



November 8, 2016

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Today we open a 60 day public comment period as part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s ongoing effort to engage with Alaska Native tribes, organizations, corporations, and the public on efforts to co-manage the subsistence harvest of polar bears in the United States. This initiative is part of a broader effort to ensure that polar bears, threatened by a loss of sea ice habitat in a warming Arctic, persist in the wild and that Alaska Native traditional subsistence practices continue into the future.

“Alaska Native communities have co-existed with the polar bears for millennia, and the Service recognizes Alaska Natives as a key partner in polar bear conservation,” said Greg Siekaniec, Regional Director for the Alaska Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In addition to the effort to receive direct public comment, the Service is working with the Indigenous People’s Council on Marine Mammals (IPCoMM), a coalition of Alaska Tribal marine mammal commissions, councils and other native organizations, to facilitate local meetings.

A co-management partner will also help inform the decisions of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission and help to manage harvest of the shared Alaska-Chukotka population of polar bears. The U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Agreement, which was signed in 2000, recognized the essential role of the Native peoples of Alaska and Chukotka in the conservation of this shared population of polar bears.

The goals of the Agreement include the conservation of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population and its habitat and regulation of its use for subsistence purposes by Native peoples in Chukotka, Russia and Alaska, including establishing take limits. In 2010, Charlie Johnson of the Alaska Nanuuq Commission, the U.S. Commissioner representing Alaska Natives, and Geoffrey Haskett of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Commissioner for the United States Government, voted with their Russian Federation counterparts, to limit the total allowable take of polar bears from the Alaska-Chukotka population.

The limit has not yet been implemented and the target date of January 2017 has been postponed. The U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission will be notified of the postponement. Recent appointments to the Commission by the United States are: Charles Brower, representing Alaska Natives and Greg Siekaniec, representing the United States Government.

In addition to helping monitor and manage subsistence harvest, other collaborative activities under a co-management agreement could include the collection of information on the distribution, abundance, and health of polar bears; management human and polar bear conflicts; and assessment and protection of important habitats.

Comments on developing a co-management partner and ideas on how to implement the polar bear taking limits may be submitted using the following methods:

Bulletin



Mail: Public Comment Processing, Attn: FWS-R7-ES-2016-0056, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Headquarters, MS: BPHC, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, Virginia 22041-3803.

Internet: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments to Docket No. FWS-R7-ES-2016-0056.

Read the U.S-Russia Polar Bear Agreement: <https://www.congress.gov/107/cdoc/tdoc10/CDOC-107tdoc10.pdf>

To learn more about the Indigenous People's Council for Marine Mammals visit: <http://ipcommalaska.org/>

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