

News Release

Office of Communications
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS-330
Arlington, VA 22203
Phone: 703-358-2220
Fax: 703-358-1973
<http://www.fws.gov>



For Immediate Release

March 07, 2013

Contact:

Bangkok, Thailand: Danielle Kessler
+66 (0) 81-750-4216
danielle_kessler@fws.gov

USA: Claire Cassel
703-358-2357
claire_cassel@fws.gov

CITES Conference of the Parties Fails to Strengthen Protection for Polar Bears

(Bangkok, Thailand—7 March 2013) A proposal to transfer polar bears from Appendix II to Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was defeated today by the member nations of the treaty. The proposal, submitted for consideration by the United States, garnered intense debate primarily due to opposition from Canada, Greenland, and Norway, all of which are range states for polar bears. The final tally for the vote was 38 support, 42 against, and 46 abstentions.

“We are obviously disappointed that the CITES membership failed to give greater protection to polar bears by limiting permissible trade in polar bear pelts and other body parts,” said Deputy Secretary of the Interior David J. Hayes. “We will continue to work with our partners to reduce the pressure that trade in polar bear parts puts on this iconic arctic species, even as we take on the longer term threat that climate change poses to polar bears.”

“As polar bear hide prices have skyrocketed, more bears are being offered at auction, and hunting levels have increased,” said Dan Ashe, head of the U.S. delegation. “A CITES Appendix-I listing would have ensured that commercial trade would not compound the threats of habitat loss that are facing this species.”

In preparation for the CITES Conference, the United States engaged with a number of member nations to CITES, referred to as “Parties,” to garner support for the polar bear proposal. “We

reached out to our CITES counterparts in many other nations to show that the science supported an Appendix-I listing. Unfortunately, politics seem to have overtaken science,” said Ashe.

According to the National Snow & Ice Data Center findings, Arctic sea ice extent reached its lowest point this year, placing September 2012 as the lowest sea ice extent since 1979, both for the daily minimum extent and the monthly average. This ‘real life’ figure is far lower than any of the scientific models predicted. The Polar Bear Specialist Group reports that 15 of 19 subpopulations are declining or data deficient.

Limiting commercial trade in this species would have addressed a source of non-climate stress to polar bear populations and contributed to long-term recovery. Each year, an average of 3,200 items made from polar bears – including skins, claws, and teeth – are reported to be exported or re-exported from range countries. Polar bear hides sell for an average of \$2,000 to \$5,000, while maximum hide prices have topped \$12,000.

In recognition of the importance of a subsistence harvest of polar bears for Alaska Natives, the U.S. proposal would not have affected the subsistence harvest of this species by Alaska Natives or the creation of handicrafts using parts of this species.

Species protected by CITES are included in one of three appendices. Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction and provides the greatest level of protection, including restrictions on commercial trade. Appendix II includes species that, although currently not threatened with extinction, may become so without trade controls. Changes to Appendices I and II must be proposed at a CoP and agreed to by a two-thirds majority of the Parties present and voting. In contrast, listings to Appendix III can be requested by individual Parties at any time. Appendix III includes species protected by at least one country that needs assistance from other Parties to control trade.

For additional biological information on polar bears, please visit <http://www.fws.gov/international/cites/cop16/polar-bear.html>. To learn more about the U.S.’s proposal to list polar bears in CITES Appendix I, please refer to our fact sheet at <http://www.fws.gov/international/cites/cop16/cop16-polar-bear-proposal-factsheet.pdf>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfws, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfws>.

-FWS-