



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Agreement

Polar bears live in sea ice habitat considered to be the harshest and most remote anywhere on earth. They typically occur in low densities over vast areas of the Arctic. Not less than 22,000 polar bears exist worldwide. Two populations occur in Alaska: the southern Beaufort Sea population, shared with Canada, and the Alaska-Chukotka population, shared with Russia. Illegal hunting, habitat loss, pollution and global warming pose the most serious threats to polar bears. In addition, polar bears and polar bear hunting are important to native people and their cultural traditions.

In 1995, a working group, comprised of representatives from the Alaska Nanuuq Commission, North Slope Borough, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Marine Mammal Commission, National Audubon Society, RuralCap, U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Interior Solicitor's Office, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) began regular meetings with Russian

counterparts to develop a conservation agreement for polar bears.

The Service finalized an Environmental Assessment in March 1997 and submitted an authorization request to the State Department to negotiate the agreement. Department of State approval was granted in January 1998 and negotiations were held through March 2000.

On October 16, 2000, the United States and Russian Federation signed a bilateral agreement to conserve polar bears shared between the two countries. The agreement between the Government of the United States and Government of the Russian Federation on the Conservation and Management of the Alaska-Chukotka Polar Bear Population unifies management programs. Notably, it calls for the active involvement of native people and their organizations. The Agreement will also provide for long-term joint programs such as habitat and ecosystem conservation, harvest



**Right:** polar bear and cub (*Ursus maritimus*)  
Scott Schliebe, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

allocations based on sustainability, collection of biological information, and increased partnerships with state, local, and private interests.

Following ratification of the Agreement by the U.S. Senate, enabling legislation is required to augment the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act.

The new Agreement enhances the 1973 Multilateral Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears between the United States, Russia, Norway, Denmark (for Greenland), and Canada by allowing a sustainable harvest by Alaska and Chukotka Natives but prohibiting the harvest of females with cubs, or cubs less than one year old. It also advances the

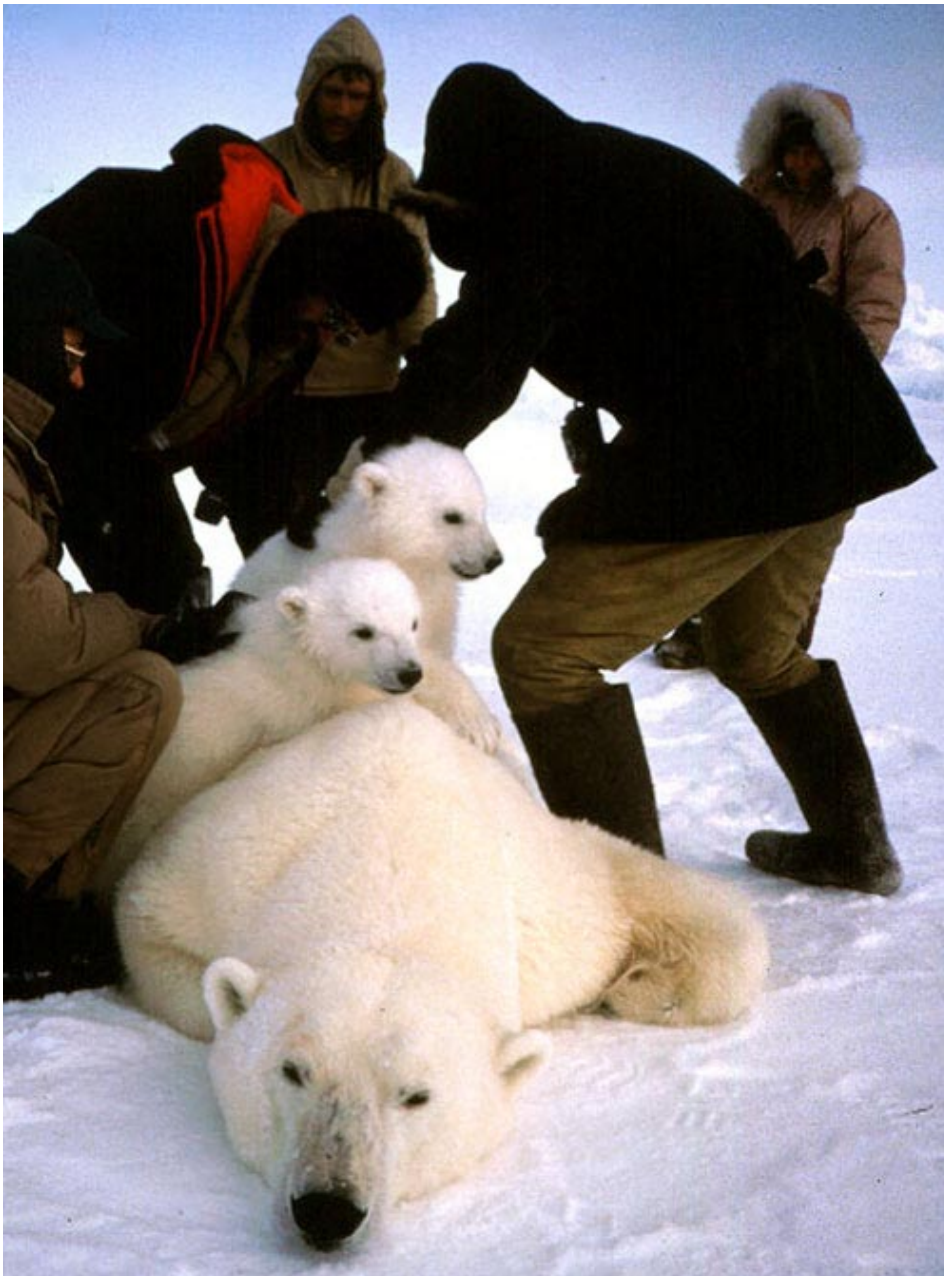
intent of the 1973 Multilateral Agreement with on-the-ground programs.

The Agreement prohibits the use of aircraft and large motorized vessels and vehicles for hunting polar bears, and focuses on conserving specific polar bear habitats such as feeding, congregating and denning areas.

The Agreement also implements the Congressional intent of the 1994 amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act, which direct the Secretary of the Interior to “consult with the appropriate officials of the Russian Federation on the development and implementation of enhanced cooperative

research and management programs for the conservation of polar bears in Alaska and Russia.”

A Joint Commission will administer the Agreement. The Commission includes four representatives: a governmental official and a Native official from each jurisdiction. The Commission may form a scientific advisory group to provide expertise.



**International Affairs**  
**Division of International Conservation**  
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Room 730  
Arlington, VA 22203  
703/358-1754  
703/358-2849 fax  
fw9ia\_dic@fws.gov  
international.fws.gov

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
[www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov)

**September 2001**

*Left: tagging of polar bear and cubs (Ursus maritimus) by Service and Wrangel Island Nature Reserve staff Scott Schliebe, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*