



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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News

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U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission Meets in Anchorage

The 2nd meeting of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission was held from June 7-9 in Anchorage, Alaska. The group, which consists of representatives from the United States and Russia representing federal, state, and Native interests, first met in Moscow in September of 2009. This meeting follows on the heels of the first annual meeting of the Commission's Scientific Working Group, held in Anchorage from March 1st through the 5th of this year. The Scientific Working Group was formed to assist the Commission in resolving questions pertaining to the protection and management of the Alaska-Chukotka Polar Bear Population.

The goal of the Commission at this meeting was to determine the potential for a coordinated and sustainable subsistence harvest of polar bears in both the U.S. and Russia. The Commission determined that harvest by Native peoples of Alaska and Chukotka should be limited to up to 19 female and 39 male polar bears per year from the Chukchi and Bering Seas for traditional and cultural purposes. This level of harvest was identified as conservative by polar bear experts and will be re-evaluated periodically based on scientific studies. In Chukotka, Russia, legal harvest will begin when monitoring and enforcement systems are in place. This will end a 50-year ban on polar bear harvest and is expected to improve monitoring and reduce poaching.

In Alaska, a team led by representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Alaska Nanuuq Commission was charged with developing procedures to implement the Commission's decision and to present it to the Commission at its next regular meeting in 2011. Establishment of sustainable harvest limits in Alaska will help protect polar bears for future generations. The Commission's decisions at the recent Anchorage meeting are based on the authority of a Bilateral Treaty for the conservation and management of polar bears, signed by the United States of America and the Russian Federation on October 16, 2000. Polar Bear Commissioner Geoffrey Haskett, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Alaska Region, called these developments a landmark in cooperative wildlife management between governmental and Native representatives of the U.S. and Russia.

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. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.