

# Fact Sheet

## Support the Polar Bear Protection Act S. 1406 / H.R. 2327

### Close the Trophy Hunting Loophole for Polar Bears Threatened by Global Warming

Since 1972, the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) has generally prohibited the import of parts from marine mammals (such as whales, dolphins, seals, and polar bears) into the United States. But in 1994, at the request of trophy hunting groups, Congress amended the law to allow American sport hunters to bring home their polar bear trophies from Canada. Since that time, more than 800 heads and hides of polar bears have been imported into the United States. The Polar Bear Protection Act—S. 1406 by Sens. John Kerry (D-MA) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME), and H.R. 2327 by Reps. Jay Inslee (D-WA) and Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ)—would restore the ban on imports of sport-hunted polar bear trophies.

- **Polar bears are in danger.** Scientists estimate there are 21,500-25,000 polar bears in the Arctic—more than half are in Canada and most of these are in the territory of Nunavut. Throughout their range, polar bears currently face unprecedented threats from global climate change, environmental degradation, and hunting. In 2005, the IUCN (World Conservation Union) uplisted the polar bear on its Red List, identifying the species as “vulnerable” for the first time. The IUCN Polar Bear Specialist Group has announced that polar bear populations could drop 30% in the coming 35–50 years and that polar bears may disappear from most of their range within 100 years.
- **The polar bear has become the iconic species for the devastating effects of global warming.** At a time when the polar bear is already in such jeopardy from the effects of global warming, and is being considered for a “threatened” listing under the Endangered Species Act, they should not be subjected to additional human-caused killing from the actions of wealthy American trophy hunters.
- **Trophy hunting of polar bears is inconsistent with American conservation law.** The United States does not allow sport hunting of polar bears in Alaska, and only Alaskan natives are allowed to hunt small numbers of these bears for subsistence. American trophy hunters cannot legally shoot polar bears at home, and should not shoot polar bears in other countries. The MMPA had barred the import of sport-hunted polar bear trophies between 1972 and 1994, and that ban should be restored. The MMPA does not allow trophy imports of walruses, whales, or other marine mammals—why should we allow imports of polar bears?
- **This bill does not affect a single hunting practice or wildlife management practice in any of the 50 states.** There is no sport hunting of polar bears in the U.S., and only a few dozen Americans participate in the trophy hunting of Canadian polar bears. The millions of sportsmen and gun owners in the U.S. are not impacted.
- **Trophy hunting is harmful to the survival of polar bears.** Polar bears rely on high adult survival to maintain populations. Sport hunters target the largest and most fit animals and are not always able to distinguish females from males in the field. These animals may be critical to ensuring the survival of polar bear populations under stress from climate change and habitat degradation. Before the passage of the Marine Mammal Protection Act, sport hunting was identified as the primary or sole cause of polar bear population declines in places such as Alaska. Once sport hunting was prohibited in the United States, some populations began to recover.
- **Commercial hunting is an incentive for higher polar bear mortality.** An American trophy hunter pays about \$35,000 for a polar bear hunting permit in Nunavut. Because the sport hunts are highly lucrative, Canadian wildlife managers may feel pressure to increase quotas beyond sustainable levels. In 2005, Nunavut increased hunting quotas by 29%, despite concerns expressed by polar bear researchers that the increase in take could be harmful to the population.
- **There is no evidence that money charged for polar bear hunting permits is essential to local communities or wildlife conservation.** An August 2005 article in the Nunatsiqaq News, a Nunavut newspaper, concluded that “most of the [financial benefits from sport hunts] never reach Inuit hands, and when they do, those earnings vary substantially from community to community.” Even if a portion of the money went to polar bear conservation, it is still unsustainable for sport hunters to kill a species that is threatened by climate change and vanishing habitat. Saving these bears will not come from money derived from killing them, but from eliminating the financial incentives to increase the quotas and from protecting their habitat.



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