

Virtual Bear Viewing as a Conservation Tool

Alysa G. McCall^{1*}, BJ Kirschhoffer², Mike Fitz², Candice Rusch², Brian Byrd², Geoffrey S. York¹, Krista Wright¹, Kieran McIver²

¹Polar Bears International, ²Explore.org

Contact: amccall@pbears.org

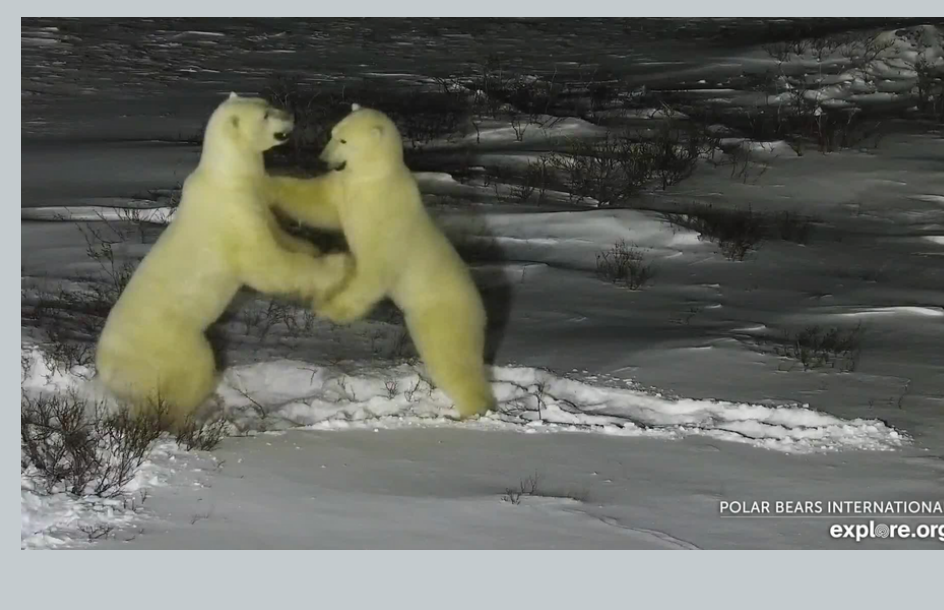
Bringing Bears to People

Education and outreach can be powerful tools in wildlife conservation. Targeted outreach can increase support for conservation actions by impacting attitudes and furthering awareness about environmental issues or species, and may be especially effective when visual elements, like photos or videos, are incorporated. Polar Bears International (PBI) first deployed live Polar Bear Cams near Churchill, Manitoba in 2007, allowing the public to view the annual polar bear gathering. After an initial success, PBI partnered with Explore.org to operate and grow the impact of these cams. We now virtually reach millions of people around the world each year who tune in to watch polar bears roam the tundra and to learn about the species. PBI also uses the Polar Bear Cam footage to complement educational programming and as a platform to inspire action on climate change.

Explore.org now has over 100 live wildlife cameras deployed around the world, including several at Brooks Falls in Katmai National Park in Alaska, where local brown bears feast during the annual salmon migration. These Brown Bear Cams allow viewers to closely follow individual bears and have led to the viral “Fat Bear Week” which has captured attention and created joy across the globe.

Many people will never get to see bears in the wild but by live-streaming incredible moments and incorporating key messaging into such outreach, we can help people build connections with bears, increase our organizations’ impact, broaden conservation support, and turn awe into action.

Tundra Connections Webcasts



Watch explore.org bears, live!
All cams are volunteer-operated.

Locations

Brown Bear Cams

Katmai National Park, Alaska, U.S.A.

Mid-June through late October

Peak viewing in July-October

Watch brown bears of all ages and sizes feast on salmon throughout the summer, getting as fat as possible before hibernating in the winter.



Polar Bear Cams

Churchill, Manitoba, Canada

Mid-October to late November

Peak viewing in November

Watch polar bears lounge, spar, and explore as the weather cools down and they wait for sea ice to freeze-up on Hudson Bay. These bears have been on land for several months and are ready to end their long summer fast and return to hunting seals.

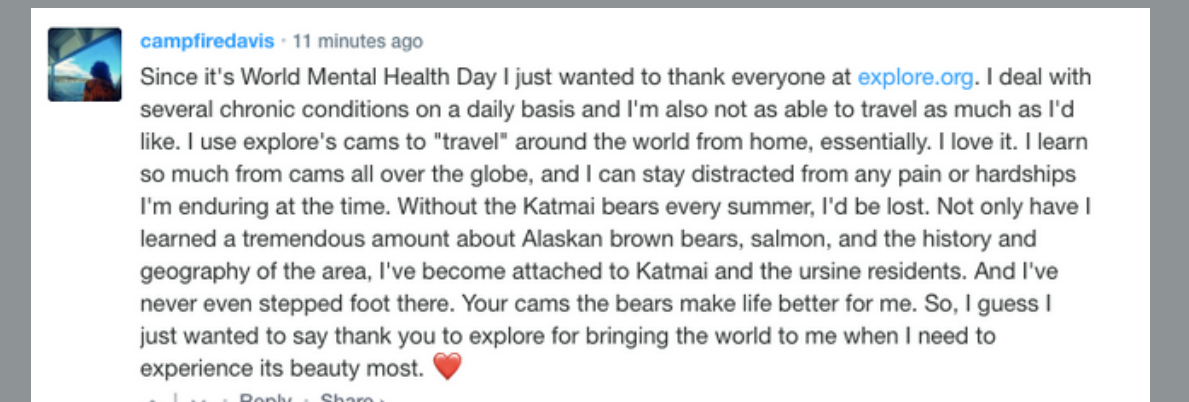
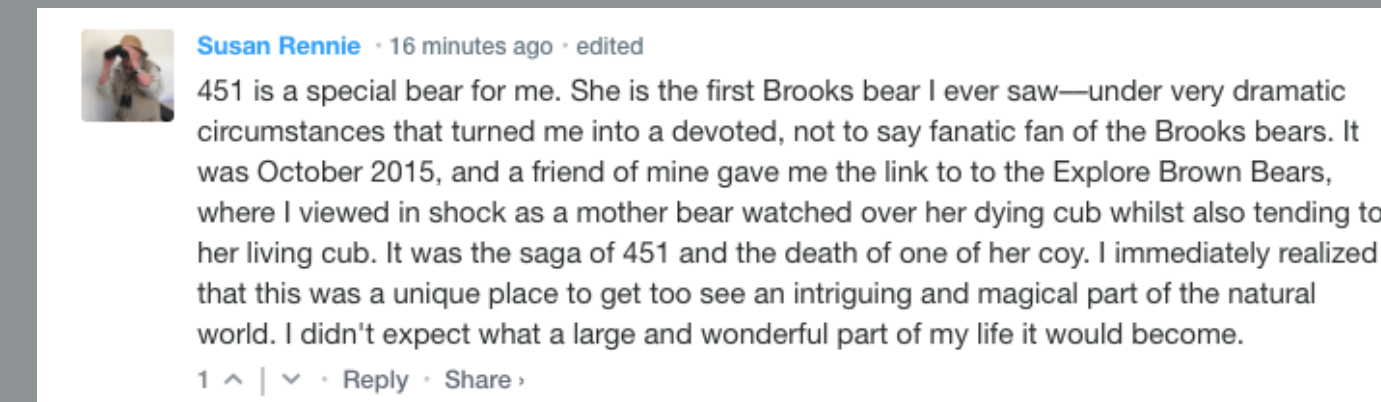


explore.org

Why Virtual Cams?

While not a substitute for in-person visits, virtual bear cams provide people with access and connection to bears. Such meaningful experiences can help inspire conservation actions.

These cams help tell bear stories which can help people become invested and fall in love with bears. With more love comes more inspiration to act on behalf of bears. Additionally, educators and science communicators use the cams as a platform to speak about climate change and other conservation issues, while informing the public about how to support bear conservation efforts.



Fat Bear Week

Fat Bear Week (FBW) is an annual, online tournament produced through a partnership between Katmai National Park, the Katmai Conservancy, and explore.org. Its goal is to help people forge meaningful connections with brown bears and salmon in Katmai National Park. The public votes for the fattest, most successful Brooks River bear of the year.

Photographs and stories about individual bears at Brooks River highlight a brown bear's changes in body mass from summer to fall as well as the challenges and successes that they experience. More than 1.3 million votes were cast in FBW 2023.

Vote in Fat Bear Week

