



FACT SHEET

HUNTING AND USE OF POLAR BEAR BY ALASKA NATIVES

January 2001

Fish and Wildlife Service • U.S. Department of the Interior

This fact sheet addresses often asked questions about polar bears. For answers to other specific questions contact one of the offices listed on the back of this sheet.

WHO MAY HUNT POLAR BEAR?

Alaska Natives (Indians, Aleuts, and Eskimos) who reside in Alaska and who dwell on the coast of the north Pacific Ocean or the Arctic Ocean may harvest polar bears for subsistence purposes or the creation and sale of Native articles of handicraft or clothing if the harvest is not wasteful. A Native must be one-fourth degree or more Alaska Indian, Aleut or Eskimo or be enrolled under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. It is illegal for a person who is not Indian, Aleut, or Eskimo to actively participate in any manner in hunting polar bears.

IS THERE A HARVEST LIMIT FOR POLAR BEARS?

No. Alaska Natives are not limited by Federal Law in the number that can be harvested, providing the harvest is not wasteful. Numbers killed should be limited to what can reasonably be utilized. Polar bears may be harvested any time during the year. Harvest guidelines exist in an agreement between the hunters of the North Slope Borough and the Inuvialuit of Canada. Check with the Alaska Nanuq Commission or the North Slope Borough Fish and Wildlife Department for more information.

ARE THERE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR POLAR BEAR HUNTERS?

Yes. Hunters must present the hides and skulls to Fish and Wildlife Service representatives for tagging. Hides and skulls must be tagged within 30 days of the kill. The hide and skull should be thawed when tagged to: 1) allow an unbroken pre-molar tooth to be extracted for aging; 2) allow accurate skull measurements to be made; and 3) allow the hide to be examined for determination of sex. The baculum should remain attached to the hides of male bears. Ear tags and radio collars must be given to the tagger. A list of tagging representatives is available from the Service's Marine Mammals Management Field Office.

WHAT MAY BE SOLD AS A NATIVE HANDICRAFT?

Authentic Native handicrafts may be sold to a non-Native. This means items composed of a significantly altered pelt that is wholly or in some significant respect of natural materials, and produced, decorated, or fashioned in the exercise of traditional handicrafts without the use of pantographs, multiple carvers, or other mass copying devices. Traditional handicrafts include, but are not limited to weaving, carving, stitching, sewing, lacing, beading, drawing or painting. Polar bear rugs are not considered

a legal handicraft.

ARE THERE OTHER LEGAL USES OF POLAR BEARS?

Yes. The meat or other edible parts from polar bears may be sold if it is sold in an Alaska Native village or is sold to an Alaska Native.

MAY RAW (TANNED OR UNTANNED) HIDES BE SOLD OR TRANSFERRED?

Yes, but only to an Alaska Native within Alaska or to a registered agent for resale or transfer to an Alaska Native within Alaska. It is illegal to give as a gift, trade, or sell either tanned or untanned hides to non-Natives.

HOW MAY A NATIVE HAVE A HIDE TANNED?

Natives may have polar bear hides tanned by taxidermists or tanneries which have a permit from the Fish and Wildlife Service. A list of authorized tanneries is available upon request. Polar bear hides must be tagged in order for the tannery to tan the hides. Tanneries have been instructed not to process untagged hides. Individuals sending hides for tanning may wish to include a signed and dated statement indicating they are a Native and may legally possess the hide.

MAY POLAR BEAR HANDICRAFTS OR CLOTHING BE EXPORTED?

Handcrafted polar bear products may be exported to a foreign country. However, the exporter must first obtain a Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) permit from the Fish and Wildlife Service. A CITES permit is not required for polar bear handicrafts that are personal items if they are worn, or carried out in accompanying baggage, however, a U.S. Customs Service declaration form should be completed prior to taking any personal marine mammal product out of the country if it is intended that it will be brought back by the same person. Exporters can obtain permits for transportation from one of the USFWS Agents listed below. Exporters should inquire about foreign import restrictions since some countries may not allow the importation of handcrafted polar bear products.

MAY POLAR BEAR HANDICRAFTS OR CLOTHING BE IMPORTED?

Polar bear handicrafts may not be imported for commercial sale. Any person may re-enter the United States with polar bear handicrafts that are personal items which were exported under a declaration form. Alaska Natives may also import polar bear handicrafts if they were acquired outside of the United States as part of a cultural exchange. For specific information, contact one of the Agents listed below.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE FOLLOWING OFFICES:

Alaska Nanuuq Commission, P.O. Box 69 Barrow, AK 99732
(907) 852-0350

Assistant Regional Director, USFWS, Division of Law Enforcement,

1011 East Tudor Road, Anchorage, AK 99503 (907) 786-3311

Special Agent, USFWS, P.O. Box 2030, Nome AK, 99762,
(907) 443-2479

Supervisor, Marine Mammals Management Office, USFWS, 1011 East
Tudor Road, Anchorage, AK 99503 (907) 786-3800, or **1-800-362-5148**