

Report of the Eighth Meeting of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission

November 17-18, 2016

Anchorage, Alaska

The eighth meeting of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission (hereafter, "Commission") took place **November 14-18, 2016** in Anchorage, Alaska, USA. The Commission meeting was attended by three members of the Commission (**Sergei Kavry**, **Greg Siekaniec**, and **Charles Brower**) and their respective delegates (Appendix I). **Amirkhan Amirkhanov** attended portions of the meeting via phone. 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, "Agreement").

Thursday, November 17, 2016

Commissioner Siekaniec opened the meeting by welcoming the Russian and American participants and thanked the previous US commissioners Haskett and Omelak. He emphasized the importance of working in partnership with Native people towards conservation of polar bears. He noted recent actions that hold promise for long-term polar bear conservation and management, including the Paris agreement on climate change and the Circumpolar Action Plan, as well as cooperative efforts to estimate the Alaska-Chukotka population of polar bears and the collaborative study on Wrangel Island. He stated that the United States has encountered challenges in their partnership with Alaska Natives who harvest polar bears for their subsistence needs, and recognized that additional work is necessary to reach a common understanding with affected communities. He emphasized that the United States is committed to meaningful consultations with the goal of reaffirming the shared commitment to the foundations of the Agreement. As part of the U.S. efforts to better understand and address what they have heard, last week they opened a 60-day public comment request for information that will help to enhance their efforts towards that shared commitment.

Commissioner Amirkhanov sent a statement, which was read. Please accept my sincere congratulations on your designation as Regional Director of the Alaska Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as on your appointment as the U.S. Government's Commissioner for the bilateral U.S.-Russia Commission under the U.S.-Russia Agreement on the Conservation and Management of the Alaska-Chukotka Polar Bear Population.

I would like to express the hope for fruitful and constructive cooperation, which for many years has been based on open and trusting relations and close and effective interaction on a range of questions at both the level of our two governments as well as between representatives of the Native peoples of our countries.

At this time, I must inform you that I will be unable to attend the upcoming 8th Commission meeting in Anchorage November 17-18, 2016. However, representatives of Russian scientific organizations, Native peoples and the Administration of Chukotka Autonomous Region will take part in the meetings of the Scientific Working Group and Commission, and will make presentations in accordance with the agenda. That said, I am prepared to take part in the 8th

Commission meeting by working on the Protocol via teleconference and signing the finished document.

Please be assured of my deepest respect and readiness to work effectively to strengthen cooperation between our countries.

Commissioner Brower welcomed meeting participants and noted that this was his first meeting as the officially appointed Native Commissioner for the United States. He expressed gratitude for his appointment, and said that he gladly accepts this responsibility and will do his best to represent Native constituents. He also thanked the previous U.S. Commissioners Geoff Haskett and Jack Omelak for their past work. Commissioner Brower expressed that there is still much work to be done, and that he is ready to take action. Amidst all of the changes that are occurring, he looks forward to continuing the work that is necessary to ensure that polar bears are sustained into the future, and remain available for subsistence use.

Commissioner Kavry welcomed all commissioners. He expressed concern that Commissioner Amirkhanov was not able to attend; however, he was also pleased that the meeting was able to take place and also noted the importance of the meeting. Mr. Kavry noted that the environment is rapidly changing and emphasized the importance of updated data and TEK. He also stated that regular meetings are critically important to our understanding of polar bears and he remains optimistic about the future.

Agenda item: Introduction of delegates and Observers: list of attendees in Appendix 1.

Briefings by co-chairs of the Scientific Working Group (SWG) on SWG meeting outcomes – Stanislav Belikov, Eric Regehr

Drs. Stanislav Belikov and Eric Regehr provided a summary of the 7th annual meeting of the Scientific Working Group held on 14-15 November 2016. The SWG reported on significant scientific advances in both countries, including joint U.S.-Russian field studies on Wrangel Island and the completion of fieldwork on a collaborative instrument-based aerial survey in 2016. The SWG provided the Commission with the following recommendations:

In addition, the SWG made the following recommendations to the Commission:

- A. The SWG recognized the new biological information considered at this meeting did not suggest the need to change the current estimate of 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 bears per year, of which no more than 1/3 will be female, or to the multiyear quota system as adopted by the Commission.*
 - a. * Six of 10 voting SWG members supported this majority recommendation. Four members supported a more concise recommendation to maintain the current sustainable harvest level, which appears to pose a low level of risk to the biological population. One member abstained from voting due to agency policy.
- B. The SWG recognized that significant new information will be available in the next year on the abundance and vital rates of the AC population. The SWG recommends that all available data, including new science on abundance, population delineation, and TEK should be considered prior to the 2017 Commission meeting. The SWG recommends that the Commission support a workshop or SWG meeting of sufficient length to allow SWG

members to assess this new information and to derive updated recommendations on sustainable harvest level. The SWG expects that this assessment will result in a range of sustainable harvest options with associated risk levels, which the Commission can use to determine an appropriate balance between protecting the AC population and meeting subsistence needs in a manner that is consistent with the terms of the Agreement.

- C. The SWG recognized the critical importance of Wrangel Island to the AC population, acknowledged the success of joint Russian-American field studies on Wrangel Island in 2016, and requested that the Commission continue to support joint research on Wrangel Island according to the joint study plan.
- D. The SWG recognized that an updated analysis of data on the movements and delineation of the AC population is important to management and conservation, and requested that the Commission support such an analysis.
- E. The SWG recognized that communities within the U.S. that rely upon polar bears as a subsistence resource, do not necessarily oppose harvest management of polar bears. However, communities and Native organizations are concerned that harvest limits, which may be conservative due to scientific uncertainty, can cause hardship for people. There are also concerns in the U.S. that overly conservative harvest limits could lead to criminalization of sustainable subsistence activities. As such, it is important for the Commission to recognize that such concerns can undermine community support for polar bear management, which is essential for successful conservation**.
 - a. ** Nine of 10 voting SWG
- F. The SWG proposed the following changes to the membership of the group:
 - a. Bob Small (Alaska Department of Fish and Game) to replace Kimberly Titus (Alaska Department of Fish and Game)
 - b. Billy Adams (North Slope Borough) to replace Mike Pederson (North Slope Borough)
 - c. Clyde Oxereok (representing Native Alaskans) to replace Charles Brower (Alaska Nanuuq Commission)
 - d. Sergey Galyagirgin (Union of Marine Hunters of Chukotka) to replace Vladilen Kavry (Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North—deceased)
 - e. Egor Vereschchagin (Chukotka Administration) to replace Vladimir Etylin (Chukotka Autonomous Region)
 - f. Stanislav Tayennom (National Park Beringia) to replace Yury Tototto (Marine Hunters Union)

The SWG also provided the Commission with a summary of other decisions and deliberations, including: development of draft standards for how the SWG considers new information, to be finalized at the next meeting; a modification to the group's Terms of References supporting the openness of SWG meetings; finalization of the study plans entitled *Information Needs and Joint Research Studies for the Alaska-Chukotka Polar Bear Population (2016-2018)* and *Information*

Needs and Joint Research Studies on Wrangel Island (2016-2018); a request for clarification from the Commission on the role of the SWG as defined in its 2009 structuring document; and an acknowledgement that the SWG has created a website to make the group's materials available to the public in a timely manner.

Commissioner Siekaniec noted that one of the recommendations in the SWG report does not appear to be directly responsive to its responsibilities as laid out in its 2009 document. This recommendation appears to offer guidance for the Commission's consideration of adoption and implementation of annual take limits. He noted that in their report, the SWG indicates that it anticipates providing the Commission a range of possible annual sustainable harvest limits in its 2017 report along with associated probabilities or expressions of risk. The Commission will have a number of factors it may wish to consider when selecting among the alternatives provided by the SWG and we may wish to do some work in advance of the meeting to identify these factors.

Agenda item: Observer statements related to the Scientific Working Group report.

Roy Ashenfelter, representing Kawerak, Incorporated, a non-profit Native organization based in Nome, expressed several concerns regarding the SWG Report and Bilateral Agreement, as follows:

- 1) Tribal consultation has been insufficient with the Alaska Native community regarding the Bilateral Agreement and harvest quota;
- 2) The Alaska Nanuuq Commission is no longer working, and the Alaska Native community has not yet formed a new organization to replace the Alaska Nanuuq Commission as the co-management partner that represents Alaska Native interests;
- 3) Once formed, Mr. Ashenfelter indicated that they want to select their own representatives to the SWG and Bilateral Commission;
- 4) It is not acceptable to just give a harvest number and then tell Natives; harvest numbers should not be created without tribal input. The Western Arctic Caribou Plan is a good example of how to derive decisions involving stakeholders; in that plan, all stakeholders were involved in discussions, decision-making, and strategizing for how to move forward with harvest allocation.
- 5) The number of bears taken historically for subsistence should be the benchmark for establishing the polar bear harvest quota;
- 6) We need to back up and put Natives at the table in order to make this Agreement work.

Mr. Ashenfelter also stated that the bilateral treaty is not good for Alaska Natives, as evidenced by letters sent from Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), North Slope Borough (NSB) and others opposing the Treaty. Lastly, he noted that oil spill response plans should include the Northwest Arctic Native Association (NANA) region

Karla Dutton, representing Defenders of Wildlife, commended the scientific studies ongoing under the Bilateral Agreement for the AC population, stating that it is very important and exciting. She recommended that Native involvement in science should be increased, as well as efforts to communicate the science back to the communities. She also encouraged the

Commission to strongly prioritize obtaining a co-management partner that is agreed upon by Native people.

John Hopson, Mayor of the City of Wainwright, and polar bear hunter, stated that his community residents and hunters have not been adequately notified or informed about the quota numbers or the boundary related to the bilateral treaty. His community is directly affected because it is an active polar bear hunting community. Polar bears are routinely taken for food and clothes and the current harvest numbers will not sustain Wainwright and Barrow. He requested that the Commission change (increase) the harvest numbers to help hunters in these communities and noted that hunters will hunt/take bears at sustainable levels. It is a cultural practice to only take what you need when you live off the land and water. As an example, Mr. Hopson explained that his family relies 90% on Native foods, and any loss of availability is a hardship for his family. He requested that the Commission re-consider the numbers so that Alaska Natives can continue to eat without fear that the government is going to “hammer us” for doing so.

Taqulik Hepa, Director, Department of Wildlife Management, North Slope Borough, stated that Alaska Natives are familiar with the need for sustainable harvest levels, and that conservation is the most important thing that Native hunters do. Native traditional practices include hunting less when resource levels require it. She expressed the following concerns:

- 1) Reliable scientific information is needed before restrictive harvest limits are imposed; she is concerned that the data being used to implement harvest is outdated and unreliable and does not meet the high standards necessary for the bilateral treaty;
- 2) New data should be reviewed before a quota is enforced; if it is reliable, we will work hard to keep harvest at sustainable level;
- 3) The boundary issue (whether the U.S. boundary is at Icy Cape or Barrow) should be addressed, a lack of a clear message on where the boundary has resulted in confusion and resentment in affected communities. She also noted that Barrow and Wainwright are already managed under the Inuvialuit-Inupiat Agreement with Canada. She expressed that the boundary at Icy Cape is preferable to the boundary at Barrow and that an adjustment of the boundary without a quota change (she said that the quota was set with the Icy Cape boundary in mind, but now Barrow is the proposed boundary with no subsequent increase in the quota to take into account the additional communities of Wainwright and Barrow) will affect Alaskan Native hunters.
- 4) Currently, a lack of adequate representation for Native people and subsistence hunters exists on the Commission. If meaningful co-management is to occur, then the lack of Native voices is a major concern. She reiterated that these concerns are directly tied to the lives of Native people who have a subsistence livelihood; and
- 5) Local observations from hunters indicate that polar bears are actually healthy; therefore, she asked that the Commission allows harvest to occur at the existing take levels until a new co-management body is in place.

Gay Sheffield, marine mammal biologist, speaking on behalf of herself, stated that she is based in Nome and works often with Native constituents. She pointed out that harvest limits can pose a hardship for people, especially during times when food security issues are going on, as they currently are in the Bering Strait region. She reminded meeting participants that polar bears are harvested for food in her region, and that there could be an economic hardship that can occur for those that also use polar bear parts for manufacture of handicrafts if they are unavailable, due to a quota. She noted that in the past there have been issues with federal rules for harvest, and incidents where the overharvest of a federally protected species resulted in hunter being incarcerated, then sent out of state to serve their sentence; this can be a hardship as well.

Commissioner Kavry commented that he wished that more Russian Native people were here to witness how Alaska Natives speak their mind and reach consensus with their government. He also was glad to see representatives of the Chukotka Autonomous region government bring information to the group regarding Russia's plan for implementing the harvest and quota.

Elisabeth Kruger, representing World Wildlife Fund, also expressed gratitude to the SWG for their commendable joint US-Russia scientific work. She stated clarifying the boundary is critical, and that connecting Native constituents with scientists, and science with TEK is absolutely essential.

Billy Adams, Alaska Native polar bear hunter, thanked the Commission for allowing us (as Natives) to speak about our way of life and expressed how important it is to maintain the opportunity for polar bear hunting in the future. He noted that a lot can be learned from the history of elders such as his grandmother; science is new, but the long history of living on this land means that Native people know how to manage animals. When the quota on whales came, it hurt a lot of people. Young people started doing bad things such as suicide and alcohol – these are potential results when the quota is too small. Alaska Natives know there were more whales when the scientists didn't. He felt that Alaska Native people can work together with scientists to conserve bears.

William Hopson, community member of Barrow, noted that in the last forty years alone, up to 30 mercy killings of polar bears have occurred in Barrow because bears were suffering, and an additional 30 bears have been killed in other villages because Native people won't let animals suffer. The SWG needs to keep this in mind when setting the quota; scientists should think about how many bears have been killed from scientific investigations, e.g. from collaring.

Agenda item: Presentation on U.S. implementation of Agreement.

Dr. Hilary Cooley presented an update from the U.S. on harvest over the past year and activities within the U.S. in support of implementation of the Agreement. In 2015, 12 bears were harvested, including 0 females, inside the Treaty Area. Since last year's meeting, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service visited four villages to conduct tribal consultation and public meetings and

also held a “polar bear summit” in Nome to discuss the Agreement and co-management of polar bears with affected communities and interested stakeholders. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, in coordination with the Alaska Nanuuq Commission (ANC) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), published a final report on the Marking, Tagging, Reporting Program Review. The USFWS recently made the determination that, regrettably, we are unable to fund the operations of the ANC. Therefore, we are currently seeking a new co-management partner to represent Alaska Native polar bear subsistence users. The Service believes the active engagement and participation of Alaska Natives is instrumental to successful implementation of our management actions, and we are committed to working to strengthen relationships to that end. We are currently working with the Alaska Native community to identify a new co-management partner. It is our goal to have a new partner identified in 2017 so that they can proceed with establishing a program of locally enforceable ordinances for polar bear harvest. To allow time for this process, we are stepping back from our previous goal of implementation on January 1, 2017. We now anticipate issuing regulations in 2019, with an anticipated effective date of January 1, 2020. In the interim, we will continue conducting consultation with federally recognized tribes, outreach and education to affected communities and evaluating biological information. We describe the implementation strategy in an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking published in the Federal Register on November 8, 2016.

Agenda item: Presentation on Russian implementation of Agreement.

(Olga Krever, Advisor to the Head of Rosprirodnadzor, Olga Safonova, Chukotka Administration)

Olga Krever noted that the US-Russia Agreement on Polar bear conservation, within which a framework of collaboration provides, was signed in 2000 and entered into force in 2007. Article 3 of the Agreement set action boundaries that have not changed since the signing of the Agreement.

Also she noted the importance of joint work and exchange of information for the purpose of long-term sustainable management of Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population, especially given current circumstances when, on the one hand, as a result of climate changes, i.e., shrinking and thinning of the ice cover, as well as reduction in the time of its presence on Chukchi and East Siberian seas, there have been more instances of polar bears showing up on the coastline and more conflicts between humans and animals, while, on the other hand, under the Arctic development plans, provided for the strategic planning documents on Russian Arctic development, economic and business activity in the polar bear habitat area is increasing and the anthropogenic burden on the Arctic ecosystems in its key habitual areas is growing.

The Commission was informed on the national management system, which is organized for Chukotka-Alaska Polar bear population.

As a means to protect the polar bear, Russia adopted a Strategy for the Protection of the Polar Bear in the Russian Federation (approved by order of the Ministry of Wildlife of Russia on July 5, 2010, No. 26-r) and Action plan are being implemented in Russia. Issues regarding the polar bear harvesting as a species included in the Red Book of the Russian Federation are regulated by the Rules for Harvesting animals belonging to species included in the Red Book of the Russian

Federation approved by Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation of January 6, 1997 No. 13. According to the Rules, polar bear harvesting is only allowed in exceptional cases, including in order to eliminate a threat to human life, as well as to provide subsistence to native minority ethnic groups based on a permit provided by the Federal Service for Supervision of Natural Resources. The Permits are issued by Rosprirodnadzor in accordance with the procedure approved by Order of Ministry of Natural Resources (MPR) of Russia of September 3, 2003 No. 799.

To prevent poaching, inspections are conducted.

For reducing human-wildlife conflict a network of public inspection "Bear Patrol" is created in in different parts of Chukotka. Currently, organization of "Bear Patrol" is provided by the responsible Department of the Government of Chukotka.

As a part of CAP implementation work, a database on Polar bear - human conflict was created.

This database shows the number of conflict situations grew after 2000, especially after 2006. Most conflicts were resolved peacefully: either the animals left on their own, or it was possible to induce them to leave. In 7 cases (11 %) bears injured people or killed them (two cases of killing of humans by bears were recorded – in the villages of Ryrkaypiy and Cape Schmidt). In 13 cases (20%) bears were injured. In one case a bear left after a gun shot hit its paw (Vankarem), others were killed. In total, 18 bears were killed as a result of 12 conflicts.

Olga informed on Protected Areas system that was developed for Polar bear habitat conservation and management. Olga informed also on effective work which provides by the administration of Chukotka Autonomous Region.

Statement of the Administration of Chukotka Autonomous Region, Ms. Olga Safonova

Representatives of the Government of Chukotka Autonomous Region expressed concern that members of Native minority peoples of Chukotka have to date not been able to carry out traditional subsistence take of polar bears under the quotas adopted by the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission. Representatives of the Government of Chukotka Autonomous Region noted that the regional social organization "Association of Native Minorities of Chukotka," at a session of its Presidium examined the issue of the necessity of resuming subsistence take of polar bears in Chukotka. The Government of Chukotka Autonomous Region provided information about the implementation of all necessary measures for conserving polar bears in Chukotka Autonomous Region.

At the Regional and Municipal levels all the necessary legal and normative bases have been prepared and mechanisms identified for implementing quotas for taking of polar bears in Chukotka Autonomous Region.

The Department of Industrial and Agricultural Policy of Chukotka Autonomous Region has prepared and concluded agreements on conservation of polar bears and other fauna included in the Red Data Book of the Russian Federation and Chukotka Autonomous Region with: the regional non-commercial partnership "Union of Marine Mammal Hunters; the Chutkotka Regional Division of the Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Federation; the management of

Wrangel Island State Nature Reserve; and with the Chukotka Regional Division of the Federal Nature Use Oversight Agency, on interdicting channels of illegal export of polar bear skins and other body parts, as well as unlawful trade in polar bear skins, and provision for joint inspections.

The representatives of Chukotka Autonomous Region presented information about outreach to and education of residents, for whom have been posted on websites of municipal administrative units and social organizations reminders and methodological recommendations on rules of behavior in cases of encounters with polar bears in order to avoid conflict situations, on preventing polar bears from entering settlements and attacking humans, and on deterring polar bears from entering villages and places where people carry out economic activities.

The representatives of Chukotka Autonomous Region reported on the extensive preparatory work conducted by social groups of minority peoples of Chukotka which has resulted in the creation of a network of rural hunters' councils. More than 40 hunters have joined this network, with the right to carry firearms, possessing hunting licenses and having the requisite experience.

The Department of Industrial and Agricultural Policy of Chukotka Autonomous Region and the Regional non-commercial partnership "Union of Marine Mammal Hunters," with the personal participation of U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Agreement Commissioner Sergey Kavry and Scientific Working Group member Anatoly Kochnev, developed a joint Plan for the Conservation and Use of the Chukotka-Alaska population of polar bears on the territory of Chukotka Autonomous Region.

Thus, the representatives of Chukotka Autonomous Region emphasized that there exists today an active system of control, developed over the course of many years of subsistence hunting of gray and bowhead whales by the native peoples of Chukotka, which attests to the readiness of Chukotka Autonomous Region to allow subsistence hunting of polar bears by native peoples.

Agenda item: Arctic Marine Spill Response Preparedness in the Bering Strait Region.

Ms. Rhonda Sparks informed that Defenders of Wildlife seeks to minimize the impacts of spills on marine mammals with response plans guided by science and Indigenous Knowledge; by engaging at-risk communities in state and federal spill response planning and execution and fostering collaboration among all conservation partners and agencies.

Agenda item: Presentation of field observations results in Chukotka.

Dr. Stanislav Belikov detailed the capture and survey efforts undertaken in 2015 on the Chukotkan coast and Wrangel Island. Four bears were captured, samples taken, and GPS transmitters attached. Non-invasive samples were also taken from polar bears and samples from

food objects. A total of 55 camera traps were placed on Wrangel Island, and three on Herald Island. Dr. Belikov also provided an update of a joint U.S.-Russian research expedition that occurred on Wrangel Island this autumn. The main objectives of the expedition were to establish a working relationship between our two countries on Wrangel Island, teach inspectors on the island how to identify different bear sex/age classes, and determine where future hair snare stations, capture locations, and survey routes might be located. A total of 179 bears were observed along nearly 1000km of survey work done from all-terrain vehicles. The majority of bears observed had good body condition.

Friday, November 18, 2016

Agenda item: Den detection efforts on the Chukotkan coast.

Commissioner Kavry provided an update on the Chukotka den survey in 2016. They found two areas with high concentrations of dens; Vatou Mountain and Vankarem Mountain. They found a total of 15 dens and saw one female with triplets.

Agenda item: Presentation of 2016 field observations of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population.

Dr. Eric Regehr provided an overview of field observations, ongoing studies, and research findings for polar bears in the United States. In most years during 2008-2016, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and partners have conducted live-capture research in the U.S. portion of the Chukchi Sea. In 2016, 71 polar bears were captured and released and 17 radio collars were deployed. Results from a comparative habitat selection study in the Chukchi Sea region were summarized. Between 1986-1994 and 2008-2013, there was no difference in polar bear habitat selection, although there was a 75% reduction of preferred summer habitat (Wilson et al. 2016). Updates were provided on non-invasive genetic sampling of polar bears along the Chukchi Sea coast of Alaska, led by the North Slope Borough and Alaska Department of Fish and Game. In a 2016 pilot effort, 45 genetic samples were collected near Barrow, AK using hair snags. An ongoing study led by the North Slope Borough and U.S. Geological Survey on the spatial use and behavior of ice seals in the Beaufort, Chukchi, and Bering seas (2011-2016) was reviewed. Initial results from a fasting study were presented, suggesting that fewer bears are fasting in the spring in the Chukchi Sea compared to the Southern Beaufort Sea (Rode et al. in prep). Sea-ice conditions, as well as the body condition of ringed and bearded seals, were important factors explaining this difference. Initial results were presented on denning, which suggest that bears in the Chukchi Sea spend longer in dens compared to the Southern Beaufort Sea, which may lead to higher cub survival (Olson et al. in prep). A study of polar bear activity was reviewed, indicating that Chukchi Sea bears use ice habitats over the continental shelf more frequently than Southern Beaufort Sea bears, and that both subpopulations have increased use of land and sea-ice habitat off the continental shelf in recent years (Ware et al. in review). Methods and initial findings were presented from a study to estimate breeding, survival, and abundance of polar bears in the Alaska-Chukotka population based on live-capture and telemetry data from U.S. research (Regehr et al. in prep). This new information on the status of the Alaska-Chukotka

population will undergo peer review in the coming year and is anticipated to be available to inform management at the 2017 Commission meeting. Other studies that were summarized include (1) a pilot study to estimate the number of bears on Wrangel Island using satellite imagery (LaRue et al. 2016); and (2) a global conservation assessment for polar bears, which suggests that there is a significant probability that the global polar bear population could decline by 30% in the next three polar bear generations due to sea-ice loss (Regehr et al. 2016).

Agenda item: Aerial surveys of polar bears in the Chukchi and East Siberian Seas in 2016.

Dr. Vladimir Chernook introduced a joint U.S.-Russia instrument-based aerial survey for ice seals and polar bears. The U.S. effort, led by Dr. Peter Boveng, included 25 flights in April-May 2016, and covered 15,742 km and generated 2,000,000 thermal and color images. Preliminary results suggested a 75% detection rate for polar bears. The collected data will be used to estimate the abundance of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population in coming years. The Russian portion of the survey was flown with thermal and color cameras in the Russian portion of the Chukchi Sea from 18 April to 18 May, 2016. The Russian survey also included four to six observers. Over 12,000 km of survey effort were flown. Over 2,000 locations were observed with polar bear tracks and there was good correlation between seal and polar bear sightings. The visual and instrument-based observation data were compared for the flight on 18 May. A higher detection rate for polar bears using instruments vs. visual observations was detected. Data from the survey are currently being analyzed.

Agenda item: Dynamics of polar bear sea ice habitat parameters in the Chukchi Sea.

Dr. Platonov introduced a study conducted by the A. N. Severtsov Institute of Ecology and Evolution of Russian Academy of Sciences (IEE RAS, www.sevin.ru). In 2015-2016 The IEE RAS continued the integrated study of polar bears and their ecology in the Russian Arctic, including region of the Chukchi Sea:

- Distribution and population structure of polar bears
- Health of polar bear population
- Polar bear habitat instability

This work is implemented under Bilateral scientific agreement between IEE RAS and Department of Nature management of Chukotka (signed 26 February 2014) and Bilateral U.S.-Russia Area V Agreement, Activity 02.05-7105 “Application of Contemporary Technology in Ecological Studies of Large Mammals” (USGS, IEE RAS)

Based on PTL model our contribution to SWG is to the adjustment of habitat capacity. We focus our current activity on the analysis of sea ice phenology (time of sea ice break-up and freeze-up) and development of ice habitat metrics based on sea ice edge position and proximity to it.

Agenda item: Commissioner discussion and decision on SWG Report

The commissioners unanimously approved the SWG Report and made the following statements.

Commissioner Siekaniec read the following statement: Yesterday we heard a presentation of the report of the SWG by the co-chairs and we then had an opportunity to hear comments from the observers on that report. First, I would like to reiterate my appreciation to the SWG for the open and transparent way in which they carried out their work, for producing such an informative report in such a quick timeframe, and for the exciting new studies and analysis discussed in the report. The initial discussion among the Commissioners following the presentation by the SWG co-chairs indicated that the commissioners may not be able to reach consensus regarding accepting that report in its entirety.

Recognizing that the Commissioners would like to be in a position to adopt the report of the SWG by consensus, including recommendation 3A on sustainable harvest level, yesterday the Commission asked the SWG to further discuss the sustainable harvest level. The SWG discussed this topic and agreed by consensus that the group was not in a position to change its recommendations on short notice. No change has been made to the report of the SWG, including its recommendations to the Commission.

We appreciate the work the SWG did to consider our request. We appreciate the demonstration of the science that that will be available to us on the commission and the significance of the treaty to us all in the conservation of polar bears and the importance to subsistence users. I would now like to ask the Commissioners if we can agree on the report of the SWG in its entirety.

As was described in yesterday's presentation on the status of treaty implementation in the United States, there was miscommunication in the past by the FWS about the area in which the sustainable harvest level and annual taking limit apply. As we noted yesterday, that miscommunication has created concern in Native Alaska hunters, particularly those in the Native villages of Wainwright and Barrow.

I look forward to new scientific information becoming available within the next few years that can help inform a re-examination of those issues by the Scientific Working Group and the Commission. Establishing a clear understanding and acceptance of what implementation of the treaty entails within the Native Alaskan community will be very important to effective conservation of polar bears and maintenance of the Native subsistence way of life.

Commissioners Kavry and Amirkhanov accepted the report in its entirety and noted that they look forward to the future science that will inform a new quota.

Commissioner Brower read the following statement: As the Commissioner representing the Alaska Native people, I am voting to adopt the Recommendations (3) B-F in the Executive Summary. I will also adopt the recommendation at 3(A) for the following reasons: I am voting on this provision because the USFWS will not enforce the sustainable harvest level until after the SWG derives updated recommendations on the sustainable harvest level and until after the formation of a successor organization to the Alaska Nanuuq Commission and the creation of a co-management plan. I am also voting on these recommendations because the new science will help inform the decision of the population boundary. This will help clear up the historical

confusion about the use of Icy Cape as the eastern extent of the harvest management area in the United States.

Agenda item: Statements by Observers

Masha Kalinina, Humane Society

Ms. Kalinina was speaking for the Humane Society, the Center for Biological Diversity, and other NGOs that could not attend. She appreciated that the commissioners have adopted the SWG recommendations and acknowledged that significant effort has been made on both sides to implement the treaty. She expressed that the Humane Society joins other organizations in supporting the establishment of a successor for the ANC, and the establishment of a working co-management plan. She echoed previous comments that improvements are needed for disseminating information to those most impacted. She expressed concerns about the delay in implementing a harvest quota until 2020. In recent years the quota has been exceeded, and thus, we need to exercise precaution when moving forward with implementation. She wanted this group to recognize the rare opportunity that it has to strike a balance in everyone's interest.

Roy Ashenfelter, Kawerak

Mr. Ashenfelter noted the importance of having Alaska Native input at the table when decisions are made, and provided three examples of why, also cautioning against the extrapolation of population numbers.

Taqulik Hepa, North Slope Borough

Ms. Hepa expressed concern about the confusion related to the boundary issue between Icy Cape and Barrow and encouraged the SWG to resolve this issue. She noted that in the 2010 report (Section C, "Movements and Distribution") it is very clear that the boundary is Icy Cape. She noted that all documents up until last February indicate Icy Cape was the boundary.

Elizabeth Kruger, World Wildlife Fund

Ms. Kruger also encouraged clarification of the boundary issue, as well as a corresponding population estimate, and sustainable harvest level.

John Hopson Jr., Mayor of Wainwright, subsistence hunter

Mr. Hopson's comments were made on behalf of Wainwright. He noted that subsistence is the basis of his culture as well as a fundamental human right that Alaska Natives are prepared to defend. Until recently, many hunters have not heard about the polar bear quota, and there has already been a large impact on his community. His community has lived through this situation before with bowhead whales; years ago they were told that bowheads were in decline and that they would have to restrict their harvest. The data used was not consistent with local observations but they were not heard by their government.

Subsistence practices are not meant to endanger polar bears; most people want to preserve bears for future generations. New data needs to be analyzed before a quota is implemented. He noted

that we all need to work together to conserve bears. We need good information to achieve this goal. If we don't conserve polar bears, Alaska Native culture and its security will suffer.

Mr. Hopson noted that, in the past, the management boundary was identified as Icy Cape; confusion about the boundary has led to resentment and confusion, including about how inclusion of Wainwright and Barrow under the Bilateral Agreement will affect the Inupiat-Inuvialuit (I-I) Agreement.

Another concern was that Alaska Natives lacked adequate representation of hunters at the table from both (U.S. and Russian) sides. A successor organization to ANC is also needed.

Lastly, he noted that current hunter observations show that bears are healthy at both the individual and population level, and so this is not the time to impose additional limits on the subsistence harvest. He recommended that TEK be better incorporated at the SWG level to aid in management decisions.

Daryll Boness, Chairman, Marine Mammal Commission

Dr. Boness stated that the MMC initially felt that it was critical to implement the Bilateral Agreement as soon as possible, but then he came to Arctic Alaska earlier this year and listened and learned from Native communities. He stated that it is critical that we think about management in an ecosystem way, and recognize that part of that ecosystem is humans. The MMC believes strongly in the use of sound science to make decisions, as well as the consideration of Native perspectives.

Roy Ashenfelter, Kawerak

Mr. Ashenfelter reiterated concerns about whether there is a process in place to determine if the bilateral treaty is successful or not; lack of adequate Native involvement when setting quotas, and the boundary issue. He also noted that there is currently no data that Alaska Natives have ever diminished wildlife populations through subsistence hunting. He reiterated that input from all stakeholders is critical.

Masha Kalinina, Observer (personal comments)

Ms. Kalinina felt that in this country we are being pushed to feel divided and that we must be more united in action than ever before. She encouraged people to recognize that we are all part of a global community and have a collective stake in wildlife and this planet. Everyone should ask themselves: what can we do as individuals to save the only planet we have? She noted that this body (the Commission and SWG) has the opportunity to conserve polar bears for the benefit of all, and if that is done, then when looking back 30 years from now, will see that the appropriate steps were taken to protect polar bears?

Taqulik Hepa, NSB DWM

Ms. Hepa noted that there are many inconsistencies in co-management, and that it is difficult to explain all the various agreements, boards, regulations, etc. to local people. But for Alaska Natives, at the end of the day, it's about putting food on the table. She noted that many rural communities do not have groceries; their groceries are in their back yard. She noted that co-

management and treaties are good things and asked the group to recall the original intent of the Agreement, which was to allow for a legal subsistence hunt on the Russian side.

She noted that when going to the hunters and communities to implement a quota, there needs to have a documented conservation concern to explain why a quota is needed. She noted that it is very important that we work together and find our common ground. She also wants to ensure that Native people are well represented, specifically hunters because that's who is going to be the most impacted, along with the people with whom their harvest is shared.

Rosa Meehan, Observer

Dr. Meehan reflected back to when the Bilateral Agreement was signed, and when everyone at the table shared the desire for collaborative management and supported subsistence use. The leadership recognized the need for working together and the importance of equal representation by Natives which is a core value of this Agreement. She noted that the I-I Agreement was used as a model for the Bilateral Agreement and that it was the expectation that these two agreements would work side by side. Regarding the boundary issue, she noted that Barrow represented the polar bear population range boundary, and the management boundary was considered to be Icy Cape, as determined by the IUCN Polar Bear Specialist Group. This is reflected throughout many documents such as the listing documents. Alaska Natives at the time had agreed to share a quota with their Russian brothers, where hunting has not been allowable for decades.

Elisabeth Kruger, WWF

Ms. Kruger expressed gratitude to the interpreters for helping both countries to understand each other, as well as for the extended implementation timeline that will allow for an effective relationship to be forged with Native co-management partners. She congratulated the Russian participants for the progress they made on their side.

Gay Sheffield, Nome resident

Ms. Sheffield noted that Bering Strait residents are living in a changing environment and while people are trying to adjust, regulatory changes are also occurring, not just with polar bears, but also with ringed, bearded seals, and potentially walruses. Local residents are under pressure to feed their families and share the goal of resource conservation. She urged communication and education with people who are trying to adapt and take care of the resources. She also urged a more comprehensive regional representation on the Commission.

Olga Krever, Advisor to Deputy Director, RosPrirodNadzor Environmental Protection

Ms. Krever thanked the SWG for all of the diverse research. This new information will help in making informed decisions in the future. She also acknowledged the boundary issue raised by Alaskan Natives and hoped that this issue can be resolved.

In addition, she refuted those that have a sweeping criticism for the work of the bilateral agreement by the Commission. Both parties have worked very hard for the past 16 years. She disagreed that there is no management plan in place and that we're not advancing with the cause. Russia has used the management plan to help further implementation in Russia. People who are responsible for managing polar bears have to take all aspects into account, not just Native

aspects. She hoped that the Commission can continue to work productively in the future to solve the problems and noted that we cannot ignore our success up to this point.

She also thanked the foundational members of this agreement, stating that we should not allow this machinery we have developed to stop functioning – we need to manage it efficiently and can be successful.

Kim Titus, State of Alaska, Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Dr. Titus stated that the state of Alaska appreciates the opportunity to address this Commission and continues to support the subsistence use of polar bears for Alaskan and Russian natives. Under a sustainable framework, the State of Alaska will support subsistence use of polar bears based on the best available information.

Agenda item: Commission discussion of continuation of research, conservation, and management of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population.

Commissioner Siekaniec thanked the Russian delegation, Russian federation, and Chukotka Autonomous Region for the significant progress made toward legal harvest. He thanked the SWG for their work and expressed U.S. support for the SWG. He expressly stated support for the SWG workshop to allow adequate time to consider new scientific information.

Commissioner Brower thanked the SWG for their presentations and applauded their hard work.

Commissioner Kavry noted the SWG work and stated the most important issue facing polar bears is climate change. He expressed appreciation for the Observer statements and stated that he will speak with his constituents about their concerns. Mr. Kavry noted that polar bears thrived for millennia, without regulation, under the stewardship of native people. He committed to conduct consultations and perform public outreach in Chukotka.

Agenda item: Commission discussion of organizational items.

The next meeting of the U.S. Russia Polar Bear Commission will take place in the Russian Federation. Commissioner Kavry recommended that the SWG and Commission meetings both occur in Chukotka. Finalized dates and venues to be determined.

Agenda item: Closing business of the Commission.

Commissioner Siekaniec read the following statement in commemoration of Vladilen Kavry, member of the SWG, who passed away earlier this year: Vladilen Kavry's contributions to the collaborative US-Russia Bilateral began in 2011, when he became a member of the Scientific Working Group representing the Traditional Marine Mammal Hunters of Chukotka. Mr. Kavry was a passionate advocate for the preservation and continuation of Chukchi culture and his knowledge of ancient customs inculcated in him a deep conservation ethic, which he practiced in his own life and encouraged others to learn. Mr. Kavry, together with his brother, Sergey, were

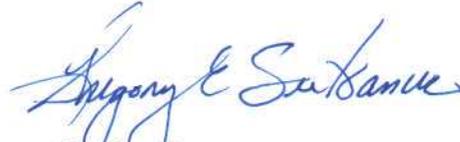
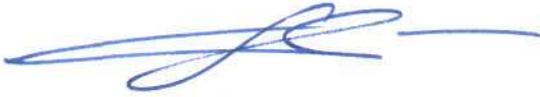
responsible for the foundation of the “Umky Patrol”, which for years has successfully deterred polar bears from the village and protected local residents, and has contributed significantly to the global goal of reducing incidences of human-polar bear conflict. Mr. Kavry’s expertise, passion, and dedication to Arctic conservation have contributed invaluable to the bilateral conservation goals of this Commission. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service express its appreciation and gratitude of the efforts Vladilen Kavry made throughout his life towards the conservation of polar bears.

Commissioners from the Russian Federation

Commissioners from the United States

Amirkhan Amirkhanov

Greg Siekaniec



Sergey Kavry

Charles Brower



Date: November 18, 2016