

**Report of the Sixth Meeting of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission**  
**05-06 June 2014**  
**Shepherdstown, West Virginia, US**

Chaired by Geoffrey Haskett (Alaska Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) and Amirkhan Amirkhanov (Deputy Director, Russian Federal Supervisory Natural Resources Management Service [Rosprirodnadzor], Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation). The sixth meeting of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission (hereafter “Commission”) took place on 05-06 June, 2013 in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, US. The Commission meeting was attended by the four members of the Commission (Geoffrey Haskett, Jack Omelak, Amirkhan Amirkhanov, and Sergei Kavry) and their respective delegates (Annex 1). The Commission is responsible for implementation of the *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* (hereafter the “Agreement”).

**Thursday, June 5, 2014**

Commissioner Haskett opened the meeting by affirming progress that has been made toward conservation of the Alaska-Chukotka (AC) population since the first meeting of the Commission in 2009. He noted signs of productivity for the AC population based on current research, and expressed concern about the further effects of sea ice loss, illegal take of polar bears, and planned industrial development of the polar bear habitat. Commissioner Haskett reaffirmed commitments to continue the scientific studies that provide the foundation of the Commissions’ activities, and expressed his hopes of the same commitment from Russia.

Commissioner Amirkhanov reaffirmed the importance of this meeting and expressed satisfaction with numerous past accomplishments. He specifically highlighted the importance of recent changes in the Russian legislation in part of upgrading penalties for illegal harvest, transportation and storage of parts of bodies and derivatives of rare and endangered species (Criminal Code), and noted efforts taken to reduce polar bear human conflicts. The Commissioner concluded with a proposal to develop a joint research program.

Commissioner Kavry welcomed delegates and affirmed the importance of the work of this Commission to the Indigenous peoples of Chukotka, and for conservation of the AC population of polar bears noting the importance of both protecting polar bears and meeting the needs of indigenous people.

Commissioner Omelak welcomed the participants and observers to the meeting. He looked forward to continued progress toward conservation and management for the AC population in both countries.

Introduction of delegations and observers.

Commissioners all recognized the important information that would be presented and adopted the Agenda.

Dr. Regehr summarized the discussions and research presented during the SWG meeting. Noting that: "The SWG recognized that new biological information considered at this meeting did not suggest the need to change the sustainable harvest level for polar bears. Therefore, the SWG recommends no change to the current sustainable harvest level of up to 58 polar bears per year to be shared equally between the U.S. and Russia, of which no more than 1/3 will be female, or to the multiyear quota system adopted for the implementation of the harvest."

In addition, Dr. Regehr noted that the SWG had a recommendation for the Commission regarding changes in the composition of the SWG on the American side:

That Charles Brower replaces Jack Omelak as a member representing the Alaska Nanuuq Commission and that Ryan Wilson, representing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, replace Scott Schliebe on the SWG.

The Commission recognized the invaluable role of Scott Schliebe in the development and implementation of the agreement, as well as Scott's long term contribution to polar bear conservation. They then voted to accept the recommended changes to the SWG membership.

The Commission also tasked the SWG with further developing a unified approach and methods for joint research studies of the AC population including collaborative studies on Wrangel Island, and to present this approach at the 2015 meeting.

The report of the SWG was accepted by the Commission.

Mike Pederson of North Slope Borough (NSB) presented a summary of the NSB polar bear deterrence program. The overall goal of this program is to prevent polar bear from entering Alaska Native communities thereby reducing potential conflict situations.

Commissioner Omelak presented a summary of the work of the Alaska Nanuuq Commission noting the many communities they have efforts in to reduce polar bear human conflicts.

Dr. Regehr presented information on the Polar Bear Human Information Management System. Conflict data were presented for the past several years. Most often, nutritionally stressed bears were the cause of the conflict.

Nadezhda Maksimova presented information about a transfer of regulatory functions on polar bear harvest for subsistence purposes to the administration of Chukotka Autonomous Okrug. She reported that as a result of the measures to increase the population awareness carried out in the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug the number of conflict situations and forced take was decreased.

Commissioner Amirkhanov noted that in frames of transferred authority to the subordinate territory of the Russian Federation the issues of illegal poaching and work with the local population should be arranged at the high level. He also noted that the responsibility of the people should be sufficiently high. In regards to this the polar bear harvest quota use by the Russian side is notably relevant.

Sergey Kavry presented information on a draft Plan for Regulated and Controlled Harvest of polar bears in Chukotka noting the importance of local involvement in the plan development. In response to a request that the draft plan be sent to the United States, it was determined that the plan needed internal Federal review by the Russian Federation and that a plan would be presented at the next Commission meeting.

There was also discussion about the importance of sharing information and it was decided that the presentations delivered at the Commission meeting would be shared by the two delegations.

Jay Slack, Director of the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC), gave a brief welcoming to the Commission meeting noting how pleased he was to host the meeting and provided the meeting with information on the on-line resources available from the NCTC.

Dr. Ryan Wilson summarized the 2014 field observations for the United States. He noted that the spring Chukchi Sea polar bear capture effort would resume in 2015 and provided information on sea ice predictive modeling for polar bear use.

Dr. Andrey Boltunov presented the results of their recent aerial polar bear survey. New methods were incorporated along the 800 kilometer survey route. He noted a west-to-east movement by polar bears over the year.

Dr. Anatoly A. Kochnev presented a summary of sociological data that captured historical and current information on the take of polar bears in Chukotka. These results suggested that illegal harvest of polar bears has declined. In response to a question who harvests polar bears Dr. Kochnev indicated that the majority of take in Chukotka was by indigenous peoples.

Commissioner Sergey Kavry presented the results of polar bear observations by indigenous people. Survey results were presented showing denning activity along the

coast of Chukotka.

Dr. Nikita Platonov presented the results of conducted studies of preferred sea-ice use and polar bear movements. One application of the model is that the distribution and quality of sea-ice can be predicted up to 5 months in advance.

Dr. Stanislav Belikov presented a conceptual description of the joint US-Russia Polar Bear Management Plan and pointed out further actions that both sides need to undertake to prepare useful and substantial document. Dr. Eric Regehr characterized the draft U.S. Conservation Plan that will be finalized in 2015.

Commissioner Haskett noted that the United States will complete its national conservation plan in 2015 that will then be used to supplement the conservation plan for A/C. The Commissioners agreed with this action.

Questions will be deferred until tomorrow.

Friday June 6, 2014

Commissioner Haskett opened the meeting.

Charles Hamilton reported that in 2013 the overall reported take of polar bears was 23 bears, of these 17 were males, 3 were females, and 3 were of unknown sex. These numbers include an adult female accompanied by a cub-of-the-year which was taken in violation of the Article 6(1)(b) of the treaty. The hunter was cited and fined for this violation.

Commissioner Omelak reported that the Alaska Nanuuq Commission and FWS have been working together on a shared management plan for the AC population. They are continuing to work on the details of the plan including authority for enforcement, reporting, and penalties for overharvest.

Opportunity for Observers to present:

Sarah Uhlemann, representing the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), expressed concern about lack of information on abundance and trends of the AC population and that the quota remain sustainable in the face of global climate change. The CBD supports co-management and encourages that regulations be proposed by next year.

Elisabeth Kruger, representing the World Wildlife Fund, encouraged continued cooperation and collaboration between the U.S. and Russia on a number of issues including oil spill response, polar bear patrols, and collaborative research. WWF recommended resuming field research, using the PBIMS model, and creating a reporting system that is simple and straightforward.

Robert Suydam, representing the North Slope Borough, expressed concerns that decisions on quotas have been based on limited science and that additional data are needed. He encouraged both governments to give Native partners a meaningful role in management and decision making. The NSB will forward their recommendations to the Polar Bear Commission.

Maria Vorontsova, representing the International Fund for Animal Welfare – Russia, expressed concern about a lack of enforcement of the current legislation in field of animals protection.. She emphasized the need for an enforceable system on harvest management.

Commissioner Kavry made a presentation on education and prevention of human – bear conflict situations. In order to minimize or prevent conflicts, they have prepared a list of measures and recommendations and conducted outreach in the village communities. Polar bear patrols have been trained to deter and haze polar bears using various methods to minimize lethal take.

Charles Hamilton presented a draft webpage and two possible logos for consideration by the Commission. The Commission discussed key components that should be incorporated in the logo. It was agreed that the logos will be shared and comments will be incorporated for presentation at the next meeting. The Commission acknowledged and thanked Katerina Wessels for her work on the logos.

Eric Regher presented the recommendation from the SWG. Their recommendation is: “The SWG recognized that new biological information considered at this meeting did not suggest the need to change the sustainable harvest level for polar bears from the AC population. Therefore, the SWG recommends no change to the current sustainable harvest level of up to 58 polar bears per year to be shared equally between the U.S. and Russia, of which no more than 1/3 will be female, or to the multiyear quota system adopted for the implementation of the harvest.”

This recommendation was adopted by all of the Commissioners.

Commissioner Haskett and Commissioner Omelak made a joint statement to the Commission on implementation of the shared harvest quota in the United States beginning in 2016; their joint statement is attached.

Commissioner Amirkhanov and Commissioner Kavry agreed with the joint statement and had no objections.

Stanislav Belikov raised a question about the timing of implementation of the joint Action Plan.

Commissioner Haskett responded that the U.S. plans to implement the quota beginning on January 1, 2016. The U.S. will continue to collaborate with Russia on monitoring and reporting for consistency and research on the abundance of polar bears.

Commissioner Omelak noted that will that the ANC will develop internal monitoring and reporting processes.

Commissioner Amirkhanov agreed to continue using the current abundance numbers and noted the results of the meeting have been satisfactory, including the participation of the observers.

The Commissioners discussed the next steps for continuation of research, conservation, and management for the AC polar bear population. The Commissioners acknowledged that the joint research efforts discussed earlier should continue and that the SWG should develop a unified approach for joint research to present at the next meeting of the Commission.

Commissioner Amirkhanov proposed that the 7th Commission meeting be held in Sochi (Russian Federation)

Commissioner Haskett noted that the U.S. will send potential dates to be agreed upon by the Commissioners of the Russian Federation.

**U.S. Commissioners**

**Russian Federation Commissioners**



Geoffrey Haskett



Amirkhan Amirkhanov



Jack Omelak



Sergei Kavry

Dated 6 June 2014