

Dear colleagues,

Please, find below our position in support of changing the CITES status of polar bear from category II to category I.

We agree that the primary threat to polar bear is global climate change that causes critical reduction of sea ice extent and structure. If warming of the climate continues polar bear population will decrease considerably during the next decade. Factors threatening polar bears also include off shore hydrocarbon extraction, marine shipping, pollution, tourism caused disturbance, increase in both legal and illegal hunting, i.e. poaching.

We are confident that currently international trade of polar bear parts is one of the most serious factors escalating negative impact to the species induced by hunting. These days, rapid increase in demand for and cost of polar bear pelts has been continuing at the Canadian fur auctions. Pelts bought by foreign traders at the auctions are further retailed in other countries where the price may exceed 50,000 USD. Doubtless, such extremely high cost is a powerful driver for illegal polar bear hunting in Russia and for rapid increase in the number of polar bears annually taken in Canada. Pelts of polar bears illegally killed in the Russian Arctic can be easily transported to former Soviet republics and offered there for sale. In Russia, polar bear hides legally brought from Canada with the CITES II certificates provide an easy opportunity to launder pelts of polar bears illegally killed in Russia. There are facts of selling Canadian CITES certificates for polar bears via INTERNET.

How can we mitigate this serious negative impact on polar bear populations? We believe that the uplisting of polar bear to the CITES Appendix I would be one of the important steps towards solving this problem. This measure would stop the rush demand and possibly decrease the number of polar bear pelts sold through Canadian auctions, since foreign buyers would not be able to resell the hides in other countries legally. Canadian pelts legally brought to other countries (primarily to Russia) are used as a cover up for selling illegal local polar bear hides which provides a serious reason to ban any commercial use of polar bear hides and other products. Therefore, uplisting of polar bear would promote decrease in number of polar bears killed worldwide.

Moving polar bear to CITES Appendix I will not stand in the way of traditional use of this species by native people of the Arctic or affect trophy hunting in Canada that uses "traditional polar bear quotas." Foreign trophy hunters will still be able to get CITES I permits to hunt in Canada, they simply will not be allowed to sell hides in their respective countries. We are confident that polar bear should not be subjected to any commercial use especially during such critical time in its history.

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