

author of the World Wildlife Fund report on The Asian Trade in Bear Parts, verbally told him "that gall bladders from polar bears were regarded as less desirable than those of terrestrial species, possibly because of the taste associated with their marine diet." Dr. Ed Espinoza, Chief of the Criminalistics Section of the National Fish and Wildlife Forensic Lab related that examination of polar bear gall bladders at the Lab revealed that polar bear gall bladders smell fishy, probably due to the high content of marine fatty acids and oils. He remembered Inuits from Kotzebue, Alaska, telling him that they are not able to get financial compensation for polar bear gall bladders because "they smell bad". He also remembered a Canadian Wildlife Conservation Officer in Whitehorse telling him there were no interested Asian parties for the polar bear gall bladders because of the odor these galls had. On the other hand, in 1992, the first case of illegal sale of polar bear gall bladders was documented by U.S. law enforcement agents in Alaska (Schliebe et al. 1995). To ensure that the gall bladders of polar bears taken by U.S. hunters do not enter into trade, the Service proposes to condition any U.S. import permits for polar bears if this proposed rule is adopted. The condition would require the permittee to certify that the gall bladder, including its contents, from the polar bear proposed for import was destroyed.

3. Trade in Hides

It was reported at the 1993 PBSG meeting that the fur market is currently glutted, resulting in low prices for pelts on the open market. The trade in polar bear hides is fairly flat, and the market in the United States is closed because of the MMPA. According to the Service's Division of Law Enforcement, an undercover operation in Alaska during 1991 and 1992 showed that a black market for polar bear hides existed in Alaska. Greenland assists in marketing polar bear pelts for local communities. In 1992 a total of 60 hides were purchased by the tannery. Thirty of these went to Denmark (PBSG 1995).

4. Canada

There is some illegal trade in bear parts in Canada, but the extent is unknown. There are documented cases in the provinces, especially British Columbia. While trade in bear parts is now prohibited in British Columbia, Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Manitoba, it is still legal to sell bear parts in Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan, and the NWT. There may be some trade in bear parts from a province that does

not allow trade by routing them through the provinces that still allow trade. There have been some questionable kills and some illegal kills of black bear to gain parts in the NWT. However, the trade in polar bear parts is not thought to be involved in any significant degree. GNWT wildlife officials have stated that distance and cost make polar bears inaccessible to southern poachers. Residents of the NWT consider the polar bear of cultural importance and worth more than just the economic value of its parts. Canada does not anticipate an increase in illegal activity or in the number of polar bears illegally killed as a result of allowing the export of sport-hunted trophies by U.S. citizens (GNWT).

5. Alaska

The MMPA prohibits, with limited exceptions, the harvest and trade of polar bears and polar bear parts in the United States. It restricts the take of polar bears to any Indian, Aleut, or Eskimo who resides in Alaska and who dwells on the coast of the North Pacific Ocean or the Arctic Ocean provided such taking is not accomplished in a wasteful manner and is for subsistence purposes or is done for purposes of creating and selling authentic native articles of handicrafts and clothing.

All polar bear hides and skulls taken as part of the Native subsistence harvest must be tagged within 30 days of harvesting the polar bear. These tags are provided by the Service, are numbered for accountability and of such a design, construction, and material so as to maximize their longevity and durability on the specified parts. Polar bear parts may only be tagged by Service personnel or authorized Service representatives (e.g., Native residents of the community). The skin and skull of an animal must accompany each other when presented for tagging. Tags are attached or applied to the skins and skulls in such a manner as to maximize their longevity and minimize adverse effect to the appearance of the specified parts which might result due to hindering the tanning or handicrafting of skins, or the handicrafting of skulls. Tags must remain affixed to the skin through the tanning process and until the skin has been severed into parts for crafting into handicrafts or for as long as practical during the handicrafting process. If the tag does come off of the specified part the person in possession of the part has 30 days to present the part and broken tag to the Service or the Service's local representative for retagging.

6. Proposed Tagging Requirement

As previously described, the NWT tag applied to a polar bear hide is removed either at the time of tanning or upon export. Therefore, once imported, hides (raw and tanned), rugs, and mounts of Canadian sport-hunted polar bears are not distinguishable from untagged Alaskan polar bear hides which may have been illegally acquired or transported. In addition, there may be some polar bear hides and mounts taken in Canada and illegally imported into the United States prior to the Amendments.

To ensure that all polar bears that enter the United States can be identified as legally taken sport-hunted trophies and not contribute to the illegal trade in polar bear parts, the Service proposes that they be marked with a one-time tag that is to remain on the trophy indefinitely. The tag would be similar in design to tags used for Alaskan polar bears taken in the Native subsistence harvest. The Service is currently working with the Canadian Wildlife Service and the Government of the NWT on the feasibility of permanently tagging the hide of all sport-hunted polar bear in Canada at the time of harvest. Developing such a cooperative program might include developing a tag which could withstand the cold climate of the NWT, the tanning process, and the taxidermy process; be unobtrusive on a polar bear mount or rug; and be visible for inspection, if necessary. The Service anticipates that the development and implementation of this program could take from 6 months to 2 years.

Until a procedure for permanently tagging sport-hunted polar bear hides at the time of harvest has been adopted, the Service proposes that a permanent tag be affixed to all sport-hunted polar bear trophies including raw (untanned) hides, tanned hides, and prepared rugs and mounts, upon import into the United States and that the skull of the polar bear, if separate from the remainder of the trophy, be permanently marked with the tag number of the accompanying polar bear hide. To ensure that all polar bear parts are permanently marked or tagged, the Service proposes that all sport-hunted polar bears must be imported through a Fish and Wildlife Service designated port during normal business hours with at least a 72-hour prior notice.

The Service has experience with tagging programs for polar bear, walrus, and sea otter taken in the Native subsistence harvest in Alaska and for CITES regulated fur-bearing species, including brown bear, bobcat, river otter, and lynx. Based on this