://arcticenergycenter.com/polar-bears-and-oil-gas-what-theyre-saying/>



# WILDLIFE COMPLIANCE ENVIRONMENTAL BULLETIN

## POLAR BEAR DEN DISTURBANCE-MITIGATION

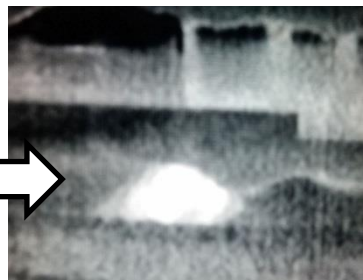
Hilcorp has negotiated the following den disturbance-mitigation measures with USFWS. These measures are in place to ensure our momma polar bear has a successful denning and cub-rearing season and to ensure our safety. Our adherence to these measures also ensures we can keep the Endicott Road open and have minimal impacts to our operations.

### OUR COMMITMENTS:

- Only essential traffic is allowed along the Endicott Causeway south of the T-intersection. Unless approved by the Endicott Foremen or North Slope Operations Manager personal travel to and from Endicott shall be via the crew bus or other already-scheduled vehicle trip.
- The Endicott Road is closed to general traffic. If you are anticipating a pre-approved visitor please notify security as to when they are expected.
- Drivers are to adhere to posted 5 mph speed limit signs and are not to stop to view the den or take pictures, unless explicitly authorized for den-monitoring purposes.
- Drivers must watch the den area as approaching, if the bear is out of the den do not proceed until she has re-entered the den - **if you are an authorized driver please request to see a map showing the specific location of the den along the road before departing.**
- For personnel safety, no one shall exit their vehicle in the vicinity of the den unless pre-authorized – as USFWS said “don’t forget there’s a polar bear in that hole!”



Den entrance along Endicott Road



Momma bear's heat signature in her den



If momma bear is successful we will hopefully see this in March or April!

### Questions? Contact:

North Slope Environmental Specialists	Deb Heebner Stefan Gogosha	mobile: 907-782-7431 mobile: 907-744-3609	AlaskaNS-EnvironmentalSpecialist @hilcorp.com
Wildlife and Habitat Specialist	Beth Sharp	office: 907-777-8436 mobile: 907-242-5700	esharp@hilcorp.com