

# U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Scientific Working Group and Polar Bear Co-Management: April 2018 Update

U.S.-Russia Bilateral Agreement for Polar Bears of the Chukchi Sea Population:

- In 2000, the U.S. and Russia signed a treaty to manage Alaska-Chukotka (Chukchi Sea) polar bears through a bilateral agreement.
- In late February 2018, the U.S.-Russia Scientific Working Group met to discuss scientific issues associated with Chukchi Sea polar bears. The North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management (DWM) participated in this meeting to provide our scientific and traditional knowledge expertise in working with polar bear subsistence communities in northern and western Alaska.

In the past, the DWM expressed concerns about a quota and other regulations that were set by the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission. This Scientific Working Group workshop was significant because the group is:

- 1) finalizing a new sub-population estimate,
- 2) creating a boundary analysis tool, and
- 3) has created a harvest risk assessment model to be used to assess risk of various harvest strategies.



Photo: Billy Adams, 2018.

To provide input into these studies, the DWM collaborated with Stephen Braund and his team, who have done TEK studies for AEWG in the past. In January 2018, Braund & Associates conducted TEK research on polar bears of the Chukchi Sea. Stephen and the DWM worked with hunters from the villages of Point Hope, Point Lay, Wainwright and Barrow. We hope to expand this work, as it was well received by the U.S.-Russia Scientific Working Group and will be very useful to the models developed to estimate the Chukchi subpopulation.

This new sub-population estimate, boundary analysis, and harvest risk assessment are important in informing the co-management agreement that the newly formed Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council (ANCC) is developing in 2018. The North Slope Borough is a regional advisor to the ANCC. Indigenous Peoples Council for Marine Mammals (IPCoMM) is currently facilitating a Bridge Agreement with USFWS to help establish the new polar bear co-management organization. There will be a U.S.-Russia Bilateral Commission meeting in Egvekinot, Chukotka in July 2018. The DWM is working to inform the new ANCC about polar bear co-management under this Agreement. This Scientific Working Group's new models will inform decision-making of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Commission. We hope to send our experts to help voice the interests of polar bear hunting communities in northern and western Alaska as the ANCC is being established.



For more information about the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Agreement or the Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council, contact Nicole Kanayurak at 907-852-0350 or email [nicole.kanayurak@north-slope.org](mailto:nicole.kanayurak@north-slope.org).