

Submission to the

Nunavut Wildlife Management Board

For

✓ Information:

Decision:

Issue: Circumpolar Action Plan for the Management and Conservation of Polar Bears.

Background: In 1973 the governments of Canada, Denmark (now represented by Greenland), Norway, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (now Russia), and the United States, collectively known as the polar bear Range States, signed the *Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears*. This committed the Range States to coordinate national measures to protect the species, and to collaborate on polar bear research and conservation initiatives. One such initiative is the preparation of a Circumpolar Action Plan to avoid, and mitigate threats to the polar bear, and ensure the persistence of the species throughout its historic range. This plan will focus on issues that benefit from international coordination (e.g. best management practice for marine shipping) and will not address issues that are better managed at national or lower levels (e.g. harvest management). Environment Canada represents Canada on the Range States Committee. Departmental officials have been involved in the drafting of this Plan and are consulting with wildlife management boards across the north.

Part I of the Circumpolar Action Plan has been drafted by Canada and the other Range States. It provides general species information, outlines key threats to the Polar Bear and showcases National management systems. Part II of the document will contain best management practices that could be used by Canada and other range states. It will also outline action items to be undertaken (for example an inventory schedule) by the Range States. Being that the NWMB is an active participant in the management of the polar bear, in Canada the Canadian Wildlife Service would like the Board's general comments on the document thus far.

A member of the Canadian Wildlife Service would like to take 15-20 minutes to explain the 1973 Agreement, present Part I of the Action Plan, and address any questions you may have. After allowance for questions we recommend a total time of 30-45 minutes for this agenda item.

Consultation:

This working draft of Part I is nearing completion. At the time of submission no consultations have yet occurred. Consultations with the relevant Wildlife Management Boards across Canada are scheduled to commence in September.

A second round of consultations with the wildlife management boards, including the NWMB, is planned for the winter of 2014/2015 and/or spring of 2015. At that time we will be inviting comments on the full document (including Part II) of the Action Plan. Simultaneously other Range States will be consulting and seeking comments on the document from relevant authorities within their own jurisdictions.

Recommendation:

We recommend that you accept this submission and allow the Canadian Wildlife Service the opportunity to present the Circumpolar Action Plan –Part I for the NWMB's comments.

Prepared by:

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Date:

Submission prepared August, 12th, 2014.

To whom it may concern,

As you may be aware, in 1973 the governments of Canada, Denmark (now represented by Greenland), Norway, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (now Russia), and the United States, collectively known as the polar bear Range States, signed the *Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears*. This committed the Range States to coordinate national measures to protect the species, and to collaborate on polar bear research and conservation initiatives.

For the past 40 years the Range States have discussed conservation and management strategies for polar bear, and have shared research results. A formalized, biennial meeting schedule was established in 2007. At the 2009 Meeting of the Parties, the Range States noted that threats to polar bears have changed since the 1973 Agreement. At the time of signing, the major threat was over hunting and, as a result, polar bear populations in some areas were considered to be substantially reduced. Measures implemented by the Range States, such as harvest management regimes have contributed to a recovery in most polar bear populations. Unfortunately, new threats have emerged in the interim. In an effort to avoid or mitigate these threats, and ensure persistence of the polar bear throughout its historic range, the Range States have been collaboratively preparing a Circumpolar Action Plan for the management and conservation of polar bears.

Drafting of Part I of the Action Plan has now been completed and it is ready for external review. Part I of the Plan includes general information about the polar bear, describes current and anticipated threats, and provides an overview of current management practices within the Range States. Part II of the Action Plan is currently under development and it will outline specific actions to be undertaken to mitigate the identified threats. It is expected to rely heavily on already-developed Best Management Practices, where available and appropriate.

Should your Board be interested, we would like to provide a presentation on Part I of the Action Plan at your upcoming meeting (an offer to present Part II will be extended at a later date). An official from the Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment Canada is willing to provide a presentation (15-20 minutes) and answer any questions that your group may have (suggested total agenda time of 45 minutes). An executive summary of Part I of the Plan is attached. The entire text of Part I will be provided as soon as possible, and is expected to be approximately 80 pages in length. If of interest, an official from the Canadian Wildlife Service could present Part II of the Plan at your Board's winter or spring meeting (2015). As noted in the Ministerial Declaration made at the 2013 *International Forum on the Conservation of Polar Bears*, the Range States have committed to having a finalized Circumpolar Action Plan available at the September 2015 Range States Meeting of the Parties being held in Greenland.

Thank you for taking the time to consider including a discussion of Part I of the Circumpolar Action Plan at your upcoming Regular Meeting. Should you have any further questions please contact Peter Hale 819.938. 3933, peter.hale@ec.gc.ca.

CIRCUMPOLAR ACTION PLAN FOR POLAR BEAR

By the Parties to the

1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears

Executive Summary:

In 1973, the polar bear Range States (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (now Russia), Norway, Greenland (Denmark), the United States and Canada) signed the *Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears* (hereafter, the *Agreement*). At that time the largest threat to the polar bear was high hunting pressure, and populations in some portions of the range had become severely depleted. While recovery of most subpopulations has since occurred through effective management by the Range States, in 2009 it was recognized that a new and larger threat has now emerged: climate change. As outlined in the 2013 Ministerial Declaration climate change is recognized by the Range States as being the most significant, long-term threat to the polar bear. The Circumpolar Action Plan – a collaborative Range States initiative - is a means of coordinating the management, research and monitoring of the polar bear across its range and for ensuring that the Range States share common goals and approaches to conservation efforts. Recognizing the effective management systems already in place, the Action Plan focuses on issues that are best handled at the international or binational level.

The Circumpolar Action Plan outlines one key goal:

To secure the long-term persistence of polar bears in the wild that represents the genetic, behavioral, life-history, and ecological diversity of the species.

The stated goal reflects the Range States' belief that polar bear conservation is crucial for ecological reasons, as well as to maintain cultural and spiritual values of Aboriginal people of the circumpolar Arctic. The framework for the Action Plan is founded on key Range State documents including the 2013 Ministerial Declaration (Moscow, Russia), the 2009 Meeting of the Parties final Report (Tromso, Norway), 2011 Meeting of the parties outcome document (Iqaluit, Nunavut).

Divided into two parts, the first part of the Action Plan highlights objectives, guiding principles, and provides up-to-date information on key polar bear threats. It also includes information on the management systems in place within each Range State, and summarizes all of the relevant bilateral agreements. The second part of the Action Plan lists actions to be taken in order to meet the Plan's objectives including plans for mitigating threats, monitoring subpopulations, and assessing the success of such actions. A full review of the Plan will occur every 10 years with progress reports provided every two years at the Range States Meeting of the Parties. In between full reviews the Plan will continue to evolve as new scientific data and Traditional Ecological Knowledge become available.

There are six primary objectives of the Action Plan, as follows:

1. Minimize threats to polar bears and their habitat through adaptive polar bear management based on coordinated research and monitoring efforts;
2. Communicate to the world public, policy makers, and legislators the importance of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions to polar bear conservation;

3. Ensure the preservation and protection of key habitat for polar bears throughout the range;
4. Ensure responsible harvest management systems that will sustain polar bear subpopulations for future generations;
5. Manage human-bear interactions to ensure human safety and to conserve polar bears;
6. Ensure that international legal trade of polar bears is carried out according to conservation principles and that poaching and illegal trade are curtailed.

Conservation and management actions by the Range States, carried out within their respective legislative and management frameworks, will be shaped by the following Principles:

1. Recognizing the role of each Range State in polar bear conservation and management, actions are to be undertaken at the appropriate level (local, domestic, circumpolar). Existing management frameworks and authorities will be respected.
2. Recognizing that multilateral initiatives require collaboration, the Range States will continue to consult and collaborate with one another with the objective of giving further protection to polar bears. Range States will consult and collaborate with one another with the objective of giving further protection to polar bears.
3. Recognizing the complexity of the circumpolar region, the Range States will ensure responsible development which takes into account the need for polar bear management and conservation actions.
4. The best available scientific data and Traditional Ecological Knowledge will be used in planning and decision-making for the conservation and management of polar bears.

5. Recognizing that the long-term conservation of polar bears will be best achieved with the engagement of communities traditionally dependent on the polar bear, the Range States will engage Arctic local people, where appropriate, in management decision-making processes, both domestically and internationally, acknowledging the important role polar bears play in the cultural heritage and subsistence of Arctic indigenous people.
6. The precautionary approach will form the basis of the Range States' conservation efforts. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.
7. Having up-to-date information on the status and trend of each polar bear subpopulation is essential for their effective management and conservation. In order to better inform management and regulatory decision-making, the International Union for Conservation of Nature/Species Survival Commission Polar Bear Specialist Group (IUCN/SSC PBSG) and each Range State will work to regularly assess and update the status and trends of each polar bear subpopulation based on the best available scientific information, taking into account results of population monitoring activities and projected changes in sea ice.

Following the guidance of the IUCN/SSC PBSG, the scientific advisory body under the 1973 *Agreement*, the Range States have identified eight key threats to the polar bear that will be addressed by this Action Plan: climate change, disease, human-polar bear conflict, oil and gas exploration and extraction, mining, toxic chemicals, shipping, and tourism. These threats have been determined to be those that are either most likely to have an impact on the polar bear in the next 10 years, or those which need to be addressed within the next 10 years to avoid negative long-term impacts on the species.

The second part of the Action Plan outlines the Measures to achieve the objectives with a focus on adaptive management, use of the precautionary approach and integrating Science, Traditional Ecological Knowledge and local knowledge into decisions. To mitigate threats best management practices will be established for human-polar bear interactions. This will help

decrease the number of defense kills. A robust schedule for inventory monitoring will be developed which will not only help to have accurate and up-to-date population estimates but will help to map key denning sites and monitor health of bears. The Range States recognize that climate change, oil and gas, shipping and tourism related threats cannot be successfully addressed on their own. The Range States will incorporate and work with initiatives like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Arctic Council, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The Circumpolar Action Plan outlines the strengths and weaknesses of the current conservation measures for the polar bear. The Plan highlights the important agreements that have been made amongst Range States to ensure successful partnerships and reinforces the need for global collaboration with respect to shipping, greenhouse gas emissions and tourism to ensure the persistence of the species.