

Subsistence Harvest Guidelines: Alaska-Chukotka Polar Bear Population

Fall 2023

These guidelines are based on the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Agreement.

What is the U.S. management area for the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population? The U.S. management area is the waters and adjacent coastal areas from the southern extent of sea ice in Western Alaska (subject to annual variation in southern sea ice extent) to Point Barrow. Polar bears harvested within this area are considered to be from the Alaska-Chukotka population. Efforts are underway to change the eastern boundary from Point Barrow to Icy Cape, but this change is not yet final. Communities within this management area include but are not limited to Savoonga, Gambell, Nome, Brevig Mission, Wales, Little Diomedea, Shishmaref, Kotzebue, Kivalina, Point Hope, Point Lay, Wainwright, and Utqiagvik.

Who can harvest Alaska-Chukotka polar bears for subsistence? Coastal dwelling Alaskan Natives who reside in Alaska can harvest polar bears for subsistence purposes or for purposes of creating and selling authentic Native articles of handicrafts or clothing, **so long as such harvest is not conducted in a wasteful manner.**

What does it mean to harvest in a wasteful manner? Harvesting in a wasteful manner means taking a polar bear or using a method of taking which is likely to result in the killing or injuring of polar bears beyond those needed for subsistence purposes **OR** to make authentic native articles of handicrafts and clothing, **OR** which results in the waste of a substantial portion of the polar bear. It also means using a method of taking which is not likely to assure the capture or killing of a polar bear, or harvesting a polar bear and then not immediately making a reasonable effort to retrieve the polar bear.

Do Alaska Natives need a permit or license to harvest Alaska-Chukotka polar bears? No.

Is there an open or closed season for Alaska Natives to harvest Alaska-Chukotka polar bears? No. Polar bears may be harvested at any time of year.

Are Alaska Natives required to report subsistence harvests of Alaska-Chukotka polar bears? Yes. Federal regulations require hunters to have the hide and skull of their bear tagged within 30 days of harvest. Taggers will record the date and location of the harvest, as well as the sex, age, and body conditions of the polar bear. Tagging is done through the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) Marking, Tagging, and Reporting Program (MTRP). Hunters can find contact information for local taggers by calling 1-800-362-5148 or visiting the USFWS website at <https://www.fws.gov/alaska-MTRP>.

How many Alaska-Chukotka polar bears can be harvested per year? The U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission establishes an annual quota for the harvest of polar bears from the Alaska-Chukotka population. No more than one-third of the bears harvested from the annual quota can be female or of unknown sex. The current annual quota is 42.5 bears for the U.S., 14 of which can be female. All harvests from Point Barrow to the west and south are counted against this annual quota. Non-subsistence human-caused removals of polar bears, such as defense of life or industry takes, are also counted against this quota. A 5-year multi-year quota system is used to manage harvest, so that if the full annual quota of polar bears is exceeded or not harvested in one year, the number of excess or unharvested bears are subtracted from or added to the next year's annual quota, including the male-female ratio. This process starts over after 5 years. We are currently in year 4 of a 5-year cycle. The USFWS uses a biological year, starting on July 1 and ending on June 30, to count harvests and determine whether harvests are within the annual quota. **As a result of using the 5-year multi-year quota system, this year, between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023, a total of 87 bears may be harvested. No more than 40 of those bears can be female/unknown sex.** USFWS uses its enforcement discretion to address any harvest that exceeds the annual quota. For assistance getting updated information on current harvest levels and quota availability, call the USFWS at 1-800-362-5148, or the Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council at (907) 855-1392.

What is NOT allowed for harvest of Alaska-Chukotka polar bears? The following are NOT allowed:

- Harvest of female polar bears with cubs
- Harvest of polar bear cubs less than one year of age
- Harvest of polar bears in dens, preparing to enter dens, or who have just left dens
- Use of aircraft, large motorized vessels (larger than 50 ft.), and large motorized vehicles (designed to carry more than 9 passengers) for harvesting polar bears
- Use of poisons, traps, or snares to harvest polar bears

What happens if an Alaskan Native hunter violates these guidelines? These guidelines summarize existing federal regulations implementing the Marine Mammal Protection Act and rules adopted under the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Agreement. These regulations and rules are enforced by USFWS. Violations could result in a hunter facing federal civil or criminal penalties, including fines and jail time.

What is allowed for defense of life and property takes of polar bears? Any person may take a polar bear if it is imminently necessary to do so in self-defense or to save the life of a person in immediate danger. Even if the annual quota has been exceeded, defense of human life takes are allowed. However, because polar bears are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, polar bear takes in defense of property (including pets) are not allowed. Defense of life takes must be reported to the USFWS within 48 hours. To report a defense of life take, call the USFWS at 1-800-362-4546; 1-800-362-5148; or (907)-883-9409.

Produced by the Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council



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