

BRIEFING TO THE

NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD

FOR



Information: X

Decision:

Issue: The Board asked for an update on the M'Clintock Channel polar bear subpopulation during the regular Board meeting in December 2012. This briefing note fulfills this requirement.

Background: Following aerial surveys conducted from 1998-2000, which indicated a steep decline in the polar bear subpopulation, the Board made a decision to reduce the total allowable harvest for the M'Clintock Channel subpopulation from 32 to 12 animals for the 2000/2001 harvest season. Following a year of reduced quota, the Board implemented a moratorium for the 2001/2002 harvest season. This moratorium was in place for 3 years at which time a total allowable harvest of three bears for the Kitikmeot region was established for the 2004/2005 harvest season. The total allowable harvest of three remains in place today and is shared between the communities of Cambridge Bay and Gjoa Haven.

Overview:

In January 2010, the Gjoa Haven Hunters and Trappers Organization rejected a proposal by Markus Dyck, a polar bear biologist with the Government of Nunavut, to conduct research, using satellite collars, on this subpopulation. Gjoa Haven objected to the handling and drugging of bears in order to fit them with collars.

In a letter to the NWMB dated June 1, 2010, the Gjoa Haven Hunters and Trappers Organization indicated that they had passed a resolution at their regular meeting on April 28 to request a quota increase for their community from the M'Clintock Channel subpopulation. No new population surveys have occurred since 2000. However, a researcher, Peter de Groot from Queens University, conducted field work from 2006-2010 using hair snags and the collection of fecal pellets to gather genetic information about the M'Clintock Channel polar bear subpopulation. He stated in his report that although the data he collected could not be used to produce an accurate population estimate, his field experience and the results of his research which identified 82 different bears through genetic analysis suggests the population has increased since 2000. The 2010 request for a quota increase from Gjoa Haven made reference to this field work.

In 2011 the Gjoa Haven Hunters and Trappers Organization wrote a letter to the Minister of Environment - Government of Nunavut requesting a meeting and expressing their frustration that the current total allowable harvest for M'Clintock Channel is not adequate, does not represent the increased numbers of bears that community members are seeing and is based on survey data that is over a decade old. This letter was supported by the Cambridge Bay Hunters and Trappers Organization. The Minister responded to this letter and agreed to a meeting to discuss these issues.

On May 8th, 2012 a letter was sent to affected communities from Markus Dyck asking to meet with the HTOS at their earliest convenience to discuss planned polar bear research initiatives. The objectives of planned research include: complete a population estimate; compare the new estimate

with previous estimates in order to determine if the population is increasing, stable, or decreasing; estimate survival and reproduction rates; determine distribution and use of habitat; and reassess the boundaries of the subpopulation. To accomplish these objectives the Government of Nunavut plans to use satellite collars and ear tags and mark recapture methods.

Community consultations took place in January and February of 2013. During these meetings it was decided that all Hunters and Trappers Organizations should have discussions amongst themselves and with their Regional Wildlife Organizations in order to come to a consensus on the proposed research. It was deemed important that all co-management partners be involved in this process so that a decision can be made in a timely manner.

Concerns expressed during the consultations included those centered on the low total allowable harvest and those centered on the handling, capturing and immobilization of bears.

Prepared by: Sarah Spencer, Wildlife Management Biologist

Reviewed by: Peter Kydd, Wildlife Management Biologist

Date: April 19th, 2013