News Release

Nunavut disappointed with polar bear ruling

Iqaluit, Nunavut (May 14, 2008) - The Government of Nunavut strongly opposes the recent United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) decision to list polar bears as a threatened species throughout its range. The decision was based on misinformed public opinion which disregarded sound science and Inuit traditional knowledge.

"Our scientists in the field as well as Inuit elders have observed an overall increase in the polar bear population," said Government of Nunavut Premier Paul Okalik. "It is unfortunate the USFWS has decided to disregard facts collected by those who have the greatest contact and longest history with polar bears. The truth is that polar bear populations are at near record levels."

There are upwards of 25,000 polar bears worldwide. Of this total approximately 15,000 polar bears are managed or co-managed by Nunavut.

The inappropriate suggestion that all polar bears are currently threatened as a result of habitat loss is not supported by the facts to date. Nunavut is home to 12 of the 15 polar bear populations worldwide. The size and health of each Nunavut population is determined based on a combination of scientific information and Inuit traditional knowledge (Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit). This information is used to make sound decisions when setting quotas.

While the USFWS decision is a set back, Nunavut will continue to sustainably manage the hunting of polar bears for food and community safety. Since hunting quotas were never based on the market demand of sports hunters, the closure of the US market for polar bear products will have no effect on the hunting quotas set in Nunavut. However, the unintended consequences of the US decision will be economic hardship in traditional Inuit communities which rely on the revenue generated through the provision of guide outfitting.

The Government of Nunavut will examine the ruling before deciding on its next course of action.

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