

SCI Opposes So-Called "Polar Bear Protection Act"

Washington, D.C. – Safari Club International strongly opposes the so-called "Polar Bear Protection Act" that has been introduced in Congress.

Both the House and Senate have introduced bills that would ban the importation of polar bear trophies, which current law allows from healthy populations in Canada. In addition, an amendment was added to the Senate Interior Appropriations Bill that would prohibit the expenditure of funds for processing permits for the importation of polar bear trophies. Around the same time, the House defeated by a floor vote of 188-242 a similar amendment for the House Interior Appropriations Bill. The issue should now be resolved in the Appropriations conference on the bills.

These anti-hunting, anti-conservation pieces of legislation will harm current successful conservation and management efforts in the United States and Canada, with no benefit to the survival of the species. The polar bear is not currently threatened with extinction and, in fact, enjoys extremely healthy numbers worldwide. The facts below dispel a number of myths put forth by the proponents of these bills and the anti-hunting groups supporting them.

Myth:

Sport hunting of polar bears threatens polar bear populations in Canada.

Facts:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Canadian wildlife authorities have determined that well-regulated subsistence and sport hunting, which currently occurs in certain populations in Canada, are not a threat to the polar bear populations.¹

Myth:

Sport hunting by U.S. hunters increases the number of polar bears killed in Canada.

Facts:

The governments in Canada that manage polar bears allocate a certain number of "tags" to the local native communities each year based on science-driven assessments of sustainability. The local communities assign a number of the tags to sport hunters to generate much needed revenue for community survival. If U.S. sport hunters did not purchase these hunts, the community would simply use those tags themselves for subsistence purposes, resulting in the same number of bears harvested regardless of the participation of U.S. sport hunters.²

Myth:

Canadian wildlife managers feel pressure to increase total harvest quotas to maximize revenue.

Facts:

Canadian wildlife managers are not pressured to increase quotas beyond sustainable levels. The sport hunt tags are taken out of the total quota given to the local native communities. If these communities wanted to increase the number of sport hunts and their own revenue, they would assign more of their "tags" to sport hunters (assuming demand for sport hunts exceeds current supply). As the native communities generally get the meat from sport hunts, the sustenance derived from each tag would not be significantly diminished by assigning more tags to sport hunters. In addition, the quotas are set by trained biologists and wildlife managers using scientific methods. All of these people understand the importance of sustainability of polar bear populations.

Myth:

Sport hunting by U.S. hunters does not support polar conservation and management.

Facts:

Sport hunting and importation by U.S. hunters supports and funds polar bear conservation and management by bringing approximately \$1.5-2.0 million for native communities each year. This money helps encourage the Government of Nunavut and the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board to contribute about \$1,000,000 per year to polar bear conservation. The \$30,000-50,000 per hunt U.S. hunters pay brings much needed revenue and the native people then have another incentive to carefully manage and conserve this species and to accept science-based management.³ By law, each import permit the FWS issues to U.S. hunters generates \$1,000 for research and management programs for the conservation of polar bears in Alaska and Russia. Over \$800,000 has been raised.⁴

¹ *Final Rule, Importation of Polar Bear Trophies from Canada Under the 1994 Amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act*, 62 Fed. Reg. 7303 (Feb. 18, 1997); *see also CRS Report to Congress: Polar Bears: Proposed Listing under the Endangered Species Act*, at 9 (July 17, 2007); World Conservation Union/IUCN, Sustainable Use Specialist Group, U.S. Endangered Species Act: Polar Bear Listing, <http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/susg/news/may06polarbear.htm>.

² *See Proposed Rule to List the Polar Bear*, 72 Fed. Reg. 1064, 1082 (Jan. 9, 2007); Letter from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to Chairman Rahall, House Committee on Natural Resources (June 27, 2007).

³ CRS Report at 11-12.

⁴ CRS Report at 9-10 (discussing program and noting that 838 import permits have been issued through 2006); Sections 104(c)(5)(B) and 113(d) of the Marine Mammal Protection Act; 50 C.F.R. § 18.30(g)(2). According to an IUCN report, import fees have been used for conservation initiatives for polar bear stocks shared between the U.S. and Russia and have been used to: 1) develop a bilateral conservation agreement; 2) conduct population surveys; 3) collect knowledge of polar bear habitat use; 4) develop standard surveying protocols; and 5) develop outreach materials. *Polar Bears, Proceedings of the 14th Working Meeting of the IUCN/SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group* at 74 (June 20-24, 2005).