Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 11, 2012

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
18th and C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

We write to urge the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to submit a proposal for consideration that would transfer polar bears from Appendix II to the more protective Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) at the 2013 Conference of the Parties. We also encourage the FWS to work with other Parties to build the necessary support for the proposal's acceptance.

Almost forty years ago, CITES was formed to ensure that international trade of wild animals and plants does not threaten species' survival. The polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*) was given a modest level of protection on July 7, 1975, when it was listed in Appendix II of CITES. While receiving some protection, species listed in Appendix II may still be commercially traded on the global market and may be subject to trophy hunting. Moving polar bears to Appendix I would provide further protections by banning the international commercial trade in bear parts, e.g. skins, teeth, claws, and skulls, and placing additional restrictions on trophy hunting.

Today scientists, governments, and the public understand that climate change will be devastating to polar bears – a threat not contemplated when they were first listed in Appendix II. The polar bear's habitat is the annual sea ice over the continental shelf and inter-island archipelagoes of the Arctic basin. As this rapidly melts away, the best scientific estimates show polar bear populations declining by two-thirds within the next 40 years. Greater protections for polar bears are needed to strengthen populations so they will have the best chance of survival.

Unfortunately, many polar bear populations are suffering from hunting levels that are too high already. 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 Canadian federal government and from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Polar Bear Specialist Group. The IUCN stated that "even the present TAH [total allowable harvest] is not sustainable so an increase only makes the resulting overharvest even less sustainable." This unsustainable harvest is occurring against a backdrop of soaring demand for polar bear hides. Earlier this year, Fur Harvesters Auction Inc. in Ontario, Canada, sold a polar bear hide for $12,400 – a record high.

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We applaud the Obama Administration's efforts to transfer polar bears from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I at the last CITES Conference of the Parties two years ago. While the proposal was ultimately unsuccessful, we believe international support has strengthened since then and the upcoming Conference of the Parties provides an excellent opportunity to enhance protections for polar bears. With the polar bear's plight getting worse over the last two years – record prices for polar bear skins, unsustainable harvest of polar bears in Canada (the only country that still allows the killing of polar bears for international trade), and new evidence of polar bears' habitat melting away – the case is stronger than ever for securing stronger protections under CITES.

Since the FWS has indicated that polar bears still meet the criteria for listing on Appendix I, we urge the FWS to submit a proposal to transfer polar bears from Appendix II to Appendix I of CITES for consideration at the 2013 CITES Conference of the Parties.

If you have any questions regarding our request, please contact Heidi Geisz (heidi.geisz@mail.house.gov) or Matt Strickler (matt.strickler@mail.house.gov) on the House Natural Resources Committee Democratic staff. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

EDWARD J. MARKEY
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources

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