

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 13, 2012

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

We urge you to ensure that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service submits a proposal to transfer polar bears from Appendix II to Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species for consideration at its Sixteenth Conference of the Parties, and that FWS works to build a winning coalition for the proposal's acceptance by the Parties.

CITES was formed to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. The polar bear was given a modest level of protection on July 7, 1975, when it was listed in Appendix II of CITES. Species listed in Appendix II may still be commercially traded on the global market and face only minimal restrictions on trophy hunting.

Today, polar bear populations are more threatened than ever before. As the polar bear's habitat – the annual sea ice over the continental shelf and inter-island archipelagoes of the Arctic basin – melts away due to temperature increases, the best scientific estimates show polar bear populations plummeting by two-thirds within the next 40 years. Adding to this decrease is the fact that many polar bear populations are overharvested. For example, in October 2011, the government of the Canadian Territory of Nunavut tripled its hunting quota for the Western Hudson Bay population, despite opposition from the federal government and from the International Union for Conservation of Nature Polar Bear Specialist Group. This type of unsustainable harvest is occurring against a backdrop of soaring demand for polar bear hides.

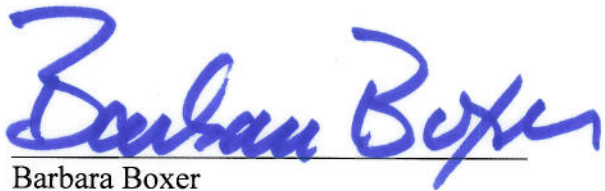
Two years ago, at the last CITES Conference of the Parties, the Obama Administration led the charge for polar bear protection by proposing a transfer of polar bears from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I. This transfer would ban the international commercial trade in polar bear parts like skins, teeth, claws, and skulls, and place additional restrictions on trophy hunting. While the proposal was not adopted in 2010, the Administration should continue to push for these reforms. With record prices for polar bear skins, unsustainable harvest of polar bears, and new evidence of polar bears' habitat melting away, stronger protections under CITES are necessary.

FWS is currently considering whether to put forward a transfer proposal for the 2013 CITES Conference of the Parties. We urge you to ensure that FWS submits a proposal to transfer polar bears from Appendix II to Appendix I of CITES for consideration at the next Conference of the Parties. Further, to guarantee the proposal's acceptance, we urge you to work with FWS and other relevant agencies to build a winning coalition for the proposal. With the support of like-minded countries, polar bears will obtain the protection they need from international trade.

Sincerely,



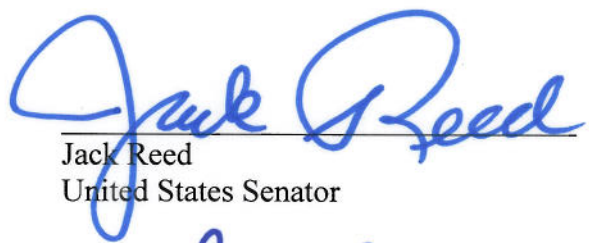
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