

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4th Annual Meeting of the Scientific Working Group of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission

Moscow, Russian Federation

03-04 June 2013

1. The fourth meeting of the Scientific Working Group (SWG) designated to support the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission (the “Commission”) took place on June 03-04, 2013 at the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment in Moscow, Russia. The SWG meeting was attended by 13 members of the SWG (including cochairs Terry DeBruyn and Stanislav Belikov; Attachment 1) and 8 observers. 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*. The main objectives of the meeting were to provide information to the Commission on the following topics: 1) review of new research findings; 2) discussion of harvest recommendations; 3) evaluation of human-caused removals from the population; and 4) development of a draft joint U.S.-Russia Conservation Management Plan outline for Alaska-Chukotka (AC) polar bear population.
2. The SWG received the following presentations from members:
 - a) Review of new research findings on the AC population in the U.S. (E. Regehr, J. Omelak, and M. Pederson)
 - b) Review of new research findings on the AC population in Russia (N. Ovsyanikov, A. Boltunov, A. Kochnev, and N. Platonov)
3. Members of the SWG discussed the types and numbers of human-caused removals of polar bears from the AC population in the U.S. and Russia for the calendar year 2012.
4. Members of the SWG made decisions or recommendations on the following points:
 - a) 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.*
 - b) The SWG recognized the importance a joint U.S.-Russia Conservation Management Plan for the AC population, discussed the draft outline and content of this plan, and discussed its relationship to other national and international plans (e.g., the Range States circumpolar Action Plan to be completed in 2015). The SWG requested approval of the Commission to complete the draft plan at the 2014 meeting of the SWG.

- c) The SWG reviewed priority studies as identified in the 2012 SWG document entitled *Study Plan for the Alaska-Chukotka Polar Bear Population (2013-2015)*, and emphasized the need to focus on the following initiatives in the next few years:
 - a. “Quantify the annual level and type of human-caused removals in Chukotka and Alaska. Evaluate methodologies for quantifying human-caused removals, including methodologies for quantifying illegal trade in polar bear parts.”
 - b. “Develop a polar bear capture program on the Chukotkan coast and a genetic sampling program on the Chukotkan coast and Wrangel Island. Begin biopsy darting on the Chukotkan coast and collect genetic samples via hair snaring on Wrangel Island.”
 - c. “Monitor seasonal distribution patterns of polar bears via observational methods and satellite tags for the purpose of identifying protected areas. This includes monitoring coastal distribution of polar bears in Chukotka via aerial surveys during the summer and autumn period; and annually monitoring bear occurrence, sex and age composition, and behavior at key locations, including community-based monitoring at walrus haulouts... along the Chukotkan coast during the ice-free period.”
5. The SWG recommended coordination between SWG cochairs and the Commission to obtain financial support for the studies listed in 4. c), as needed, including competing for funds available from the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission.
6. The SWG recognized the need to clarify the existing structure and operating guidelines of the SWG, to include Terms of Reference on the following topics: 1) procedures for making recommendations to the Commission, 2) procedures to represent minority perspectives, 3) methods for external review of scientific findings, and 4) criteria for qualification of prospective members. The SWG recommended that the cochairs will present draft Terms of Reference for consideration at the 2014 SWG meeting.
7. The SWG recognized the need to jointly coordinate objectives, data collection, analysis, and publication among the various monitoring studies for the AC population.
8. The meeting was attended by observers that made the following points:
 - a. Thanks were expressed for the balanced approach of the SWG.
 - b. Observers requested access to detailed reports of the information discussed by the SWG.
 - c. Observers encouraged presentation of non-technical and understandable presentation of research and management findings to communities.
 - d. The importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge was affirmed.
 - e. Observers expressed appreciation for the conservation focus of the SWG.

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- f. Observers requested development of a protocol for den surveys on Wrangel Island, and affirmed the importance of transparent joint science.
- g. Observers requested clear steps toward the implementation of legal and sustainable harvest limits for the AC population.

*This recommendation was supported by 12 of the 13 SWG members present at the meeting.

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Attachment 1

List of Attendees at the 4th Annual Meeting of the Scientific Working Group of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission

Scientific Working Group members that attended the meeting:

Stanislav Belikov (Russian cochair) – All-Russian Research Institute of Nature Protection

Andrei Boltunov – All-Russian Research Institute of Nature Protection

Olga Etylin (in place of Vladilen Kavry) – Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North

Vladimir Etylin – Chukotka Autonomous Region

Anatoly Kochnev – Chukotka Federal Fisheries Research Institute

Ilya MordvinsteV – Russian Academy of Sciences

Nikita Ovseyanikov – Wrangel Island Nature Reserve

Yury Tototto – Marine Hunters Union

Terry DeBruyn (American cochair) – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Jack Omelak – Alaska Nanuuq Commission

Mike Pederson – North Slope Borough

Eric Regehr – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Kimberly Titus – Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Scientific Working Group members who were unable to attend the meeting:

Vladilen Kavry

Todd Atwood

Karyn Rode

Scott Schliebe