

## **Polar Bear** **(*Ursus maritimus*)**

Polar bears are distributed throughout the Arctic region within the national boundaries of the United States, Canada, Greenland, Norway, and Russia, as well as in international waters. The species comprises several largely discrete stocks, two of which occur in Alaska—the western Alaska (Chukchi/Bering Seas) stock, shared with Russia, and the northern Alaska (southern Beaufort Sea) stock, shared with Canada. The total number of polar bears in Alaska and adjacent waters has been estimated at 2,000 to 5,000 animals. The worldwide population has been estimated at 21,000 to 28,000 animals.

Accurate estimates of the current and historic sizes of polar bear stocks are difficult to obtain for several reasons—the species' inaccessible habitat, the movement of bears across international boundaries, and the costs of conducting surveys. It is thought, however, that intense sport hunting before enactment of the

Marine Mammal Protection Act may have reduced both the Chukchi/Bering Seas and the Beaufort Sea stocks. In September 1998 the Fish and Wildlife Service published stock assessments for these two stocks, suggesting that both have grown since passage of the Act.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, polar bears in Alaska were taken primarily by Natives for subsistence purposes and for the sale of hides. Late in the 1940s trophy hunters using professional guides, and sometimes aircraft, began taking polar bears. As the size of the sport hunt grew, pressure on polar bear stocks in Alaska and elsewhere increased substantially. Recognizing this, in 1961 the State of Alaska adopted regulations restricting the sport-hunting season and requiring hunters to present all polar bear skins and skulls for tagging and examination. At the same time, preference was provided to subsistence hunters, and a prohibition was placed on shooting cubs and females with cubs. Between 1961 and 1972 an average of 260 polar bears was taken annually in Alaska, 75 percent of which were males. In 1972 the state banned hunting with the use of aircraft.

That same year, enactment of the Marine Mammal Protection Act placed a moratorium on the take of polar bears and other marine mammals, and management responsibility for these species was transferred to the federal government. Under the Act, Alaska Natives are allowed to take polar bears and other marine mammals for purposes of subsistence and creating and selling traditional handicrafts and clothing. The Act does not restrict the number of animals that can be taken or prohibit the take of cubs or females with cubs by Alaska Natives, provided that the take is not wasteful and the population is not depleted. The Act also established a general prohibition on the import of polar bear parts, such as hides, into the United States.

Because the ranges of many polar bear stocks cross national boundaries, efforts to protect and conserve polar bears require cooperation among the various nations. Concern over the dramatic increase in polar bear harvest levels in the 1950s and 1960s led to negotiation of the international Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears. The Agreement was concluded in 1973 by the governments of Canada,

Denmark (for Greenland), Norway, the Soviet Union, and the United States.

In 1994 Congress amended the Marine Mammal Protection Act, adding a number of measures related to polar bears. Among these was a provision allowing the issuance of permits to import sport-hunted polar bear trophies legally taken by U.S. citizens in Canada provided that the Fish and Wildlife Service, in consultation with the Marine Mammal Commission, made certain findings. Efforts by the Fish and Wildlife Service to promulgate regulations allowing imports from certain stocks and further amendments enacted in 1997 have been discussed in previous annual reports. The 1994 amendments also called on the Secretary of the Interior to initiate two reviews relative to the 1973 polar bear agreement. Activities in this regard, along with efforts to develop an agreement between the governments of the United States and Russia, are discussed later in this chapter. Activities related to the take of polar bears and other marine mammals incidental to oil and gas development, exploration, and production in the Arctic are discussed under small-take authorizations in Chapter IX.

### **Polar Bear Stock Assessments**

The 1994 amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act require the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service to prepare and periodically update stock assessment reports for each marine mammal stock in U.S. waters. Initial stock assessments for the two polar bear stocks in Alaska were published by the Fish and Wildlife Service in October 1995 and were updated in September 1998. In its latest assessments, the Service estimates the size of the Beaufort Sea polar bear stock at 1,765 (CV = 0.10). However, no reliable stock estimate could be made for the Chukchi/Bering Seas stock in either 1995 or 1998.

At the Marine Mammal Commission's 1999 annual meeting, representatives of the Fish and Wildlife Service emphasized the pressing need to obtain information about the Chukchi/Bering Seas stock. The Service noted that one method for obtaining needed information was to continue earlier work to survey polar bear dens for use as an index of abundance. The Service advised the Commission that it planned to meet with Russian colleagues early in 2000 to work out a protocol for den surveys. In addition, the Service

expressed optimism that, during 2000, researchers would be able to use a Coast Guard icebreaker or a similar vessel operating in the area as a platform of opportunity to conduct aerial surveys of polar bears in the Chukchi and Bering Seas.

As hoped, Fish and Wildlife Service scientists conducted a pilot study of its aerial survey methodology in August 2000 from aboard the Coast Guard icebreaker *Polar Star*. In all, 71 hours of aerial surveys were flown, covering almost 9,000 km of transect lines. During those surveys 52 polar bear were observed. An additional 12 bears were spotted from the ship during its transit of the survey area. Polar bear density estimates derived from the study ranged from 0.0093 to 0.0164 bears per square kilometer. Contingent upon the availability of ship time and helicopters, the Service plans to conduct additional surveys in 2001.

Also in 2000, the Service convened a workshop of U.S. and Russian scientists to develop a protocol for conducting den surveys on Wrangel Island, north of the Chukotka Peninsula. Although a protocol was agreed to, joint surveys are not likely to be conducted until the new bilateral U.S.–Russian polar bear agreement has been implemented and the parties have agreed on procedures for authorizing, funding, and conducting such projects. As an interim step, the Service has contracted for development of a habitat suitability index of polar bears on Wrangel Island that would be used to focus survey effort on those areas that, because of topography and other factors, are most likely to be used for denning.

New information is also needed to refine and update the Service's estimates for the Beaufort Sea polar bear stock. The data currently being used are about 10 years old, and the Fish and Wildlife Service hopes to work with Canadian scientists to carry out a systematic mark-recapture study to help assess the current status of that stock. At the Commission's 1999 meeting, Service representatives also provided information on work being conducted by the Biological Resources Division of the U.S. Geological Survey to radio-tag female polar bears to test the effectiveness of forward-looking infrared imagery as a means of detecting bears in their dens. A final field study of this technology was conducted during 2000. Preliminary results suggest that about 50 percent of

polar bear dens are detected using this technique. The Service plans to hold a workshop during 2001 to consider whether use of infrared imagery in conducting polar bear surveys is warranted in light of the experimental detection rate.

Section 117 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act specifies that, except for strategic stocks or those stocks for which significant new information is available, stock assessments are to be reviewed and updated at least once every three years. In keeping with this schedule, the Service expects to update the assessments for both the Beaufort Sea stock and the Chukchi/Bering Seas stock of polar bears during 2001.

### **Polar Bear Conservation Plan**

In 1988 Congress amended the Marine Mammal Protection Act to direct the Secretaries of the Interior and Commerce to develop conservation plans for depleted and, when appropriate, nondepleted marine mammal species and populations. In January 1989 the Marine Mammal Commission recommended that the Fish and Wildlife Service prepare conservation plans for polar bears, walruses, and sea otters in Alaska. The Service agreed and, from 1992 through 1994, the Commission worked closely with the Service to ensure that the conservation plans identified research and management actions necessary to maintain populations in Alaska within their optimum sustainable population range, as required by the Act.

The final conservation plan for polar bears in Alaska, as well as the plans for walruses and sea otters in Alaska, was issued by the Service in 1994. At that time, the Service noted that the plans would be reviewed annually with the idea of updating the plans, if necessary, in three to five years. Although it has been more than five years since the polar bear conservation plan was published and the Service still intends to review and, if necessary, update the plan, other responsibilities related to polar bear management have been more pressing and have precluded directing staff time and resources to this task.

### **Co-Management Agreements**

Section 119 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act, enacted in 1994, provides explicit authority for establishing cooperative agreements between the Secretaries of Commerce and the Interior and Alaska

Native organizations to conserve marine mammals and provide for co-management of subsistence uses by Alaska Natives. Under such agreements, the Secretaries may make grants to Native organizations for collecting and analyzing data on marine mammal populations, monitoring the taking of marine mammals for subsistence, participating in marine mammal research, and developing marine mammal co-management programs with federal and state agencies.

On 19 February 1997 the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Alaska Nanuq (Polar Bear) Commission signed a cooperative agreement pursuant to section 119 for the co-management of polar bears. In each of the first three years under that agreement about \$90,000 was provided to the Nanuq Commission, which, among other things, helped to fund its participation in efforts to conclude a bilateral agreement between the United States and Russia on conservation of polar bears in the Bering and Chukchi Seas (see discussion later in this section). Under the cooperative agreement for 2000, \$80,000 was provided by the Service to continue these efforts, to help cover operating expenses, and to enable the Nanuq Commission to engage in other activities. Among other things, the Nanuq Commission, with additional support from the National Park Service, has been working with the Union of Marine Mammal Hunters in Chukotka, Russia, to gather traditional ecological knowledge about polar bear habitat use in Chukotka.

Another co-management project involves the collection of samples from polar bears taken by subsistence hunters to facilitate assessment of contaminant levels. During the 1999–2000 hunting season, four sample sets were collected, bringing the total number collected over the past four years to 24. The Service has obtained preliminary results from the analyses of these samples, which indicate that organochlorine levels do not appear high, when compared with concentrations found in bears from other polar regions. However, some concentrations of hexachlorocyclohexane (HCH) found in samples from polar bears in the Chukchi, Bering, and Beaufort Seas are among the highest reported in the Arctic region. With respect to heavy metal concentrations found in Alaskan polar bears, mercury levels were lower and cadmium and copper levels were somewhat higher than those reported in bears from western Canada.

### Marking, Tagging, and Reporting Program

As noted above, the Marine Mammal Protection Act allows Alaska Natives to take marine mammals for purposes of subsistence and for making and selling traditional handicrafts. Under amendments to the Act adopted in 1981, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service have specific authority to establish marking, tagging, and reporting programs to monitor Native harvests of marine mammals. The Fish and Wildlife Service issued regulations in 1988 establishing such programs for sea otters, walruses, and polar bears. The purposes of those programs are to estimate annual harvest levels, obtain biological data needed to manage the species and stocks, and help control illegal trade in products from those species.

The Service's regulations require that, within 30 days of taking a polar bear, walrus, or sea otter, Native hunters must report the take to an authorized Service agent and present specified parts, including polar bear hides and skulls, to be marked and tagged. Since promulgating its regulations, the Service has worked closely with Native groups to implement the program. Data obtained from the program are maintained by the Service in a computerized database. During the harvest year running from 1 July 1999 to 30 June 2000, 39 polar bears were presented for marking and tagging by Alaska Natives. The numbers of polar bears tagged during each harvest year since inception of the program are shown in Table 7.

### Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears

As noted earlier, polar bears occur throughout the Arctic in relatively discrete stocks that overlap national boundaries. Thus, effective conservation of polar bears requires international cooperation. In 1973 the governments of Canada, Denmark (for Greenland), Norway, the Soviet Union, and the United States concluded the Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears. The Agreement was prompted by growing concern about the possible effects of sport and commercial hunting of polar bears, which had increased in the 1950s and 1960s, and the potential effects of industrial activities.

The Marine Mammal Commission and others have questioned whether the Marine Mammal Protection Act or other domestic statutes provide sufficient legal auth-

**Table 7. Numbers of polar bears tagged during Alaska Native harvests, 1989–2000**

Harvest Year	Number Tagged	Harvest Year	Number Tagged
1989/90	99	1995/96	40
1990/91	76	1996/97	69
1991/92	59	1997/98	49
1992/93	66	1998/99	90
1993/94	121	1999/00	39
1994/95	92	2000/01	–

Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

for the United States to implement fully all provisions of the Agreement, particularly those related to habitat protection. Accordingly, in 1992 the Commission contracted for an examination of the Agreement's provisions, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and other domestic legislation to identify possible inconsistencies and provide suggestions as to how inconsistent provisions of the Agreement and the Act might be reconciled. The report of that study was provided to the Fish and Wildlife Service in January 1994 and was subsequently updated to reflect amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act enacted in 1994 (see Baur 1995, Appendix B).

In response to concerns that the Agreement may not have been implemented fully by the United States and other parties, Congress amended section 113 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act in 1994 to require the Secretary of the Interior to initiate a review of the effectiveness of the Agreement and to work with the contracting parties to establish a process by which future reviews of the Agreement would be conducted. The amendments also required that the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretary of State and the Marine Mammal Commission, review the effectiveness of U.S. implementation of the Agreement, particularly with respect to habitat protection. A report on the results of that review was to be submitted to Congress by 1 April 1995.

In June 1995 the Service convened a meeting of representatives of interested governmental agencies and nongovernmental organizations to review U.S.

implementation of the Agreement. The Service subsequently prepared a draft report assessing U.S. compliance with each of the provisions of the Agreement and with a resolution adopted by the Parties to the Agreement concerning the taking of female bears, cubs, and denning bears. However, as of the end of 2000, the report had yet to be finalized and transmitted to Congress.

Section 113 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act also directs the Secretary of the Interior to consult with contracting parties to review the effectiveness of the Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears. In May 1997 the Fish and Wildlife Service wrote to the other parties seeking their assistance in conducting the review. The Service received final reviews from Canada, Norway, and Greenland, but, as of the end of 2000, was waiting for a final response from the Russian Federation. A preliminary response from Russia suggested that there may be some sentiment to open up the 1973 agreement for modification. Once all final responses are in hand, the Service intends to prepare a report on international compliance with the Agreement and the other parties' views as to what further review is needed.

### **Bilateral Polar Bear Agreements**

As discussed earlier, two discrete polar bear stocks occur in Alaska, and both are shared with other countries. The northern (Beaufort Sea) stock is shared with Canada and the western (Chukchi/Bering Seas) stock is shared with Russia. Efforts to develop and implement cooperative programs with these countries for the management and conservation of polar bears are discussed below.

**North Slope Borough/Inuvialuit Polar Bear Agreement** – Native hunters in both Alaska and northwestern Canada have traditionally hunted polar bears in the Beaufort Sea area. Because both groups were targeting polar bears from the same stock, unregulated hunting, by itself and in combination with other activities, could have caused the stock to decline. Recognizing this possibility, the Fish and Game Management Committee of Alaska's North Slope Borough and the Inuvialuit Game Council of Canada's Northwest Territories entered into an agreement in January 1988 to govern cooperatively the hunting of

polar bears in the area between Icy Cape, Alaska, and the Baillie Islands, Canada.

The agreement is more restrictive than the Marine Mammal Protection Act because it calls for protecting cubs, females with cubs, and all bears inhabiting or constructing dens, and prohibits airborne hunting. Other provisions of the agreement prohibit hunting at certain times of the year and provide that a harvest quota, based on the best available scientific evidence, be established annually. Quotas are allocated equitably between Natives in Alaska and Canada, and data are collected and shared on the number, location, age, and sex of bears killed.

Although the agreement is not legally binding, both Alaska and Canadian Natives have largely complied with the mutually agreed conservation measures. The subsistence harvest of Beaufort Sea polar bears has remained well below the calculated sustainable level, and the take of female bears and cubs has been reduced significantly since establishment of the agreement. After more than 10 years of experience with the agreement, it is considered to be a model for cooperative, voluntary management of a resource by user groups.

The parties to the agreement held a meeting of commissioners and technical advisors on 3–4 March 2000, in Inuvik, Canada. At that meeting, the agreement was modified to clarify that annual sustainable harvest levels are to be determined by the commissioners, in consultation with the technical advisory committee. Another amendment specified that prior notification of and consultation with the commissioners is required before undertaking research projects under the agreement.

**U.S.–Russian Polar Bear Agreement** – The western or Chukchi/Bering Seas polar bear stock, which ranges between Alaska and Russia, has traditionally been used for subsistence by Native people in both the United States and Russia. In 1992 the Fish and Wildlife Service's Alaska Regional Director and a representative of the Russian Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources signed a protocol stating the parties' intentions to conclude a bilateral agreement on the conservation and regulated use of polar bears from the shared stock. The protocol called on both governments to create special working groups

composed of representatives of government agencies and Native communities to prepare proposals for such an agreement and to convene a meeting of the working groups to prepare a draft agreement.

The 1994 amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act added a new provision, section 113(d), which specifically addresses conservation of the shared U.S.–Russian polar bear stock. The provision directed the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Commission and the State of Alaska, to consult with Russian officials on the development and implementation of enhanced cooperative research and management programs for the shared polar bear stock. In 1994 representatives of Native organizations and government agencies from the United States and Russia held technical discussions concerning joint conservation of the shared stock of polar bears occupying the Chukchi, Bering, and eastern Siberian Seas. As a result of those discussions, the parties signed the Protocol on U.S./Russia Technical Consultation for the Conservation of Polar Bears of the Chukchi/Bering Sea Regions on 9 September 1994. Further scientific and technical discussions concerning the proposed government-to-government agreement were held with Russian officials during 1995 and 1998, culminating in the adoption, on 12 February 1998, of an ad referendum text of a bilateral agreement for submission to the two national governments for approval. Participants in those negotiating sessions included both government officials and representatives of the affected Native communities. The U.S. delegations included a representative of the Marine Mammal Commission.

After reviewing that text, the U.S. Department of State suggested minor revisions, which were forwarded to the Russian Federation for consideration in 1998. In July 1999 the Russian Federation forwarded its suggestions for additional changes to the U.S. Department of State and the Department of the Interior. Following review of the revisions suggested by Russia, the two agencies wrote jointly to the head of the Russian State Committee for Environmental Protection on 8 December 1999 indicating that some of the proposed modifications reflected a significant departure from the principles worked out at the February 1998 meeting. The letter stated that, although some of the technical revisions proposed by the Russians were agreeable, others were not acceptable to the United

States. Subsequently, it was agreed that a further negotiating session was needed to work out these differences.

A final round of face-to-face negotiations was held in Anchorage, Alaska, on 7–9 March 2000. The U.S. delegation, headed jointly by the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of State, included a representative of the Commission, Alaska Natives, and a representative of an Alaska-based conservation organization. These negotiations resulted in a new text that was circulated for approval within the respective governments and provided to the other three parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears for their review. After incorporating technical changes to reconcile the English and Russian texts, the “Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Conservation and Management of the Alaska-Chukotka Polar Bear Population” was signed by the parties in Washington, D.C., on 16 October 2000. The text of the agreement and related information can be found at the web site maintained by the Fish and Wildlife Service’s Alaska Region (<http://www.r7.fws.gov/ea/pbsigning/>). Before the Agreement enters into effect, the advice and consent of the Senate is needed. It is expected that the Agreement, along with proposed implementing legislation, will be transmitted to the Senate for its consideration early in 2001.

The Agreement specifies that subsistence taking by Native residents of Alaska and Chukotka are to be the only allowable consumptive uses of the affected stock of polar bears. Under the Agreement, a joint commission composed of four members—a governmental official and a Native representative from each jurisdiction—is to establish annual taking limits that may not exceed the sustainable harvest level determined for the stock. The allowable taking limit will be divided equally between the two parties, but, subject to approval by the joint commission, one party may transfer a portion of its allowable take to the other party. It is expected that the joint commission will establish a scientific working group to assist in setting annual sustainable harvest levels and identifying scientific research to be carried out by the parties. Other provisions of the Agreement prohibit the taking of denning bears, females with cubs, or cubs less than

one year old, and the use of aircraft and large motorized vessels for hunting polar bears. Also the agreement directs the parties to undertake all efforts necessary to conserve polar bear habitats, particularly denning areas and those areas where polar bears concentrate to feed or migrate. Implementation of these provisions is expected to help ensure that the United States is in full compliance with the provisions of the multilateral 1973 polar bear treaty.

### **Polar Bear Trophy Imports**

In 1994 the Marine Mammal Protection Act was amended to allow the Secretary of the Interior to issue permits to import sport-hunted polar bear trophies from Canada, provided that certain findings are made. Among other things, it must be found that Canada has an enforced sport-hunting program consistent with the purposes of the Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears and based on scientifically sound quotas that will ensure the maintenance of the affected population stock at a sustainable level. The amend-ments also direct the Secretary to charge a reasonable fee for permits and to use the receipts to develop cooperative research and management programs for the conservation of polar bears in Alaska and Russia.

Regulations to implement the polar bear import provision were published by the Fish and Wildlife Service on 18 February 1997. The Service determined that 5 of the 12 Canadian polar bear management units met the Marine Mammal Protection Act's criteria and that parts from those subpopulations could be imported. The management units from which imports were originally authorized included the southern Beaufort Sea, the northern Beaufort Sea, Viscount Melville Sound, western Hudson Bay, and M'Clintock Channel. A key feature of the final rule was establishment of a \$1,000 permit issuance fee, in addition to a \$25 processing fee, to be used for polar bear conservation activities.

As discussed in previous annual reports, the regulations were not well received by hunters, who expected findings also to be made for other management units, or by animal welfare groups, who believed the Service had erred by making any affirmative findings. This prompted the House Resources Committee to convene a hearing early in 1997 to review the Service's implementation of the polar bear import

provisions. That hearing led to an amendment to the Marine Mammal Protection Act to allow imports of all polar bear trophies legally taken in Canada before 30 April 1994, regardless of where the hunt occurred.

Shortly after publication of the final regulations in February 1997, the Commission requested and received from the Service additional information on Canada's polar bear program. Among other things, Canada had revised the boundaries of some polar bear management units. What previously had comprised three management units (Queen Elizabeth Islands, Parry Channel, and Baffin Bay) had been realigned into smaller Baffin Bay and Queen Elizabeth Islands units and three new management units (Kane Basin, Lancaster Sound, and Norwegian Bay). In light of the new information, the Commission contracted for a review of Canada's polar bear management program, particularly as it relates to the current status and sustainability of those populations for which the Fish and Wildlife Service deferred making findings under the 1997 final rule (see Testa 1997, Appendix B).

The Commission transmitted a copy of the contract report to the Service in late April 1997 and, based on the information in the report and its independent review of the available data, recommended that the Service initiate a rulemaking to make affirmative findings for the Lancaster Sound and Norwegian Bay management units. The Service considered this recommendation and, on 2 February 1998, published a proposed rule to make affirmative findings for these two management units. A final rule allowing the import of polar bear trophies from the Lancaster Sound and Norwegian Bay management units was published by the Service on 11 January 1999. Approval of the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin populations was deferred pending the establishment of cooperative management arrangements between Canada and Greenland. The Service also deferred making a finding on the revised Queen Elizabeth Islands population that now contains land only in the far northern part of the Canadian Arctic archipelago.

In October 2000 the Fish and Wildlife Service received a report from the Canadian Wildlife Service concerning the status of the M'Clintock Channel polar bear population. That report indicated that a new survey of this population had begun in 1998 to update the population estimate from 1978, which was being

used in setting harvest limits. Based upon a preliminary analysis of three years of data from the survey, it appeared that the population size was lower than originally believed (the best estimate was 288 bears) and that the sex ratio of the adult population was heavily skewed toward female bears (65 percent females). The analysis in the report explained that these data suggest that the adult male population had been reduced by hunting and that any continuing harvest would be increasingly composed of adult females. The report projected that, at the current rate of exploitation, the population would be extirpated within 10 years. The report concluded that the M'Clintock Channel polar bear population should be considered depleted and recommended that the maximum sustainable harvest level be reduced from 32 to 8 bears per year. However, even at that reduced level, the removal of bears would not allow the population to recover. Therefore, the territorial government of Nunavut initiated discussions with local communities to establish new harvest limits before the onset of the hunting season in February 2001.

In response to the information it had received from the Canadian authorities, the Fish and Wildlife Service began an expedited review of its finding under which imports of polar bear trophies taken from the M'Clintock Channel management unit were authorized. The Service wrote to the Commission on 13 December 2000, indicating its intent to amend its regulations to rescind the approval of imports from this population. Under the anticipated amendment, imports of polar bears taken by U.S. hunters from M'Clintock Channel after the 1999–2000 hunting season would no longer be permitted. The Service indicated its intent to publish an emergency interim rule early in 2001 to implement the change before the next hunting season.

Under the 1994 amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Fish and Wildlife Service was directed to undertake a scientific review of the impact of issuing import permits on the polar bear populations in Canada. The review was to be completed by 30 April 1996. No permits could be issued after 30 September 1996 if the review indicated that issuing such permits would have a significant adverse effect on Canadian polar bear stocks. Because the regulations authorizing imports had not been issued by the time the review was to be completed, no review was undertaken. Instead, the regulations published by the

Service on 18 February 1997 specified that the review would be undertaken within two years of 20 March 1997. During 2000 the Fish and Wildlife Service updated the draft status review with recent data obtained from Canada, including new information on the M'Clintock Channel population. As of the end of 2000, however, the review had yet to be completed. The Fish and Wildlife Service expects to finalize the status review in 2001.

Since regulations authorizing the import of polar bear trophies went into effect in 1997, 411 import permits have been issued. Of these, 132 were issued in 1997, 60 in 1998, 143 in 1999, and 76 in 2000.