



Backgrounder

The Bear Facts: Baffin Bay Polar Bear Management

Background

- Both Nunavut and Greenland harvest from the Baffin Bay polar bear population (BB). Since the 1990s, the Greenland harvest has been taken into account in our management system.
- The last population surveys were done in the mid 1990s, and in 1997 the population was estimated at approximately 2100 polar bears. In calculating the overall harvest, it was estimated that the Greenland take was between 18-25 bears annually.
- In 2002-2004, new Polar Bear Management MOUs were negotiated between the Government of Nunavut and the communities that harvest from each polar bear population. Based on the population estimate of 2100, it was assessed that the population could sustain a combined harvest of approximately 130 bears annually. The total allowable harvest in Nunavut was increased accordingly.
- In early 2005, Greenland provided updated information on its BB harvest. Based on this new information it was determined that the combined harvest was higher than could be sustained by the population. Greenland instituted phased harvest reductions in 2006 that decreased their harvest to 68 bears in 2009.
- In 2007 the Minister of Environment referred BB to the NWMB as a conservation concern. The NWMB decided not to change the TAH, and this was accepted by the Minister.
- In 2009 the Minister again referred BB to the NWMB as a conservation concern.
- In 2009 Canada, Nunavut, and Greenland signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the management of shared polar bear populations. The MOU creates a joint commission, and provides for the creation of a user-to-user working group to advise on polar bear management. The first meeting of the Joint Commission took place in January 2010, and the next Joint Commission and first User-to-User meetings with Greenland will take place in June 2010.

NWMB Decision

- Following the process described in the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, the NWMB decided that the harvest should be reduced. Their decision was to reduce the Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) for Baffin Bay by 10 bears per year over four years, beginning in 2011-2012, resulting in a TAH of 65 in 2014-15.

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Minister Shewchuk's Response

- The NLCA provides that the Minister can vary a final decision of the NWMB. Minister Shewchuk has varied the decision as follows:
 - The TAH will be reduced by 10 bears per starting in 2010-2011, and will be reduced by an additional 10 bears in each of the following 3 years, resulting in a TAH of 65 in 2013-2014.
- In addition to reducing the harvest, the Minister has committed to undertaking the following actions:
 - To complete, by 2014, a research project to obtain an updated population estimate. Community consultations on this project have already begun.
 - To implement community-based Polar Bear Deterrent plans in the Baffin Bay communities.
 - To implement new programs to prevent and mitigate damage caused by problem wildlife.
 - Implementation of the MOU signed with Greenland to coordinate management of this shared polar bear population is underway. Representatives from Inuit organizations in Nunavut and Greenland are part of the Joint Commission under this MOU and will play an instrumental role in collaboratively setting research and management priorities for this population.