

April 6, 2007

Supervisor, USF&WS
Marine Mammals Management Office
1011 East Tudor Road, MS 341
Anchorage, AK 99503
Phone: (907) 786-3800

Dear Sir,

This is a comment in opposition to the proposed listing of polar bear populations as "threatened". My name is Ryan St. John, I am a local resident, outfitter and businessman. I have lived in the Nunavut Territory all my life. I have been hunting and fishing since I was a young boy and have intimate knowledge of the western hudson bay area. Our family has been in business for over 30 years and we ventured into the outfitting business in 2005. One of the main reasons we got into outfitting was that, we could create much needed employment with a business that builds on our strength as Inuit which is our "connection to the land". Hunting and fishing is a way of life for Inuit and is very important to our culture. If creating a few jobs with Polar Bear hunts offers an opportunity for local people to leave the hopelessness and despair in their communities then it is well worth it for me as a businessman.

During our Polar Bear hunts in November of 2006, we had a total of six hunters for a period of three weeks. We had three hunters in the first group and each day we travelled 10 to 15 miles from base camp. We saw anywhere from 8 to 12 bears each day. The bears all looked very healthy and in good shape. Over a 10 day hunt, each hunter saw 70 to 100 bears. I personally saw over 200 bears in 3 weeks of guiding. We did not have any problem bears at our base camp which normally indicates healthy bears.

"We keep hearing that the polar bears are declining due to global warming". Has anyone asked local people for their input on the changing movements of polar bears? We are seeing a lot of polar bears moving north through our area in July and August which is unusual. Is this the reason for the suggested decline in the Churchill area? Wildlife will move if they are continually harrassed and the tourism industry has certainly put a lot of stress on polar bears in the Churchill area. As well, the earlier spring break up may be part of the reason for bears moving further north. These animals are resilient and adaptable.

Will the U.S. listing of Polar Bears as an endangered species help the conservation effort? Absolutely not. Polar bear numbers are not declining and our wildlife management systems are the best in the world. As Inuit, we are in control of our government and we will continue to hunt and kill bears. From a conservation standpoint, it makes a lot more sense to offer sports hunts to Americans or non-Americans as they normally only take a very small number of mature boars each year. Mature boars will kill and eat young cubs. As well, the money that is brought in from sport hunting is important as local people realize that it provides jobs and benefits so the conservation of bears becomes very important to Inuit. If the listing does happen, the permits that are now allocated to sports hunting will be converted back to local hunts and bears will be hunted and killed. The down side of local hunts is that we are only given 48 hours to harvest a bear and we do not look for large mature boars. We shoot the first bear that we see over 5 feet as we do not have anytime to be selective. Also, a bear hide from a local hunt only sells for about \$800 so what value does this place on such an important and beautiful animal?. Sports hunting brings in over \$20,000 for a hunt.

I have always said that Inuit are the best conservationists in the world, period!! We have not caused any arctic species to become endangered or extinct so please leave us to do the job that we do well, which is conservation for our future generations. As the leaders of tomorrow, we will continue to protect our environment and wildlife and I think that the American people have an important role to play in the conservation effort. It has been proven that sports hunting, when managed properly, is extremely important to the conservation of wildlife around the world and the arctic is no different.

Sincerely,
Ryan St. John
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