

Five New Pieces of Evidence Supporting the U.S. Proposal for Uplisting Polar Bears Since 2009

On October 4, 2012, the United States, supported by the Russian Federation, submitted a proposal to transfer the polar bear, *Ursus maritimus*, from Appendix II to Appendix I of the Convention in accordance with Article II and Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP15) on the basis that the polar bear is affected by trade and shows a marked decline in the population size in the wild, which has been inferred or projected on the basis of a decrease in area of habitat and a decrease in quality of habitat. Pursuant to the Convention, "Appendix I shall include all species threatened with extinction which are or may be affected by trade." CITES Article II, paragraph 1. CITES Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP15) provides the criteria and definitions to be used to determine if a species is "threatened with extinction" and if it is or may be "affected by trade." Below are five key findings from new scientific and trade information, since 2009, that underpin Russian Federation and U.S. support for uplisting.



OVERHARVEST AFFECTS POLAR BEAR POPULATIONS

Legal hunting of polar bears solely for the purpose of international trade and sport occurs only in Canada (Peacock *et al.* (2011)). Each year, approximately 600 polar bears are hunted in Canada (Peacock *et al.* (2011)) the parts of more than half of them are internationally. This level of harvest has negatively affected some polar bear populations. For example, in 2011, unsustainable harvest occurred in the Western Hudson Bay and Southern Hudson Bay populations.

DEMAND FOR POLAR BEAR SKINS HAS INCREASED

Since 2009, the market demand for polar bear skins has strengthened significantly. For example, polar bear hides sold at Fur Harvesters Auction Inc. in Canada in 2012 for more than double the prices obtained in 2007; and the number of polar bear hides offered at auctions in Canada tripled between 2007 and 2012 from 40 hides to 150 hides.

HARVEST HAS INCREASED IN CORRELATION WITH DEMAND

During the same period that demand and prices for polar bear skins has gone up, quotas and harvest have increased to unsustainable levels. For example, in April 2011 it was reported that hunters in Quebec killed 70 polar bears—more than 17 times the usual number killed in southern Hudson Bay (Maclean's 2012). Eventually, the three jurisdictions that share the Southern Hudson Bay population agreed to a joint hunting quota of 60 bears per year, a level many polar bear scientists believe is unsustainable (Marine Mammal Commission 2012).



THE MAJORITY OF STUDIED POLAR BEAR POPULATIONS ARE DECLINING

Polar bears live in 19 populations with a total population estimated at 20,000-25,000 (Stirling and Derocher 2012). The IUCN/SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group (PBSG) has determined eight of these populations to be in decline. Seven populations are too “data deficient” to determine current population trends. Of these, some may also be in decline. Further, data used to estimate the sizes of several populations are either non-existent or dated (Stirling and Derocher 2012). For example, for three of the data deficient populations, the current population size is “unknown,” while for two others, Laptev Sea (Russia) and Viscount Melville Sound (Canada), a population survey has not been conducted for more than 16 years. Thus, the size of the total population is actually uncertain (Stirling and Derocher 2012). Of those populations with enough information available to determine trends, a clear majority (66 percent) are in decline. Only three populations are thought to be stable, none of which have been studied within the past six years, and only one small population which had been severely over-harvested is thought to be increasing, based on a 12-year-old study.

POLAR BEAR POPULATIONS ARE EXPECTED TO SUFFER SEVERE DECLINES IN THE FUTURE

Sea ice is essential habitat for polar bear survival (Durner *et al.* (2009); Peacock *et al.* (2011); Stirling and Derocher 2012). Since 2009, scientists observed a direct correlation between decreased sea ice extent and declining polar bear body condition, size, and survival. Scientific papers published in recent years also demonstrate through observation a direct correlation between reduced sea ice and decreased polar bear recruitment and population size. On August 27, 2012, the United States' National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) announced that Arctic sea ice extent reached the lowest level ever recorded, breaking the previous record set in 2007 (NSIDC 2012a). In fact, Arctic sea ice extent is decreasing more rapidly than predicted by global climate change models. According to modeling conducted by the United States Geological Survey, this decline in sea ice is expected to lead to the extirpation of approximately two-thirds of the world's polar bear populations within the next 45 years, or three generations (Amstrup *et al.* (2008); Stirling and Derocher 2012).

The full document and citations can be found at: http://docs.nrdc.org/international/files/int_12110601a.pdf.

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