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Polar Bear Range States Celebrate 40th Anniversary of 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears

Representatives of the polar bear range states – United States, Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Norway and the Russian Federation – convened in Moscow, Russia, today to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears. Representatives responsible for polar bear policy, research, and management recognized the significant contributions over the past four decades to polar bear conservation throughout the species' Arctic range.

“It is an honor to be here to celebrate the anniversary of this historic agreement and reflect on all the important work we’ve done together for the conservation of the polar bear,” said Geoff Haskett, Service Regional Director and head of the United States Delegation. “Despite our significant accomplishments working together as range states for 40 years, the health and survival of polar bears requires our unwavering commitment into the future, especially in the face of the complex challenges presented by the rapidly changing Arctic.”

Haskett noted that the range states acknowledged the importance of addressing the impacts of climate change for the long-term conservation of polar bears and underscored their strategy to reduce the other stressors to polar bear and its habitats. A declaration signed by the range state representatives at the opening of the meeting, recommitted and focused their continued work, both independently and cooperatively, to conserve polar bears.

While significant declines have not yet been observed in most populations, declining sea ice caused by human-induced global climate change is projected to have a significant impact on polar bear populations. Habitat loss restricts the access of polar bears to seals, their main prey items. Sea ice has been reduced by 8 percent in the past 30 years alone, while summer sea ice has been reduced by 15 to 20 percent. The best available scientific information indicates that polar bear populations will suffer significant declines over the next 45 years, with many populations facing extirpation.

“The polar bear range states’ collective efforts to conserve polar bears and their habitats under the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears are critical to the future of this shared species of global importance,” said Service Director Dan Ashe, as he expressed his deep regret for being unable to attend this high priority meeting. “The United States is committed to strengthening our collaboration with each of the range states to address threats to the polar bear,

especially trade in polar bear parts, conflicts with human activity and the impacts of a changing climate."

Following the meeting, referred to as a "jubilee," range state representatives and technical experts will meet for two days to consider the current status of the species, threats facing the species, and best management practices to address those threats. Meetings of the range states occur every two years to facilitate cooperation and the exchange of information on the status and conservation needs of the polar bear.

In the United States, the polar bear has been listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act since 2008 and protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act since 1972. For more information on the polar bear and polar bear conservation, visit:
<http://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/mmm/polarbear/pbmain.htm>.

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