



BRAIDED RIVER

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

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The Last Polar Bear: Facing the Truth of a Warming World **A photographic exploration of a disappearing species**

The Last Polar Bear: Facing the Truth of a Warming World, a new publication to be issued in February by Braided River, records and celebrates one of nature's most majestic creatures—the polar bear—and examines how global warming is affecting the fragile, complex Arctic environment.

These topics continue to make headlines this month. Last week, the U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service announced its decision to sell oil leases covering nearly 30 million acres in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas in North America's Arctic, critical polar bear habitat. By early February, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will decide whether to list the polar bear as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, imposing restrictions on all federal agencies to avoid actions that could hurt the bears or their habitat.

Polar bears use sea ice to move about, find mates and hunt for seals. As temperatures warm, the loss of the pack ice directly impacts their ability to survive. Scientists agree that Arctic ice is disappearing at an alarming rate. Last summer, sea ice levels plummeted to their lowest since satellite measurements began in 1979. And a new scientific study by the U.S. Geological Survey, released last fall, predicts that two-thirds of the world's polar bears, including Alaska's entire population, may disappear completely by 2050.

For the past eight years, wildlife photographer Steven Kazlowski traveled to the remote Beaufort and Chukchi Seas to photograph these magnificent creatures and record the intricacies of this delicately balanced ecosystem. *The Last Polar Bear: Facing the Truth of a Warming World* (\$39.95 hardcover; ISBN 978-1-59485-059-2) combines 235 full-color photographs of polar bears, other Arctic creatures, stunningly beautiful sea- and landscapes with essays from well-known scientists, conservationists and nature writers, touching on every aspect of the shrinking sea ice and the complicated web of life it supports.

The Alaskan Arctic is a vast and unforgiving land, rarely visited and seldom photographed. To secure images for *The Last Polar Bear*, Kazlowski traveled by boat, single-engine plane, snowmobile and on foot. He

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accompanied native Inupiaq hunters on whale and seal hunts and camped for weeks in gale winds and temperatures below fifty degrees Fahrenheit.

Sometimes, with great patience, the perfect shot came to him. On one occasion, Kazlowski spotted spring cubs frolicking in the snow, their mother nearby. After several days, the mother bear became used to his presence and left to search for food. One of the more curious cubs decided to see how close it could get to Kazlowski before the photographer would retreat. The game was never played the same way twice.

Finally, the cub lost interest, appearing to ignore Kazlowski completely. Feeling secure, Steven dropped to his belly, one eye glued to his camera, focusing on his craft. Slowly, the cub crept forward, inch by inch, until it was a mere 15 feet away. Once he realized he had been “tricked,” the startled Kazlowski wasted no time backing away to safer terrain. But the charming close-up photos he took bear testament to his tenacity.

The book includes many such anecdotes of life among the bears, relayed by the photographer, Alaskan natives and Inupiaq elders. Essays written by conservationist **Theodore Roosevelt IV**, Natural Resources Defense Council President **Frances Beinecke**, cultural anthropologist **Richard Nelson**, environmental journalist **Daniel Glick**, and Alaskan residents and writers **Nick Jans** and **Charles Wohlforth** provide a more in-depth understanding of the scientific, political and social issues that surround climate change.

National outreach campaign

The Last Polar Bear will be supported by a traveling exhibition of 40 photographs, organized by the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, Wash. The first stop will be at the Burke Museum, where the exhibit runs June 28 – Dec. 31, 2008. A 10-city national author tour and an educational outreach campaign, held in collaboration with leading conservation organizations, are also planned.

About the author

Steven Kazlowski [www.lefteyepro.com] earned a degree in marine biology from Towson State University and worked briefly in the Florida Keys as a marine biologist before setting out for Alaska to pursue his true passion – wildlife photography. His photographs have been featured in *Audubon*, *Backpacking*, *Canadian National Geographic*, *National Wildlife*, *Sierra* and *TIME* magazines and in several books. A resident of Seattle, Kazlowski travels to the Alaskan Arctic coast, photographing the natural world.

About Braided River

Braided River, a new conservation imprint from The Mountaineers Books, provides a unique publishing venue for photographers and writers who bring a fresh perspective to environmental issues facing western North America’s wildest places. Braided River books go beyond the printed page, reaching a wider audience through lectures, exhibits and multi-media events in collaboration with leading environmental organizations.

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Note to Editors: For photographs and information on *The Last Polar Bear* or on other Braided River books, go to www.BraidedRiverBooks.org. For a review copy, please contact Laura Case at 206-223-6303, ext. 118, or email LCase@BraidedRiverBooks.org.