

Chukchi Sea Polar Bear Annual Taking Limit

Your Knowledge Needed

In June 2010, Charlie Johnson, the U.S. Commissioner representing Alaska Natives and Geoffrey Haskett, the U.S. Commissioner for the United States Government voted with their Russian Federation counterparts, Sergey Kavry and Amirkhan Amirkhanov, to limit the total allowable taking of polar bears from the Alaska-Chukotka population. The Commissioners decided this limit was needed to ensure the harvest of polar bears now will not impact the future of polar bears and the future needs of Alaska Native and Russian Native people. The Commissioners made this decision after listening to their advisors who were knowledgeable on polar bear biology and Alaska Native Traditional Ecological Knowledge. The limit agreed to was that the Native People of Russia and Alaska Native People should evenly share a quota of 58 bears, of which no more than 19 can be female. Because this annual taking limit is split evenly between the U.S. and Russia, the Alaskan portion is 29 polar bears per year, of which no more than 9 can be female. The Commissioners also understood that sometimes bears are killed because they become a danger to human life, or accidentally by human activity, so they decided that if a bear is killed for any reason by human activity, the quota should include that kill. Every year since 2010, the Commissioners have reviewed available information and agreed that this annual taking limit should be maintained. Understanding this new limit is very important to subsistence hunters.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) must develop regulations to make certain we do not take more bears than the U.S. is allowed under this limit. The regulations that we develop will establish a reporting requirement. The reporting method should allow hunters and the USFWS to know in real time how many bears have been taken out of the allowable taking limit and how many bears are left to be hunted. **In order to help inform our regulations, we are seeking the ideas and insights of polar bear hunters on:**

- 1) The most effective ways to keep hunters informed of the number of bears available to harvest and when the annual taking limit has been met and taking is closed for the year
- 2) The quickest and easiest ways for hunters to report their harvest so that we can let others know how many bears are left that can be hunted

Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Conservation and Management of the Alaska-Chukotka Polar Bear Population

Treaty Goals

- Manage the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population using reliable biological information, including scientific data and traditional knowledge of Native peoples.
- Include Native peoples input through equal membership on a four-member Polar Bear Commission that will make management decisions for the population.
- Recognize the subsistence needs of Native people while conserving polar bears by identifying a sustainable harvest level and applying an annual taking limit to be shared equally between the U.S. and Russia.

Other Treaty Implications

- The Treaty prohibits the take (harvest) of female polar bears with cubs, take of cubs, and the take of polar bears in dens.
- The Treaty also prohibits the use of aircraft, poisons, traps, snares, large vessels and large motorized vehicles in the harvest of polar bears.
- The Treaty does not remove the ability of Alaska Natives to harvest polar bears for subsistence use; it establishes a taking limit, which will be re-evaluated annually.
- All human-caused removals count towards the annual taking limit (quota), including polar bears killed in defense of life. However, even after the quota has been met, people will still be able to take polar bears in self-defense or to save the life of a person in immediate danger.
- The annual taking limit (quota) specifically caps the proportion of female bears taken to no more than 1/3 of the total quota. Reporting and verifying the sex of all harvested bears is critical as polar bear harvest in any given year will be closed when/if the female quota is reached. Bears where sex is not reported or verified will be counted as female.
- The taking limit currently applies to the area from Point Barrow south to the southernmost annual formation of ice.
- The Treaty allows for co-management and USFWS is supportive of efforts to develop and implement a civil-based co-management regime.

U.S.-Russia Polar Bears Commission

Under the Treaty, a joint U.S.-Russia Polar Bears Commission is responsible for conservation and management of the Alaska-Chukotka subpopulation of polar bears found in the Chukchi and Bering Seas. The Commission recognizes the nutritional and cultural traditions of Native peoples with connections to polar bear populations, including the opportunity for sustainable harvest of polar bears.

The Commission is comprised of a Native representative and federal representative from each country. The representatives for the U.S. are Jack Omelak, Executive Director of the ANC and Geoffrey Haskett, Alaska Regional Director of the USFWS.

To learn more or share your ideas and insights, please:

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