



# THE POLAR BEAR PATROL NEWS, # 4

September, 2007

## Time to substitute photcamera for a rifle



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 came into force on September 23, 2007. WWF is anxious about the fact that after 50-year long break polar bear hunt can be legalized in Chukotka (Russia).

The Agreement was signed 7 years ago (October 16, 2000). It confirms that Russia and the United States have mutual responsibility for preserving the alaska-chukotka polar bear population. The Parties of the Agreement also acknowledge that sound scientific data and traditional knowledge of aboriginal peoples are the basis for working out an effective strategy for managing the population.

However Arctic environment has experienced dramatic changes since the time when the Agreement was signed: climate change and rapid reduction of sea ice cover affect the bears' ability to hunt seals, rest and attend proper denning sites. IUCN/SSC polar bear specialist group experts believe that during next 50 years the world population of this species may decrease by 30% under current environmental changes trend.



It is necessary to underline that the Agreement does not automatically means the beginning of the polar bear hunt in Chukotka. Russian-American polar bear Commission shall consider a program for preserving the population and decide is it right time for setting quota. Theoretically it is also possible that a moratorium for any take of chukotka-alaska polar bears can be declared, both on Russian and American sides.

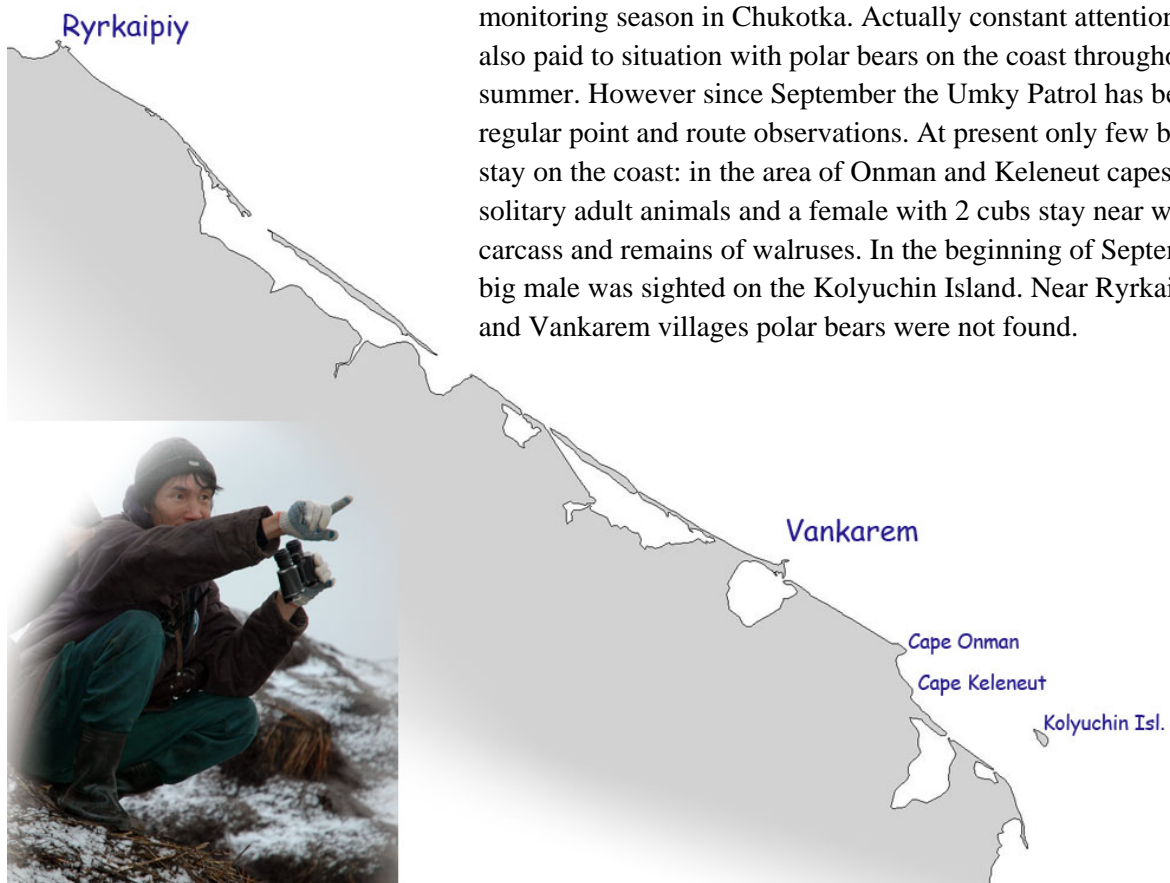
Current knowledge about this population is not enough even for speculating about quota size. The best recent expert guess is that the population numbers about 2,000 bears, while 10 years ago the estimate was

2,000-5,000 bears. Only large-scale survey and intensive study of population basic parameters (distribution, recruitment rate, etc.) may provide information essential for setting quota.

At present the polar bear hunt is totally prohibited only in Norway and Russia. Aboriginal people in Greenland, Canada and USA (Alaska) have exclusive right for subsistence hunt of polar bears. Taking into account number of polar bears illegally hunted in Russia total annual take of polar bears in the world may exceed 1000! This take level (roughly 4-5% of total polar bear population) seems too high considering present dramatic environmental changes and their negative influence to polar bears. It is of urgent importance to work out global program for preserving the species. It is time to substitute photo camera for a rifle.

## Polar Bear Patrol starts new season in Chukotka

In September 2007 the Polar Bear Patrol team started the second monitoring season in Chukotka. Actually constant attention was also paid to situation with polar bears on the coast throughout summer. However since September the Umky Patrol has begun regular point and route observations. At present only few bears stay on the coast: in the area of Onman and Keleneut capes 4-5 solitary adult animals and a female with 2 cubs stay near whale carcass and remains of walruses. In the beginning of September a big male was sighted on the Kolyuchin Island. Near Ryrkaipiy and Vankarem villages polar bears were not found.



## Polar Bear Patrol in Nentskiy Autonomous Okrug

Environmental changes in the Arctic caused by global warming make coast of the Nentskiy Autonomous Okrug of Russia (NAO) important habitat for polar bears. Reduction of sea ice forces polar bears to spend more and more time on land. In June 2007 Authorities of the NAO with support of WWF decided to establish big nature reserve on the Vaigach Island. New protected area covers the most part of the

Island (242,778 ha). The map shows southern and northern borders of the reserve. The only settlement on the island is small nenets village Varnek (64 people) which can be reached by helicopter only. WWF has information about 5-10 polar bears killed on the island every year.

Another important site for polar bear monitoring and protection is area of Amdyrma settlement. In early September about 10 polar bears occurred in the area.

On September 5 and 6, 2007 in Narian-Mar WWF representatives had a meeting with Authority of the NAO. The authority expressed great interest to development of the "Polar Bear Patrol" project in the Nentskiy okrug. It was also decided to establish observation point on the Vaigach Island for monitoring polar bears. Launching this project will allow not only polar bear monitoring and protection but also reducing conflicts between people and polar bears.



This is especially important due to increase of economical activity in the region (oil and gas extraction). Many people come from other regions of Russia and they are not ready to meet polar bears. As a beginning of cooperation WWF provided the Nenets Okrug with special presentation about safety rules in a "polar bear land". This presentation was prepared by Craig Perham basing on experience of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



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