

10 June 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3rd Annual Meeting of the Scientific Working Group of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission

Anchorage, Alaska U.S.A

14-16 March 2012

1. The third meeting of the Scientific Working Group (SWG) designated to support the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission (the “Commission”) took place on March 14-16, 2012 at the National Park Service building in Anchorage, Alaska, U.S.A. The SWG meeting was attended by 12 members of the SWG (including cochairs Terry DeBruyn and Stanislav Belikov; Attachment 1), 4 invited specialists, and 8 observers. The Commission is responsible for implementation of the *Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Conservation and Management of the Alaska-Chukotka Polar Bear Population*.
2. The main objectives of the meeting were to complete a report to the Commission on the following topics: 1) new research findings; 2) review of harvest recommendations; 3) recommendations on harvest seasons; 4) a joint U.S.-Russia study plan; and 5) an outreach document on the status and biology of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population for the Commission’s website.
3. The SWG received the following presentations from members and invited specialists:
 - a) Genetic capture and individual relatedness of polar bears in the Chukchi Sea 2010-2013 (A. Boltunov).
 - b) Seal disease on the Chukotka coastal waters (A. Kochnev).
 - c) Monitoring polar bear groups on Wrangel Island (N. Ovsvyanikov).
 - d) Updates on polar bear studies in the U.S. portion of the Chukchi Sea (E. Regehr).
 - e) Body condition, reproduction, and feeding ecology of polar bears in the Alaska-Chukotka population (K. Rode).
 - f) Movement and haul-out patterns of ringed seals tagged near Barrow, Alaska (J. Herreman).
 - g) Ringed and bearded seal populations in Alaska are not showing signs of decline based on long-term harvest monitoring (L. Quakenbush).

10 June 2012

- h) Review of seal research by the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (M. Cameron, via teleconference).
 - i) Alaska Nanuuq Commission Traditional Ecological Knowledge study (R. Sparks).
 - j) Update on U.S. harvest management for the Alaska-Chukotka population (E. Regehr).
 - k) Review of oil and gas development and production plan for the southern Beaufort and Chukchi seas, presented by the Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management (M. Cody).
4. Members of the SWG achieved consensus on the following points:
- a) The SWG developed Operating Guidelines for observers and invited specialists at working group meetings. The SWG recognized the need to explain and adhere to these guidelines at future meetings.
 - b) The SWG recognized that new biological information considered at this meeting did not suggest the need to change the sustainable harvest level for polar bears from the Alaska-Chukotka population. Therefore, the SWG recommends no change to the current sustainable harvest level of up to 58 polar bears per year, of which no more than 1/3 will be female, to be shared equally between the U.S. and Russia.
 - c) The SWG recommends that the Multiyear Quota System included in the U.S. Shared Harvest Management Plan represents a valid and biologically sound method for implementing the quota. When a regulated harvest is implemented in the U.S., the SWG will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of this quota system.
 - d) The SWG recommended that the U.S. and Russia implement country-specific harvest seasons. The U.S. proposed an annual harvest season from 01 January to 31 December. Russia proposed a season from 01 December of the current year to 01 April of the next year, for the purpose of protecting reproductive females. The SWG recognized that harvest seasons should reflect consultation with subsistence users. The SWG recommended that harvest seasons should be re-evaluated if the seasonal distribution of polar bears changes.
 - e) The SWG recognized the importance of collaboration between the U.S. and Russia, and requested that the Commission take steps to facilitate the following mechanisms, to improve collaboration on science and Traditional Ecological Knowledge studies and on conservation and management:

10 June 2012

- i. Transfer of funds between countries. This difficulty currently represents a key barrier to collaboration.
 - ii. Transfer of biological samples between countries for collaborative research.
 - iii. Cross-collaboration of personnel on field and research studies.
 - f) The SWG drafted a joint study plan for the Alaska-Chukotka population that is based on high-level information needs, and identifies prioritized studies to address these needs (document “Study Plan for the Alaska-Chukotka Polar Bear Population [2013-2015]” dated 10 June 2012).
 - g) The SWG recognized that financial support is currently not available in Russia to implement scientific research and other studies aimed at the management and conservation of the Alaska-Chukotka population.
 - h) The SWG recommended that the Commission consider identifying funding to support the highest-priority research studies, which are necessary to support management decisions for the Alaska-Chukotka population.
5. The meeting was attended by observers that made the following points:
- a. Concerns were expressed regarding the potential effects on the Alaska-Chukotka population of oil spills, tourism and shipping, trade in polar bear parts, and illegal hunting.
 - b. The importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge was affirmed.
 - c. The non-technical and understandable presentation of scientific findings to communities was encouraged.
 - d. Appreciation was expressed regarding transparency of the SWG meeting.
6. The SWG developed an outreach document on the status and biology of the Alaska-Chukotka population, for inclusion on the Commission website (document “Status and Biology of the Alaska-Chukotka Polar Bear Population” dated 10 June 2012).

10 June 2012

ATTACHMENT 1

List of Attendees at the 3rd Annual Meeting of the Scientific Working Group of the U.S.-
Russia Polar Bear Commission

Scientific Working Group members that attended the meeting:

Stanislav Belikov (Russian cochair) – Head of laboratory, All-Russian Research Institute
of Nature Protection

Terry DeBruyn (American cochair) – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Scott Schliebe – former employee of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Eric Regehr – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Karyn Rode – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Rhonda Sparks (for U.S. member Jack Omelak) – Alaska Nanuuq Commission

Andrei Boltunov – All-Russian Research Institute of Nature Protection

Anatoly Kochnev – Chukotka Federal Fisheries Research Institute

Nikita Ovsyanikov – Deputy Director of Science, Wrangel Island Nature Reserve

Kim Titus – Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Mike Pederson – North Slope Borough

Lily Peacock – U.S. Geological Survey

Scientific Working Group members who were unable to attend the meeting:

Vladimir Etylin

Yuri Tototto

Vladilen Kavry

Ilia Mordvintsev