

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1054

A Bill to Amend the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 to Allow Importation of Polar Bear Trophies Taken in Sport Hunts in Canada before the Date the Polar Bear was Determined to be a Threatened Species Under the Endangered Species Act of 1973

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House Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
House Committee on Natural Resources

Written Testimony Submitted by

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Good morning. My name is Dr. William Moritz, Director of Conservation for Safari Club International Foundation (SCIF) and acting Director of Governmental Affairs for Safari Club International (SCI). I have a Bachelors' degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Biology, a Masters degree in Fish and Wildlife Management, and a Doctorate in Zoology. I worked in the field of wildlife research and management for over 20 years. SCI protects the freedom to hunt and promotes wildlife conservation worldwide. SCIF funds and manages worldwide programs dedicated to wildlife conservation, outdoor education and humanitarian services. Thank you, Chairwoman Bordallo, for allowing me to testify today on their behalf.

Madam Chair, the most important point that we would like to make to the Committee is that the question before the subcommittee is not the future of polar bears, it is only about whether approximately 42 polar bears that were legally harvested by U.S. citizens under the legal framework established by local communities, the government of Canada, and the polar bear range states in the 1973 international agreement on conservation of polar bears, should be allowed into the United States and thereby provide over \$40,000 for polar bear research. Canada, the United States, and other range state governments will continue extensive efforts to conserve and manage the polar bear, including but not limited to the development of and compliance with international agreements and domestic laws. Multinational agencies and

committed governments are already dedicating significant resources to manage the polar bear and to ensure its long-term sustainability. These efforts have resulted in positive impacts to the polar bear, including rebounding from possible population numbers as low as 5,000 bears 30-40 years ago to today's population of 20,000-25,000. Freeman, *et al.* 2006, at page 21.

The issue today is only whether a small number of harvested bears hunted legally before the polar bear was listed as threatened should be allowed to be imported. The obvious fact underlying the bill to allow the import of already harvested polar bears is that the bears are dead, no legislation will make them live again. The harvest of these animals provided important income to local native communities, which encouraged the communities to value the polar bear even more and to better accept science-based quotas on the appropriate levels of sustainable take. In addition to much needed income, the animals provided meat and employment to local communities to ensure native people will be able to continue their way of life. Under U.S. law, allowing the importation through permits will generate over \$40,000 in fees for much needed research on polar bears. This money will be in addition to the more than \$900,000 in import fees generated since 1997.

This bill is not about climate change even though some may try to tell you that it is only about climate change. This bill is not about future hunting of polar bears, that question will be left for another day. This bill will not affect the population of polar bears at all. This amendment is simple, straightforward and totally unrelated to climate change and future of the polar bear.

It will allow approximately 42 citizens to bring their legally harvested polar bears into the United States and to contribute much needed revenue to polar bear conservation. These citizens lost the ability to import their personal property due the arbitrary decision of the federal government, and this bill will do one thing and one thing only – it will provide relief from this taking. We strongly urge the Subcommittee to support HR 1054.

Key points:

- 1) Polar bears harvested in Canada are taken under a legal framework established by the government of Canada and approved under an international agreement governing polar bear conservation

worldwide. Based on scientific knowledge, including local ecological knowledge, Canada routinely sets quotas for polar bear harvests to be sustainable.

- 2) Prior to May 15, 2008, the date the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the polar bear as threatened worldwide and imposed an import ban, US hunters could import polar bear trophies from six populations in Canada approved by the FWS as having a sustainable and well-managed conservation and hunting program.
- 3) Foreign sport hunters, including U.S. hunters, do not increase polar bear mortality from hunting. These hunters use “tags” assigned to local native communities based on these scientifically-determined quotas. If the tags were not used for sport hunting, they would be used for subsistence.
- 4) By bringing much needed cash to these remote native communities (U.S. hunters generally spent between \$30,000-50,000 per hunt), U.S. hunters in particular helped encourage the local communities to support science-based polar bear management efforts in Canada.
- 5) Under U.S. law, import permits provide important conservation program funding of \$1000 per permit. In the last 13 years, almost \$1 million dollars has been contributed to research. The permits sought for bears taken before the import ban went in effect would add over \$40,000 to current efforts in polar bear research.