



MEETING Record

WMAC (NS) Teleconference

June 13, 2011

Lindsay Staples (Chair) · **Rob Florkiewicz** Yukon Government (Member) · **Danny C. Gordon** Inuvialuit Game Council · **Ernest Pokiak** Inuvik Game Council · **Jennifer Smith** (Secretariat) · **Christine Cleghorn** (Secretariat)

A. Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:08am and reviewed the agenda. The Chair noted that another teleconference would be required in the coming weeks to pass the financials for the year ending March 31.

Motion 06-11-01

To approve the agenda as presented for the June 13th teleconference

Moved: Rob Florkiewicz

Seconded: Danny C Gordon.

Motion carried.

B. Review and Approval of Minutes

The Council reviewed the minutes from the April teleconference. Rob suggested additional wording to action item 04-11-01, "...mid-March with an effective date of April 1- March 31."

Rob suggested that administratively it would be easier to have grizzly bear tags be in Aklavik by mid-March at the latest. Danny said that this would suffice in terms of ensuring that the tags are there in a timely manner.

Motion 06-11-02

To approve the minutes as revised for April 20,2011 teleconference.

Moved: Danny C Gordon.

Seconded: Rob Florkiewicz

Motion carried.

C. Southern Beaufort Sea Polar bear harvest quota

The Chair reviewed the Inuvialuit Game Council letter of September 1,2010 requesting a reduction in the harvest quota for the Southern Beaufort (SB) Sea polar bear subpopulation. He explained that the Inupiat and Inuvialuit Commissioners, when they met last year, were presented with a lower population estimate for the SB by researchers. The old estimate was 1800 bears, the new one is 1526 +/- 315 bears. The new population estimate is based on research (traditional mark and recapture study) done by the Alaskans. The new estimate shows a decline in the population, though not statistically significant. The new estimate along with empirical evidence (observations of skinny bears and cannibalism) suggest a declining population even without a harvest. The commissioners considered the new population estimate, past harvest, and other factors like traditional knowledge to come up with a recommended reduction in harvest by ten bears (five in Canada and five in the USA). The same harvest rate of 4.5% was used to consider the quota. Researchers who were looking for a more conservative harvest rate were reminded by the Commissioners that the harvest has been, especially on the Canadian side, substantially lower than what the quota allows for. They further made the argument that the population estimate didn't include bears in the far offshore. The Chair noted that it is generally accepted that there are more bears out in the offshore, but it is difficult to include them in a population estimate. Ernest agreed that there are more bears out there. Jennifer noted that the researchers were clear that the population is likely declining and were pushing for a more conservative estimate, and that the Alaskans were clear that the state of their knowledge about this population is as good as it likely will ever be. Overall the Commissioners recommended ten bears less for the SB, with a harvest rate of 4.5%, reviewable annually.

The Chair explained that a community consultation tour was conducted to discuss the harvest quota as well as the proposed population boundary. All six communities in the ISR were visited and asked for comments on the two matters. Views from the community meetings were insightful.

Ernest noted that the Tuktoyaktuk HTC seemed amenable to the reduction of the quota for the SB, recognizing that it may mean a quota reduction for the community. Based on the meetings, there was an acceptance of a reduction that would have the effect of reducing the quota on the Canadian side by five bears. The Chair noted that the Alaskans are monitoring this population and the importance of maintaining ongoing clear communications with them.

Danny spoke about the Aklavik and Inuvik HTC meetings, noting that Inuvik has three bears tags and Aklavik has five. He mentioned that Aklavik gave Inuvik one bear tag 20 years ago. The meeting with the two HTCs together was very positive.

The Chair noted that we are ultimately trying to come up with a shared set of recommendations with WMAC(NWT).

The Chair outlined an option for a TAH for the overall population of 70 bears, with a harvest quota on the Canadian side of 35 bears, and a harvest rate of 4.5%. This would be adjusted as required pending the discussion on the proposed boundary change.

Rob said this would be satisfactory for Yukon.

Danny agreed with the 4.5% and the proposed quota.

C. Proposed Boundary Change for Southern Beaufort and Northern Beaufort Sea Polar Bear Subpopulations

The Chair reviewed the proposed boundary change for the South and North Beaufort Sea Polar bear subpopulations. The proposal involves moving the current eastern boundary of the SB to 133 degrees west. The concept is to bring the boundary westward from near Paulatuk to Tuktoyaktuk. The shift moves a large area from the SB population to the NB population. Considerable materials and a boundary analysis have been generated to support this. According to the analysis, approximately 311 bear would be moved from the SB subpopulation to the NB.

Ian Stirling's work shows that with respect to the movement of bears offshore, there is a real delineation east of Tuk vs. west of Tuk. For Aklavik and Inuvik, historical harvesting has occurred within the current and proposed management area of South Beaufort bears. Based on the community tour, four communities supported the boundary change, with Inuvik and Aklavik not in support. The Chair asked Danny to clarify why Aklavik is opposed to the boundary change. It was evident at the Aklavik HTC consultation that some people were concerned about losing hunting areas if the boundary changed. A SB tag allows Inuvik, Tuk and Aklavik to hunt basically anywhere within the management area of the SB. Rob noted that most of the hunting activity is from the Tuk boundary westward (in reference to the maps). Ernest commented that the quota in Tuk will likely be filled this year because of the demand for hides is so high and prices so good. He understands Sachs to be in the same position.

The Chair summarized by saying that the mapped information on polar bear movements indicates that Tuk represents an area where bears to the east tend to stay to the east, and those on the west tend to stay to the west. This is one of the reasons for wanting to redefine the boundary for management purposes. Another is to better define the subpopulations for harvest purposes. There is an obvious alignment between where the bears are and where people are harvesting. There appears to be strong evidence for shifting the SB/NB subpopulation boundary for management purposes based on biological and harvest considerations. In light of the environmental changes resulting from climate change that are occurring, more active management including defining subpopulations and boundaries may become an ongoing discussion.

The Chair proposed the following motions:

Motion 06-11-03

The Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope) recommends for management purposes a shift of the current boundary delineating the Southern Beaufort and Northern Beaufort sub-populations west to 133 degrees west longitude.

Moved: Rob Florkiewicz

Seconded: Ernest Pokiak

Motion carried.

Motion 06-11-04

The Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope) recommends for management purposes a new population estimate of 1,215 bears for the SB subpopulation (defined with an eastern boundary of 133 degrees west longitude) and a continuation of the harvest rate of 4.5% based on a targeted sex ratio of 1/3 females and 2/3 males resulting in a Total Allowable Harvest of 56 bears for the SB subpopulation, with an annual quota of 35 for the Inupiat and 21 bears for Inuvialuit (or 37% of the TAH).

Moved: Ernest Pokiak

Second: Rob Florkiewicz

Motion carried.

The Chair will present these motions to the WMAC(NWT) meeting on Thursday morning.

D. Inuvialuit -Inupiat Agreement Review

The Chair noted that the boundary change has implications for this agreement. Currently the agreement indicates a 50:50 split of SB polar bear tags between Canada and USA. The change in the boundary, movement of bears to the NB population will make the split 63% Alaska and 37% Canada . There needs to be an adjustment to the agreement to reflect this administrative change. The principles of sharing the harvest don't change.

He also raised the paper by Nigel Bankes regarding the merits of the two jurisdictions continuing to share information and have discussions on boundary adjustments. This could be an area where Commissioners make some changes. He also raised the issue of "critical habitat" and the I&I Agreement's reference to "important habitat". Rob commented on the issue of defining critical habitat and how difficulties have arisen about this in the implementation of the federal SARA. Canada has made very slow progress on this. Whether this is a problem of definition or related to something else is not clear at this time. The US has defined critical habitat areas for Polar bear.

Danny raised the issue of bowhead whaling and its relationship to the critical habitat designation in Alaska. The Inupiat have in general resisted offshore oil and gas development because of their relationship to the bowhead whale. There may be various reasons for why there is a shift in the response

to development, but this could be driven by a number of factors. Under the US Species at Risk Act, there is a concern that development could be restricted because of the critical habitat designation.

Rob also commented that in Article 5 Section C of the I-I agreement there is direction about where management changes are directed. In Canada, it notes an office in Yellowknife (GNWT). He suggested that affected jurisdictions, Yukon and Canada, should also be notified.

The Chair will bring the following suggestions forward to the IGC at their June meeting.

1. A boundary adjustment will mean revisions to the II agreement
2. There may be legal implications in applying the term critical habitat as it affects the I&I Agreement's use of the term "important habitat. "
3. Consider adding Yukon and Canada to the management agencies list in Article 5, Section C.

E. Additional comments

Rob noted the change in Dolly Varden harvest limits in Herschel Territorial Park and committed to circulating correspondence on this.

Motion 06-11-05

To adjourn the June 13th teleconference

Moved: Rob Florkiewicz

Seconded: Danny C. Gordon

Motion carried.