

NEWS RELEASE



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Science Shows Polar Bears in Nunavut are Abundant and Healthy

(April 3, 2012 –*Iqaluit, Nunavut*) Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. Vice-President James Eetoolook today commended the Government of Nunavut for releasing their recent Western Hudson Bay polar bear population aerial survey results. The study shows that polar bears in that population are abundant and healthy, and not declining in number as predicted by polar bear scientists.

“This is excellent news. Inuit said polar bears are not declining in number. We have reported for many years that we are seeing more and more bears on the land and in communities, which raises public safety concerns. Inuit were told by scientists the reason there are more bears in communities is due to a decline in the condition of the population, but Inuit disagreed with this interpretation,” said Eetoolook. “For many years, Inuit asked the territorial government to conduct summer range aerial surveys. Finally, in 2011, that aerial survey was conducted and as Inuit knew, the population was found to be healthy and abundant.”

The scientific results of this aerial survey contradict declining population predictions made by Environment Canada scientists in 2004. Those predictions were based on data scientists collected during mark-recapture surveys conducted near Churchill, Manitoba. The scientists interpreted their data to show that due to earlier spring break up and later fall freeze up, the polar bear population in Western Hudson Bay had declined to 935 bears and would continue to decline to 610 by 2011 even if there was no harvesting. The GN’s recent aerial survey results show bears in this population to number closer to 1,000, disproving the former science.

These faulty predictions were particularly damaging to Inuit harvesting because they were used to further predict the global decline of polar bears and to justify reductions in harvesting quotas.

“This is not about climate change. This is about how polar bears were used to draw attention to climate change. Changes were not made to reduce the causes or impact of climate change, but changes were made to the harvesting quotas. It was dangerous and wrong for scientists to use incomplete data to make predictions,” said Eetoolook. “Wildlife management must also take into account the very valuable knowledge Inuit have to share about our animals,” said Eetoolook.

Eetoolook also commended the GN for continuing to plan and conduct more aerial surveys of polar bear populations, noting that Inuit have also repeatedly asked for less intrusive methods of research to be conducted.

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For further information:

Kerry McCluskey
Director of Communications
Tel: (867) 975-4914 Toll-free: 1-888-646-0006
Cell: 867-222-2893
kmcluskey@tunngavik.com
www.tunngavik.com