

## Signature Page

At the ninth meeting of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission held by teleconference on December 13/14, 2017, the United States and Russian Federation Sections:

1. unanimously approved the recommendation of the Scientific Working Group to not change the sustainable harvest level at this time.
2. unanimously approved the new United States nominees to the Scientific Working Group.

### Commissioners from the Russian Federation Section



Amirkhan Amirkhanov



Sergey Kavry

### Commissioners from the United States Section



Greg Siekantec



Charles Brower

Date: December 19, 2017

## Report of the Ninth Meeting of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear

Commission December 13/14, 2017

By teleconference

The ninth meeting of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission (hereafter, "Commission") took place December 13/14, 2017 by teleconference. The ninth meeting included discussion on upcoming Commission meetings to consider new scientific information that is anticipated being made available in 2018; therefore, a scientific workshop is being planned for February 2018, and a Scientific Working Group ("SWG") and the Commission meetings in July 2018.

The ninth Commission meeting was attended by all four members of the Commission (Amirkhan Amirkhanov, Sergei Kavry, Greg Siekaniec, and Charles Brower) and their respective delegates (Appendix 1). The Commission is responsible for implementation of the *Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Conservation and Management of the Alaska-Chukotka Polar Bear Population* (hereafter, "Agreement").

Commissioner Amirkhanov opened the meeting by welcoming the American and Russian participants. He acknowledged good work between the U.S. and Russian specialists and particularly highlighted the work on Wrangel Island and a desire to make it easier. He said that President Putin made this the year of conservation, so there is increased emphasis on the polar bear work. He expressed thanks to the Government of Chukotka for their help in organizing a useful meeting over the past year and expressed hope that the useful work between Alaska and Chukotka will continue into the next year and emphasized the importance of taking into consideration the native people from both sides.

### Commissioner Siekaniec's statement:

- We appreciate the flexibility of the Russian Federation and Native people in Russia in scheduling the SWG workshop and next meetings of the SWG and the Commission to allow for full consideration of this significant new scientific information.
- Today's call provides an opportunity for us to check-in on the status of implementation, the proposed schedule for the work of the Commission and SWG over the next year, and to hear from our scientific advisors on the annual sustainable harvest level, consistent with the Agreement.
- At the November 2016 Commission meeting we were encouraged to hear of the Russian Federation's intention to authorize a legal harvest as a way to better manage and track the taking of polar bears and to provide for the subsistence needs of Russian Native people.
- We were also excited to hear about the work planned by the SWG to review and analyze the new scientific information on the status of the Alaska- Chuktoka population, and supported:
  - ensuring that the SWG had sufficient time to review the available information and prepare a comprehensive report,

- allowing sufficient time for translation of that report and for the US and Russian delegations to consider the new information, and
- allowing sufficient time for the Commissioners to identify appropriate management actions in light of this significant new information.
- We also wish to provide an update on our work to establish a new Alaska Native co-management partner willing and able to implement local and regional polar bear harvest management.

**Commissioner Kavry's statement:**

Уважаемые комиссионеры Амирханов, Siekaniec и Brower.

Уважаемые приглашенные и наблюдатели. Выражаю благодарность всем заинтересованным сторонам, сделавшим усилия для того, чтобы провести данную телеконференцию. Отмечу важность выполнения обязательств Правительствами России и США, прописанных в Соглашении 2000 года, в частности права коренным жителям Чукотки и Аляски использовать белого медведя в традиционном укладе жизни. Мы привлекаем особое внимание к правильному, равному и справедливому подходу при обсуждении квоты на добычу, в том числе исходя из учета двух популяций, как на Аляске, также и с учётом двух популяций на Чукотке.

Необходимо отметить и признать многовековой опыт природопользования коренных народов и культуры сохранения белого медведя. Также в современное время практическая работа науки в исследовании белого медведя имеет большой опыт за последние годы, которая дает более точное состояние чукотско-аляскинской популяции. Благодаря усердию людей научной рабочей группы и их коллегам открывается более подробная картина жизни, поведения, приспособляемости белого медведя. Интерес коренных жителей очень огромный, в сравнении проведенных исследований в прошлом, настоящем в плане влияния быстро меняющегося мира и понимания как сохранить не только вид, но и его места обитания. Есть твердая уверенность в том, чтобы государства делали прогрессивные шаги к совместному управлению сохранения и использования чукотско-аляскинской популяции, и коренные жители много сделали для этого, работая с жителями и всеми заинтересованными сторонами нашего региона. проводят современные и традиционные наблюдения, предупреждая и предотвращая конфликтные встречи, сохраняя жизнь и здоровье человека и белого медведя.

Прошу проявить усилия к более тесному взаимодействию и сотрудничеству федеральных, региональных властей с жителями Чукотки и Аляски в области семинаров, обмена опытом между народами и культуры значимого для нас животного.

В данной телеконференции ожидаю утвердить темы обсуждения для будущего заседания ИРГ и Комиссии, а также не менять ничего из того, что было достигнуто на прошлых заседаниях.

С уважением,

Комиссионер РФ Российско-Американской комиссии по белому медведю Сергей

Кавры

**Google translate version:**

Dear Commissioners Amirkhanov, Siekaniec and Brower.

Dear invited guests and observers. Thanks to all interested parties, making efforts to conduct this teleconference. I would like to note the importance of the implementation of the obligations the Governments of Russia and the United States, prescribed in the agreement of the year 2000, in particular the rights of the indigenous inhabitants of Chukotka and Alaska use polar bear in a traditional way of life. We draw particular attention to the right, equal and equitable approach in discussing quotas, including on the two populations, both in Alaska, and also taking into account two population in Chukotka.

It is necessary to note and acknowledge the centuries-old experience of nature use of indigenous peoples and cultural preservation of the polar bear. Also in modern times the practical work of science in the study of polar bear has extensive experience over the past years, which gives a more accurate State Chukchi-offering Alaskan populations. Thanks to the diligence of the people the scientific working group and their colleagues offer a more detailed picture of life, conduct, adaptation of a polar bear. Interest of indigenous residents very huge, in comparison of the studies in the past, the present in terms of the impact of a rapidly changing world and an understanding of how to save not only the appearance, but also its Habitat. There is a strong belief that States have made progressive steps towards joint management of the conservation and utilization of Chukchi-offering Alaskan populations, and indigenous people have done a lot for this, working with the residents and all interested Parties in our region, conducting modern and traditional monitoring, alerting and preventing conflict meeting, preserving human life and health and the polar bear.

Ask to demonstrate efforts towards closer interaction and cooperation of the Federal, regional authorities with residents of the Chukotka and Alaska in the field seminars, the exchange of experiences between peoples and culture meaningful to us.

In this teleconference expect to approve discussion topics for future meetings of the GNR and the Commission, as well as not to change anything of what has been achieved at the last meeting.

With kind regards.

Commissioner of the RUSSIAN FEDERATION the Russian-American Commission on polar bear Sergey Qawra

**Commissioner Brower's statement:**

Greetings Commissioners Siekaniec, Armikhanov, fellow co-Chairman Kavry.

Welcome observers and delegates. I too am pleased that the Russian Federation intends to authorize a legal harvest (has not the Russian Federation declared for the last several years they are working towards management of a harvest in Russia) This is one of the primary reasons we entered into discussions between the Alaska Nanuuq Commission and the Association of Traditional Marine Mammal Hunters of Chukotka in January of 2008 that ultimately resulted in the establishment of this bilateral agreement for the conservation of polar bears.

The second primary reason was to establish a democratic process for the management of

the shared Chukchi population avoiding full federal management of the species solely by the Federal Government. I am pleased that efforts by our regional organizations and our federally recognized tribes have begun the process to building a new co-management entity to represent the interest, traditions and needs of the Native people of Alaska.

It is crucial that western scientific strategies, and the observations, understandings, concerns and methods of Alaska's first environmental stewards, Alaska's Indigenous people are properly integrated into any management system. I too support our attempts to separate meetings between our advising body, the Scientist Working Group and we the Commission. This will allow for adequate time to properly assess and integrate the information into our proceedings. The next few years will be crucial for co-management and our communities that rely on the continued adequate harvest of polar bears.

**Agenda item: Introduction of delegates and Observers: see list of attendees in Appendix 1. Agenda item: Briefings by co-chairs of the Scientific Working Group (SWG)**

**Dr. Eric Regher: Recommendations to the Commission are underlined.**

- Greetings to the Commissioners, delegations, and observers. My name is Eric Regher. I'm the American co-chair of the US-Russia Polar Bear Scientific Working Group. I'd like to provide a brief statement on behalf of the SWG, including the group's recommendation on sustainable harvest level. Following my comments, we will hear from Dr. Belikov, the Russian co-chair of the SWG.
- At present, the primary task of the SWG is to consider all available information for the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population—including new information on population size and vital rates that was discussed at this 2016 Commission meeting—and to develop updated recommendations on sustainable harvest level. The SWG is approaching this task in a collaborative manner that reflects input from all members, as well as a small number of Invited Specialists with relevant expertise. Work on the harvest assessment is currently underway. In February 2018, the group will hold a workshop in Moscow, Russia. The result of this work will be a written harvest assessment report that is provided to the Commission and others in advance of the next Commission meeting in summer 2018.
- In preparation for today's meeting, the SWG has reviewed available information on the status of the Alaska-Chukotka population, for the purpose of providing an annual recommendation on sustainable harvest level, as required under the Agreement. Members of the SWG make the following majority recommendation to the Commission:
  - "The SWG recognized that new scientific data is currently in preparation on the abundance, movements and distribution, and effects of harvest on the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population. This scientific data is expected to be ready to inform management decisions in 2018. The SWG also recognized that currently there is no other new scientific data or Traditional Ecological Knowledge that suggests the need to change the current estimate

of sustainable harvest level for the Alaska-Chukotka population. Therefore, the SWG recommends no change to the current sustainable harvest level of up to 58 bears per year, of which no more than 1/3 will be female, or to the multiyear quota system as adopted by the Commission.”

- This majority recommendation was voted for by 12 of 16 members of the SWG
- Of the four SWG members that did not vote for this majority recommendation:
  - One member did not respond to requests to participate in the discussion on sustainable harvest level, and therefore did not vote
  - One member abstained from voting due to an agency policy
  - One member did not support this recommendation
  - One member did not support this recommendation, and provided the minority view that a sustainable harvest level of up to 58 bears per year is overly conservative and may cause hardship for native communities, noting that there is confusion over management boundaries and a need for communication about harvest management with communities and hunters
- In addition to the recommendation on sustainable harvest level, members of the SWG make the following consensus recommendation to the Commission regarding the composition of the SWG:
  - “The SWG recommends that James Wilder (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) replace Dr. Hilary Cooley (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) as a member of the American section of the SWG, and that Dr. Lori Polasek (Alaska Department of Fish and Game) replace Dr. Bob Small (Alaska Department of Fish and Game) as a member of the American section of the SWG.”
  - Both of these replacements are for individuals that have changed jobs and are no longer able to serve on the SWG. Therefore, the number of individuals in the American section of the SWG remains unchanged.
- Thank you for your time and attention. We will now hear from Dr. Belikov.

**Dr. Stanislav Belikov:**

### Recommendations of the Russian section of the Scientific Working Group to the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission

Dear members of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission and observers. My name is Stanislav Belikov and I am, like Dr. Regehr, a co-chair of the Scientific Working Group (SWG), established by decision of the Commission in 2010. One of the main tasks of the SWG is preparation of the annual recommendation to the Commission on a sustainable harvest level of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population based on available scientific

information and Traditional Ecological Knowledge of indigenous peoples of Chukotka and Alaska.

At the last meeting in 2016 the SWG recommended the Commission sustainable harvest level of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population in 58 individuals, while the harvest of females should not exceed one-third. Six out of eight members of the Russian section of the SWG (including the co-chair) believe, that at present there are no new data that would call into question this recommendation. The most of the U.S. section of the SWG share the same opinion, what follows from the report of Dr. Regehr, which you've just heard.

On this basis, the Russian SWG members participating in the discussion support the following recommendation of the Commission: "The SWG recognized that new scientific data is currently in preparation on the abundance, movements and distribution, and effects of harvest on the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population. This scientific data is expected to be ready to inform management decisions in 2018. The SWG also recognized that currently there is no other new scientific data or Traditional Ecological Knowledge that suggests the need to change the current estimate of sustainable harvest level for the Alaska-Chukotka population. Therefore, the SWG recommends no change to the current sustainable harvest level of up to 58 bears per year, of which no more than 1/3 will be female, or to the multiyear quota system as adopted by the Commission."

Thank you for your attention

Stanislav Belikov

**Agenda item: Determination of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population's annual sustainable harvest level**

#### **Russian Federation update on implementation of Agreement**

**Commissioner Amirkhanov** noted that the Russians are currently involved in intensive work with the other polar bear Range States. He agreed with the statement of the SWG that no change to the sustainable harvest level is warranted at this time. He noted that he has had a meeting with the Governor of Chukotka to discuss implementing the agreement, and that more meetings are to come. He also discussed the possibility of holding the next Commission meeting in Chukotka, if the U.S. will agree. He said he felt it was important to have a meeting in Chukotka as there had not been one held there before. He expressed his interest in hearing more about the new Alaskan Native Organization that has formed to co-manage polar bears in the U.S., and noted that he would like to see a continuation of the close relationship between the Native partners in the U.S. and Russia.

#### **U.S. update on implementation of Agreement**

**Mary Colligan made the following statements:**

- At the November 2016 meeting of the Commission we notified the Commission that the Fish and Wildlife Service was no longer able to provide continued funding and support to the Alaska Nanuuq Commission and that we were actively seeking a new Alaska Native co-management partner.
- We shared with the Commission that it was our goal to have a new partner identified in 2017 so that they could proceed with establishing a program of locally enforceable ordinances for polar bear harvest management.
- We further notified the Commission that it was our intention to issue regulations addressing harvest management in 2019, with an anticipated effective date of January 1, 2020.
- A major focus of our efforts over the past year has been working with representatives from Tribal Governments in villages that hunt polar bears to establish a new Alaska Native polar bear co-management partner.
- We are pleased to report that, despite some challenges, a new entity has been formed to represent the Tribal Governments in Alaska that engage in subsistence taking of polar bears. We also wish to acknowledge the significant role that the Indigenous People's Council of Marine Mammals (IPCoMM), an Alaska Native Organization, played in this effort.
- The first official meeting of the Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council was held on 14 November.
- We look forward to working domestically with the Alaska Nanuut Co-Management Council to implement the Agreement and the quota that has been established, as well as other matters relevant to polar bear conservation.
- As we have discussed at previous Commission meetings, we believe a program of locally enforceable ordinances for polar bear harvest management, which is supported by federal regulations, is a key priority for the successful realization of the Agreement.

**Agenda item: Commissioner discussion and decision on SWG Report**

The Commissioners unanimously approved the SWG Report and made the following statements.

**Commissioner Kavry** stated that he was pleased with the proposal to hold the next Commission meeting in Chukotka. He also stated that he supports Commissioner Amirkhanov's recommendation to not change the sustainable harvest level at this time.

**Commissioner Brower** agreed with the recommendation to not change the sustainable harvest level at this time, recognizing that the SWG will continue to work on a new recommendation that considers new information before the next Commission meeting.

**Commissioner Siekaniiec** concurred with the recommendation to not change the sustainable harvest level at this time and recognized that all the Commissioners had reached consensus on this point. He also looks forward to the SWG's work leading up to the 2018 Commission meeting, which will help to resolve some of the issues that still need to be addressed. He made a motion that the SWG recommendation be accepted by the Commissioners.

**Commissioner Brower** seconded the motion and the SWG recommendation that no change be made to the sustainable harvest level was adopted.

**Agenda item: Approval of new nominees to SWG**

**Commissioner Siekaniec** made a motion that the U.S. nominees to the SWG be accepted.

**Commissioner Brower** seconded the motion, which was adopted by the Commissioners.

**Agenda item: Commission discussion of organizational items.**

The next meeting of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission will take place in the Russian Federation, with the recommendation that the meeting occur in Chukotka. Final dates and venues to be determined.

**Agenda item: Closing business of the Commission.**

**Commissioner Kavry** stated that he will send Russian nominees to the SWG by writing.

**Commissioner Siekaniec** said that the U.S. appreciated the invitation for a meeting in Chukotka and understands and appreciate the value of meeting in Chukotka and would take that invitation under advisement. He said he would be in contact and conversation shortly as to whether the U.S. can travel to a meeting in Chuktoka in July.

**Appendix 1. Attendee List**

## Attendee List for 9th meeting of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission

December 13/14, 2017

By teleconference

### U.S. Participants

| <b>Name</b>      | <b>Organization</b>                    |
|------------------|--|
| Greg Siekaniec   | U.S. Commissioner                      |
| Charlie Brower   | U.S. Commissioner                      |
| Eric Regehr      | U.S. Co-chair Scientific Working Group |
| Mary Colligan    | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service         |
| James Wilder     | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service         |
| Katya Wessels    | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service         |
| Patrick Lemons   | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service         |
| Ryan Wilson      | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service         |
| Michael Gosliner | Marine Mammal Commission               |
| Shawn Finley     | U.S. Department of the Interior        |
| Elizabeth Phelps | U.S. Dept of State                     |
| Steven Kohl      | Private Observer                       |
| Randi Meyerson   | American Zoo Association               |
| Lori Polasek     | Alaska Dept of Fish & Game             |
| Taqulik Hepa     | North Slope Borough                    |
| Andrew VonDuyke  | North Slope Borough                    |
| Nicole Kanayurak | North Slope Borough                    |
| Masha Kalinina   | Humane Society International           |
| Shaye Wolf       | Center for Biological Diversity        |
| Lisa Lidgus      | St Louis Zoo                           |
| Karla Dutton     | Defenders of Wildlife                  |
| Tyson Kade       | Van Ness Feldman                       |

### Russian Participants

| <b>Name</b>         | <b>Organization</b>                            |
|---------------------|--|
| Amirkhan Amirkhanov | Russian Commissioner                           |
| Sergey Kavry        | Russian Commissioner                           |
| Stanislav Belikov   | Russian Co-Chair Scientific Working Group      |
| Irina Fominykh      | Ministry of Natural Resources                  |
| Olga Krever         | Ministry of Natural Resources                  |
| Alexander Gruzdev   | Ministry of Natural Resources                  |
| Alexander Druchinin | Ministry of Natural Resources                  |
| Nataliya Slugina    | Chukotka Department of International Relations |
| Ayvana Enmykau      | Chukotkan translator                           |

Olga Safonova  
Anatoliy Kochnev  
Egor Vereshchagin  
Yuriy Tottoto  
Vladimir Devyatkin

Denis Litovka  
Viktoriya Golbtseva

Chukotkan Department of Industrial and  
Agricultural Policy  
Russian Academy of Science  
Chukotkan Division of Wildlife Preservation and Use  
Union of Marine Mammal Hunters  
Department of Native Affairs  
Chukotka Branch, Pacific Research Institute of  
Fisheries and Oceanography  
Regional Language Society