

**SUBMISSION TO THE NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD**  
**FOR**

**Information:** X

**Decision:**

**Issue:** Total Allowable Harvest of Gulf of Boothia polar bears

**Background:**

The Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board (KRWB) understands that the Government of Nunavut Department of Environment (GN DOE) is proposing a Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) of 74 for the Gulf of Boothia polar bear subpopulation for consideration by the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB). This proposal will not change the current TAH and is based on the results of the most recent genetic mark-recapture survey that suggests the subpopulation is stable (Dyck et al. 2020). KRWB also understands that the proposal considers Inuit harvesting below the TAH, evidenced by accumulating credits for each community:

- 19.5 males, 4.35 females for Gjoa Haven
- 43.7 males, 1 female for Kugaaruk
- 46.26 males, 5.32 females for Taloyoak

KRWB understands that a decision on this proposal was deferred until the GN DOE's Harvest Administration and Credit Calculation System (HACCS) was approved. In letters between NWMB and the Minister of Environment (dated 1 and 7 February 2022, respectively) regarding the approval of HACCS, both NWMB and the Minister acknowledged "the Government of Nunavut and co-management partners work together towards a fair and acceptable alternative to resetting harvest credits to zero when a new sub-population Total Allowable Harvest is set".

For Gjoa Haven, Taloyoak, and Kugaaruk, KRWB notes the following:

- Community members have reported they are encountering more Gulf of Boothia polar bears in the last two decades. Hunters can tell the subpopulation is increasing because of how easy it is to encounter and/or hunt bears; observations every mating season; encountering more females, young bears, and/or females with more (up to four) cubs; and bears going into meat caches. Behaviour also changes when there are more bears; polar bears are more aggressive when there are higher densities of them (e.g., Gjoa Haven et al. 2021).
- Community members have also reported bears over the last 10 years have been physically healthy (e.g., Gjoa Haven et al. 2021).
- Experienced hunters can tell the sex and age of bears when they encounter them and/or their tracks, and they use this skill to select for bears while hunting.
- Gjoa Haven, Spence Bay (Taloyoak), and Kurtairojuark (Kugaaruk) Hunters and Trappers Organizations (HTOs), through the accumulation of their credits, demonstrate harvest management. Communities are not harvesting to the maximum level that is allocated to them. Resetting credits erases those records.

- Tags and credits are not always used because the accessibility of polar bears changes from year to year. Hunting also depends on experience, season, weather conditions, levels of interest in the community, etc. Some hunters will also wait until a preferable bear could be harvested.
- HTOs do not always want to maximize harvesting each year. Polar bear hunting can be a lot of work and hide sales and exports have dropped (90% and 80%, respectively, since 2012; E. Cooper 2022, personal communication).
- The way credits are currently managed encourages the use of a large number of credits in a small amount of time, specifically in the years approaching a new proposed TAH, when credits are reset.
- The resetting of credits to zero without an increase in TAH is perceived as unfair and puts pressure on HTOs to use all of their credits.
- The assumption that keeping credits would result in “double counting” should consider harvest selection. Credits could, for example, be used for older versus younger bears, sick bears, or bears behaving unusually. Credits could also be used for defence kills.
- Kitikmeot HTOs stress that they need to be able to meet with Igloodik, Sanirajak, and Naujaat HTOs on any decisions regarding Gulf of Boothia polar bears. Funding support for this is needed.

### **Consultation:**

This submission was prepared after discussions with the KRWB executive on 26 April 2022. This submission was reviewed and approved by KRWB via teleconference on 29 April 2022. This submission was reviewed and refined by Gjoa Haven, Spence Bay (Taloyoak) and Kurtairojuark (Kugaaruk) HTOs at a workshop in Yellowknife on 4 May 2022.

### **Recommendations:**

- Gjoa Haven, Spence Bay, and Kurtairojuark HTOs recommend an increase in the TAH for Gulf of Boothia polar bears.
- Gjoa Haven, Spence Bay, and Kurtairojuark HTOs recommend a face-to-face meeting with HTOs in Igloodik, Sanirajak, and Naujaat, through a workshop supported by NWMB, to discuss Gulf of Boothia polar bears further. KRWB staff could assist with planning.
- Gjoa Haven, Spence Bay, and Kurtairojuark HTOs do not support resetting credits to zero.
- Accumulating credits may be viewed as a “risk of overharvesting” but for communities, are an indicator of under harvesting and good management. Special credits should be used for defence kills.
- Population models should consider different options and scenarios that include using and/or not using credits, and resetting and/or not resetting them.
- From an ethical standpoint, communities should be included when harvest data and data on credits are being interpreted or used to represent their hunting practices. A consent process is needed on how the data that a harvester submits to GN DOE might be shared, used and/or interpreted.
- The current polar bear management plan and HACCS continues to encourage the perception and management of polar bears as “credits” and numbers. This contrasts

Inuit views of polar bears as animate and responsive to how people think about, talk about, and treat them. Work is needed to incorporate these views.

- There is a need to acknowledge past agreements about polar bear management and harvesting, both written and unwritten, that older community members continue to recall. Informed consent is an ethical responsibility, while it may not be a legal one.
- Work is needed to transition away from historically paternalistic approaches in polar bear management. KRWB encourages more capacity-building, information sharing, and management approaches that empower Inuit to make decisions about their wildlife.
- Research is needed to examine the meaning of credits for Inuit and how polar bear management affects how Inuit and future generations relate to and view their wildlife.

**References:**

Dyck, M., Regehr, E. V., & Ware, J. V. (2020). Assessment of abundance for the Gulf of Boothia polar bear subpopulation using genetic mark-recapture. Final Report, Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment, Iglulik, 74pp.

Gjoa Haven HTO, Spence Bay HTO, Kurtairojuark HTO, Aiviq HTO, Igloodik HTO, and Hall Beach HTO. (2020). Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit of Gulf of Boothia polar bears. Final Report, Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment, Iglulik. 53pp.

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**Date:**

5 May 2022