

**Report of the Second Meeting of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear
Commission
June 7-9, Anchorage, Alaska, USA**

Chaired by Geoffrey Haskett

Monday, June 7, 2010

Chairman Haskett opened the meeting. He announced that for the duration of the meeting Charlie Brower would unofficially represent Charlie Johnson, who for medical reasons would only be able to attend portions of the meeting. Commissioner Amirkhanov indicated that the Commission should have procedures in place for any commissioners who cannot personally participate in meetings.

Commissioner Amirkhanov acknowledged that the Scientific Working Group had performed all of the work assigned to them at the previous Commission meeting in Moscow in September 2009.

Commissioner Kavry acknowledged that the Scientific Working Group had identified the need for additional information to improve the estimate of sustainable harvest. He encouraged close coordination of research activities with local people and reiterated the interest of Native peoples in Russia in ensuring a speedy beginning to their Native harvest.

Chairman Haskett announced that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had received notice that the U.S. State Department concurred with the designation of Charlie Brower as an alternate commissioner to Commissioner Charlie Johnson, and Gary Frazer as an alternate commissioner to himself.

Agenda topic: Discussion of meeting goals and expected outcomes

The goal of the meeting was identified as evaluation of the cultural use and conservation of polar bears with specific attention to identifying a sustainable harvest level, and carrying out conservation and research programs.

Agenda topic: Briefing by chairs of the Scientific Working Group (SWG) on harvest recommendations - by U.S. co-chair Scott Schliebe

The Commission received a report on the recommendations of the SWG. The Commission acknowledged that the data needed to accurately estimate a sustainable harvest level are currently lacking and that there is a need for a comprehensive study plan.

Agenda topic: Presentation and discussion of harvest models – Eric Regehr

A report was given on details of the population models and assumptions used by the SWB to identify the likely range of sustainable harvest levels for the Alaska-Chukotka population.

Agenda topic: Presentation from Russian and Alaskan Natives on the cultural significance of subsistence harvest

Reports on the cultural significance of polar bear harvest to Natives of Alaska and Chukotka were provided by Charlie Johnson, Eduard Zdor, and Vladilen Kavry. Commissioner Amirkhanov acknowledged that the Agreement was largely based on the restoration to the people of Chukotka of legal use of natural resources. It was acknowledged that natural resources, including polar bears, are closely linked to the history, traditions, and culture of the Chukotkan and Alaskan people.

Agenda topic: Briefing on U.S.-Russia harvest workshop

Scott Schliebe provided a briefing on the US-Russia harvest workshop (see Attachment 1). There was discussion on the need to determine how defense of life and illegal killings will be considered within the quota. It was acknowledged that programs are needed in Russia to minimize bear-human interactions and eliminate kills in defense of life, preferring instead to frighten bears off, particularly those by non-Natives. It was acknowledged that the recommended harvest level determined by the Scientific Working Group includes all human-caused mortalities.

Stanislav Belikov indicated that participants in the harvest workshop had identified the need for each country to prepare its own rules for harvest monitoring proceeding from the specifics of each nation's laws. Each country has different regulations and laws, but it was agreed that those differences would be reconciled to the extent possible so that monitoring programs in the two countries would be as similar as possible.

Scott Schliebe responded to a question from Commissioner Amirkhanov that the Commission's role in harvest monitoring would be to direct further harvest workshops to standardize monitoring requirements, including data collected from harvested bears. The U.S. side would be directed to move forward on working with the Alaska Nanuuq Commission to develop a set of regulations compatible with those that have been outlined on the Russian side.

Commissioner Amirkhanov acknowledged that not only are compatible harvest monitoring and regulation systems needed, but also a joint cooperative research program to strengthen justification of harvest levels adopted by the Commission. Chairman Haskett and Scientific Working Group co-chair Scott Schliebe agreed on the need for a joint research program.

Agenda topic: Harvest restrictions outlined in the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears and the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Agreement

Mike Young provided a review of the harvest restrictions outlined under the 1973 Agreement and in the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Agreement. Those restrictions also specify that a quota includes all human-caused mortalities. All commissioners agreed with this principle.

Agenda topic: Briefing on monitoring and enforcement mechanisms required to establish a Native harvest in Russia

Evgeny Shevchenko provided an overview of the status of monitoring and enforcement mechanisms that have been identified to manage a polar bear harvest quota in Chukotka. Commissioner Amirkhanov indicated that legislation is in place to transfer authority for harvest management from the federal to the Chukotkan Regional government.

Tuesday, June 8, 2010

The meeting opened with a review of topics covered the previous day. There was further discussion on the question of kills of polar bears in defense of life. It was agreed that in response to the need for ways to minimize such kills (e.g., deterrents), the U.S. would share its expertise with Russian colleagues.

Agenda topic: Discussion of consistency of harvest management and monitoring in Alaska and Russia

Stanislav Belikov summarized the discussion of this topic which took place during the harvest workshop. This information was heard and taken into consideration.

Agenda topic: Determination of harvest quota for polar bears and timeline for implementation

The Commissioners were asked by Chairman Geoffrey Haskett to present their current positions on a vote for a harvest quota. Commissioner Haskett announced his willingness to accept the harvest option recommended by the Scientific Working Group of a harvest quota of 45 polar bears for the Alaska-Chukotka population. Commissioner Amirkhanov indicated that he supports the work of the SWG and endorses a legal harvest of up to 45 polar bears if all parties can agree, recognizing the conservation benefits of a legal harvest. He stated his opposition to the status quo of continued unregulated harvest in the U.S. Commissioner Kavry supported a harvest quota of 45 bears. He indicated that estimates of illegal harvest in Russia were likely overstated and, as a result, that the population size could be slightly higher than estimated – perhaps 2,500 polar bears instead of the 2,000 estimate used by the SWG.

Charlie Johnson was not present when position statements were made by the Commissioners and was unable to attend the second day of the Commission meeting. Charlie Brower indicated that the Alaska Nanuuq Commission believes a harvest quota set at 45 is too low, said that the Nanuuq Commission appreciates the work of the Scientific Working Group, and relayed a request from Charlie Johnson, who hoped to be present at the meeting's third day, that no decisions be made in his absence.

Throughout the second day's discussions the Commissioners acknowledged their acceptance and support for the work of the Scientific Working Group. Commissioners Amirkhanov and Haskett summarized this support in statements

indicating there has been no dissention to the work of the SWG, that they are pleased with the report they received, and are using that information as the basis for their decisions.

The Commission acknowledged that a legal harvest would improve conservation of the Alaska-Chukotka population, reduce illegal take in Russia, and provide valuable harvest monitoring data.

Nikolay Etytegin read a position statement on behalf of Chazto.

Commissioner Amirkhanov indicated that illegal harvest levels of 100-300 polar bears have been irresponsibility reported, and are erroneous figures. Evidence of such estimates must be proved. Evgeny Shevchenko and Commissioner Kavry similarly stated that those estimates were likely higher than the actual level of illegal harvest.

There was further discussion about the moratorium option presented by the Scientific Working Group. Commissioner Amirkhanov indicated that Evgeny Shevchenko would be charged with controlling illegal harvest in Russia. Commissioners Haskett and Amirkhanov expressed the opinion that a moratorium would in all probability not be acceptable to the Natives of Alaska and Chukotka. They suggested the Commission focus its attention on the harvest quota option.

In response to some discussion about the Scientific Working Group's use of a population size of 2,000 in harvest modeling, the working group's co-chair Stanislav Belikov provided further clarification for the use of this estimate. He indicated that 2,000 is not a permanently fixed number, but would be changed as scientific information becomes available. He emphasized the importance of involving Native people in a practical way in the management of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population.

Igor Mikhno indicated that more than \$30,000 has been provided by the Chukotkan government to assist with polar bear population monitoring.

Eduard Zdor suggested a separate side-meeting between the Chukotkans and the Alaska Nanuuq Commission.

Wednesday, June 9, 2010

Agenda topic (continued): Determination of harvest quota for polar bears and timeline for implementation

Commissioner Charlie Johnson proposed a total harvest of 68 for a period of approximately four years. Native Chukotkans and Alaskans met and agreed upon this number. Commissioner Johnson indicated that this number corresponds with the level of harvest associated with an r_{max} of 0.06 in Table 2 prepared by the Scientific Working Group at a population size of 2,000 bears.

This proposal was supported by Vladimir Etylin, Taquilik Hepa, and Doug Vincent-Lang.

Vladilen Kavry and Vladimir Etylin pointed out that annual harvest limits should not roll over from year to year, so that credits and debits do not occur in harvest quotas for subsequent years.

Mike Goslinger of the Marine Mammal Commission called into question the scientific basis for the proposed higher quota of 68. He indicated that he has received advice from Canadian polar bear biologist Ian Stirling, a scientific advisor to the Marine Mammal Commission, that a growth rate of 0.06 is unrealistically high for polar bears in general, and especially so for the Alaska-Chukotka population.

After lunch, Commissioner Geoffrey Haskett suggested that an annual take be adopted of 58 polar bears per year, not to exceed 68 bears in any given year, under a 5 year block quota. The proportion of females in the harvest should not exceed that defined by a 2:1 male to female sex ratio each year. The total harvest should not exceed 290 bears over 5 years. The Commission would charge the Scientific Working or an ad hoc group to determine how we will monitor and enforce a harvest. Additionally, the Scientific Working Goup would conduct an annual review of this quota and either confirm or specify a new quota during this time.

Commissioner Amir Khanov responded that he could not accept that option because it had not been considered and approved by the SWG.

The Commission asked that the members of the Scientific Working Group (SWG) present at the Commission meeting convene separately to discuss the option of harvesting 58 bears per year over a five-year period.

The SWG members present at the Commission meeting (7 of the 11 official members) met as proposed. Scott Schliebe presented their conclusion to the Commission and Commissioner Amir Khanov requested that this be provided in writing and signed by the members of the Scientific Working Group present at the meeting (see Attachment 2).

The proposal put forth earlier by Geoffrey Haskett was read to the Commission and modified per requests of the Commissioners. The following was considered for a vote.

The Commission adopts an annual take of up to 58 polar bears per year of which no more than 19 will be females. Implementation of a regulated harvest of 58 bears will occur when legislative and enforcement mechanisms are in place. An ad hoc group will be charged with identifying harvest seasons within 60 days of this meeting and a report will be decided upon via a teleconference of the Commissioners. Each country is responsible for developing documents describing how a regulated harvest will be implemented to be reported at the

next Commission meeting. The United States and Russian Federation will work together over the coming year to identify the legal requirements and documents needed to implement the identified harvest limit. This will be further discussed at the next Commission meeting June 2011.

The Scientific Working Group will conduct an annual review of this harvest limit and provide a recommendation to the Commission confirming continuation of the existing harvest limit or specifying a new harvest limit. The Commission also tasks the Scientific Working Group to consider how a harvest limit will be administered , including a potential block harvest limit.

The Commission supports the work of the participants of the harvest workshop and tasks this group with providing recommendations on standardizing the collection of harvest data and biological samples from harvested bears at the next Commission meeting.

All Commissioners voted in support of this proposal.

Chairman Haskett stated that the Commission will work closely over the coming year and will work closely with the ad hoc scientific working group. The Commission will further discuss future actions of the Scientific Working Group over the coming year due to their inability to address this topic in entirety at this meeting.

Commissioner Amirkhanov recommended that the term “subsistence harvest” be used instead of “hunting” when referring to the decisions of the Commission.

Commissioner Amirkhanov will chair the next meeting with a suggested timeframe of June 2011. He suggested holding the next Commission meeting in Chukotka.

List of Attendees (Attachment 3)

United States Commissioners


Geoffrey Haskett


Charlie Johnson

Russian Federation Commissioners


Amirkhan Amirkhanov


Sergey Kavry

Anchorage, June 9, 2010