



TALKING POINTS ON THE INSLEE-LOBIONDO AMENDMENT TO PROTECT POLAR BEARS

- The Inslee-LoBiondo amendment to the FY '08 Interior Appropriations bill would bar funding for federal actions that would allow for the import of sport-hunted polar bear trophies from Canada.
- The Humane Society of the United States, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Defenders of Wildlife, American Hunters and Shooters Association, and other humane and conservation groups support the amendment.

THE AMENDMENT IS NEEDED TO CONSERVE THREATENED POLAR BEARS

- Historically, American residents have not been allowed to import polar bear trophies (nor any other marine mammal parts) under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). In the 1994 reauthorization of the MMPA, Congress bowed to trophy hunting interests and created a loophole that allows the importation of trophy heads and hides from Canada. Regulations for imports were finalized in 1997. Since then, more than 800 import permits have been issued.
- The Inslee-LoBiondo amendment seeks to restore a de facto prohibition on importing polar bear trophies by establishing a funding limitation on federal actions to allow for import permits. It would restore a ban on imports for sport-hunted marine mammals that had been in place for 22 years—between 1972 and 1994.
- At a time when polar bears are facing threats from global warming and vanishing habitat, we should minimize human-caused forms of mortality.
- The Arctic sea ice that polar bears need for mating, hunting, and travel is disappearing due to climate change. Scientists report polar bears are having a harder time hunting seals because of melting ice, and they have reported drops in body weights and increased mortality. When polar bears are stressed from the effects of warming, and already struggle for survival at the razor's edge of life in the rapidly changing Arctic environment, it is best to be cautious and act to protect the polar bears from the threat of trophy hunting.

POLAR BEAR POPULATIONS ARE VULNERABLE

- Five nations have polar bears within their borders—the United States, Russia, Norway (Svalbard Islands), Denmark (Greenland), and Canada. Of these five nations, only Canada and (recently) Greenland allow trophy hunting of polar bears.
- Polar bear researchers estimate that there are 20,000-25,000 polar bears throughout the Arctic, distributed in 19 recognized populations. Approximately 15,000 (comprising all or part of 14 populations) live partially or wholly within Canada, with most of these in the territory of Nunavut. The major threats facing these animals include global warming, contaminants (e.g., heavy metals, PCBs, DDT), hunting, oil and gas development (e.g., oil spills, disturbance from development), and tourism disturbance.
- In 2005, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) uplisted the polar bear on its Red List from a species of “least concern” to “vulnerable” for the first time. The IUCN Polar Bear Specialist



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Group (PBSG) 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 if global warming trends continue.

THE U.S. DOES NOT SUPPORT POLAR BEAR HUNTING

- Trophy hunting of polar bears in the U.S. is banned, and only Alaskan natives are allowed to hunt small numbers of bears for subsistence. American trophy hunters cannot legally shoot polar bears at home, and should not be encouraged to shoot polar bears in other countries.
- Since there is no sport hunting of polar bears in the U.S., this amendment does not affect a single hunting practice or wildlife management practice in any of the 50 states. Only a few dozen Americans participate in the trophy hunting of Canadian polar bears, and the millions of sportsmen and gun owners in the U.S. are not impacted.
- Americans do not support shooting polar bears for their heads and hides. The meat from these animals is not consumed by the hunters and they are not shot for population control. Most of these animals are killed simply as a head-heading exercise, in order for trophy hunters to qualify for the Safari Club International's "Bears of the World" hunting achievement award—which calls upon hunters to shoot 4 of the 8 bear species.

TROPHY HUNTING IS HARMING POLAR BEAR POPULATIONS

- Sport hunting of adult polar bears can cause a catastrophic population crash. It did so in the 1950s and 1960s and this hunting-caused collapse was one of the reasons for the original enactment of the MMPA in 1972 and the signing of the International Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears in 1973.
- Before the passage of the MMPA, trophy hunting was identified as the primary or sole cause of polar bear population declines in places such as Alaska. Once trophy hunting was prohibited in the United States, some populations began to recover.
- Trophy hunters target the largest and most fit animals and are not always able to distinguish females from males in the field. The animals that are targeted may be critical to ensuring the survival of polar bear populations under stress from climate change and habitat degradation.

WE NEED TO ACT NOW TO BAR IMPORTS WHILE THE FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE DECIDES WHETHER TO LIST THE POLAR BEAR AS THREATENED

- In late 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed to list the polar bear as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The proposed rule comment period has closed—a final listing decision must be made by January 2008. Dozens of polar bears could be hunted for trophies and imported into the U.S. before the Service makes a final decision.
- Even if the polar bear is listed under the Endangered Species Act, it will not necessarily stop imports of polar bear trophies. According to the agency, "If the species is listed as threatened, the Service would work with the Marine Mammal Commission, Congress, and all interested parties to consider a special rule allowing continued import of trophies from healthy populations." Therefore, a threatened listing would not be a substitute for this amendment.



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- While there is authorizing legislation to permanently close the loophole in the MMPA and restore the prohibition of polar bear trophy imports (S. 1406 and H.R. 2327), this funding restriction is critically needed to stem the tide of polar bear trophy imports for the next fiscal year, at least while the Fish and Wildlife Service is taking the time to review public comment and consider listing the polar bear as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.
- A federal agency action is required to issue the import permits for polar bear trophies to enter the United States, and it is appropriate to defund that activity through the appropriations process if the Congress chooses to do so.

DOESN'T THE MONEY FROM TROPHY HUNTING HELP TO FUND POLAR BEAR CONSERVATION?

- This is high-priced commercial hunting, and the hefty fees may prompt over-exploitation of already vulnerable populations of bears. 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, the Nunavut increased hunting quotas by 29%, despite concerns expressed by polar bear researchers that the increase in take could be harmful to the population.
- We have seen no evidence that money charged for polar bear hunting permits is essential to local communities or wildlife conservation. An August 2005 article in the Nunatsiaq 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.”
- Of the \$30,000 or more paid by an American trophy hunter to shoot a polar bear, only a small percentage of that money—such as a \$750 “trophy fee”—goes to native communities. The bulk of the money is spent on transportation, hunting gear, commercial outfitters, and other incidentals—not for conservation purposes.
- Even if a portion of the money went to polar bear conservation, it is still unsustainable for trophy 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.

IF THERE ARE ONLY A FEW DOZEN IMPORT PERMITS EACH YEAR, IS THIS REALLY A PROBLEM?

- Scientists report polar bears are having a harder time hunting seals because of melting ice, and they have reported drops in body weights and increased mortality. When polar bears are stressed from the effects of warming, and already struggle for survival at the razor’s edge of life in the rapidly changing Arctic environment, it is just reckless and selfish to chase them with packs of dogs and shoot them for trophies.
- The MMPA does not allow trophy imports of walrus, whales, and other marine mammals—even if it were just a few animals. Why should we allow imports of polar bears?



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DON'T POLAR BEAR POPULATIONS HAVE TO BE STABLE AND CAREFULLY MANAGED IN ORDER FOR IMPORT PERMITS TO BE APPROVED?

- Only 7 of 19 populations are believed to be stable or increasing by the IUCN PBSG. Of these, two populations, in M'Clintock Channel and Viscount Melville Sound, have been severely reduced in numbers. Over-hunting caused these two populations to drop, and cessation of hunting or extreme reduction in hunting quotas have allowed recovery to begin. Seven of 19 populations are data deficient—their status and trend are *unknown*. Five populations are believed to be reduced in numbers and/or declining. Therefore, the status of 12 of 19 populations is either unknown or poor.
- Canadian authorities until recently maintained an unsustainable quota to the detriment of the population in M'Clintock Channel. This population was initially approved for U.S. imports by the Fish and Wildlife Service, until the damage had been done—*then* the population was disapproved for imports. Nunavut has just increased its quotas, counter to scientific data and advice, by almost 30%. Canada has yet to decrease the quota for the Western Hudson Bay population, despite its recent decline. Some Canadian populations have poor population estimates, yet are hunted. By the time the U.S. stops allowing trophy imports from specific polar bear populations, it may be too late.