

# OUTPOSTS

GETTING THE MOST FROM THE GREAT OUTDOORS

« [Whooping crane population declines for first time in almost a decade](#) | [Main](#) | [Report: Hawaii's tourism industry in state of crisis](#) »

## Arctic sea ice gone in 30 years -- what will become of wildlife?

2:51 PM, April 2, 2009



We knew polar bears were in trouble, what with the Arctic ice they require for survival disappearing at an alarming rate.

But most of us did not know the extent of trouble facing these and other critters, such as walrus, Pacific gray whales, killer whales and fish stocks (not to mention humans, who will experience rising water levels).

Lead paragraph in an Associated Press story today out of Washington: "Arctic sea ice is melting so fast most of it could be gone in 30 years."

Because of recent ice loss, Arctic surface air temperatures are warmer than normal, and much warmer than scientists expected to find.

A report on the issue, by Muyin Wang of the [Joint Institute for the Study of Atmosphere and Ocean](#) and James E. Overland of the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory](#), will appear in Friday's edition of the journal [Geophysical Research Letters](#).

They expect the area covered by summer sea ice to decline from about 2.8 million square miles to 620,000 square miles within 30 years. That represents serious shrinkage, with frightening implications for wildlife and humans.

Said Wang in a statement: "The Arctic is often called the Earth's refrigerator because the sea ice helps cool the planet by reflecting the sun's radiation back into space. With less ice, the sun's warmth is instead absorbed by the open water, contributing to warmer temperatures in the water and the air."

-- Pete Thomas

*Photo: As ice melts, fewer polar bears are able to survive at sea like this family did in the past. Credit: Steve Amstrup / U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*