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NEWS

14-12

June 3, 2014

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Diverse Team Convened to Develop United States' Plan for Polar Bear Conservation

ANCHORAGE— A plan to conserve the polar bear in the United States over the next century is being crafted by a diverse group of stakeholders, led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The required plan, when finalized, will guide activities for polar bear conservation in response to the 2008 determination that the polar bear is a threatened species due to the ongoing loss of sea ice habitat from global climate change.

“We are working with our partners here in Alaska, throughout the U.S., and internationally to address all threats to polar bears,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Director Geoffrey Haskett. “The team we have convened to develop the United States’ conservation management plan includes a diverse array of perspectives about polar bears, but the one thing everyone can agree on is that polar bears should be conserved, the question is *‘how?’*”

The plan will meet legal obligations under the Endangered Species and Marine Mammal Protection acts, and will contribute to a global plan being drafted by the parties to the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bear -- United States, Canada, Russia, Norway, and Greenland/Denmark—the five polar bear “Range States.”

The Polar Bear Recovery Team—as the group is known—includes 35 representatives from Federal Agencies, the State of Alaska, the North Slope Borough, Alaska Native organizations, industry, non-profit organizations, and the Canadian Wildlife Service, with expertise in polar bear biology, climate science, policy, communications, and traditional and contemporary indigenous ecological knowledge. The team’s goal is to have the draft plan available for a 60-day public comment period in late fall 2014 and a final plan for presentation to the international partners at their 2015 meeting.

“The Service received over 700 thousand public comments during the listing process, so we know the public has a great interest in the fate of polar bears,” Haskett said. “The public will have a similar opportunity to weigh in on how we continue to conserve and manage polar bears into the future as outlined in the plan.”

A public announcement will be issued when the comment period opens on the draft polar bear conservation management plan. Learn more about the Polar Bear Recovery Team and progress on the draft plan at www.fws.gov/alaska/pbrt and follow the team’s progress on Facebook.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information, visit <http://www.fws.gov/alaska/>, or connect with us through any of these social media at <http://www.fws.gov/home/socialmedia/alaska.html>.