



News Release

US proposal to up-list polar bear under CITES will not contribute to conservation

IQALUIT, Nunavut (October 28, 2009) The Government of Nunavut is opposing a recent proposal by the US government to up-list polar bears under the *Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species* (CITES). If accepted, the proposal will effectively end the export of polar bear products from Canada due to increased import and export restrictions.

Central to the Government of Nunavut's opposition is the fact the US proposal assumes that international trade in polar bear parts is a major factor in determining harvest levels. In reality, almost all polar bear parts originating in Canada (home to two thirds of the world's polar bear population) are from bears legally harvested under Nunavut's sustainable management system. Under that system, harvest levels are based on what polar bear populations can safely support and are not connected to economics or trade.

While the intention of CITES is to protect wildlife from over-exploitation, Nunavut's Minister of Environment believes not only would up-listing polar bears under CITES be ineffective, but in fact it could actually be counter-productive to conservation efforts.

"We have a very effective polar bear management system involving sustainable harvest of polar bears," said Daniel Shewchuk, Minister of Environment. "Well-regulated sport and subsistence harvesting is a key component of our polar bear management system, which relies heavily on community buy-in and support for management decisions."

"We must be clear that the primary threats to polar bears within Canada and throughout the species' range have nothing to do with trade," said Shewchuk. "Creating awareness of the possible impacts of climate change is not a valid reason to up-list polar bears under CITES. Any decision made on that basis would greatly undermine the important role that CITES plays in wildlife protection and conservation."

Moving forward, the GN will be studying the US proposal and working with the federal government and other agencies to prepare a response based on the best available information.

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