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**STATE OF ALASKA**  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
JUNEAU

November 17, 2006

Mr. Dale Hall, Director  
Fish and Wildlife Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Interior Building, Room 3256  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Hall:

I recently wrote to Secretary Dirk Kempthorne about how Endangered Species Act (ESA) listings can harm Alaska's and the nation's economy without having any significant effect on the well-being of the species in question. In my July letter, I recommended that the Secretary not list polar bears as either threatened or endangered. I have not received a response to that letter, but want to make sure that you understand my concerns before you make a decision on ESA listing of the polar bear.

Polar bears are abundant and well managed by international agreements. They are not threatened with extinction. The Marine Mammal Protection Act provides ample authority to protect polar bears and ensure they are well managed in the United States. ESA listing is not necessary. In Alaska, polar bears may only be harvested by coastal Natives for subsistence purposes; about 50 are taken each year. It is not legal to hunt polar bears in Russia and the recently passed US/Russia agreement on polar bears will curtail illegal harvest. Harvest of polar bears is not allowed in Europe. Canada has the largest harvest of polar bears; hunters there take about 500 per year in tightly controlled hunts. Each polar bear population in Canada has a harvest quota that can be taken by Native hunters. These Native hunters can harvest a set number of bears for subsistence use or sell the opportunity to harvest a bear to a trophy hunter. Hunting of polar bears does not constitute a threat to their survival.

There are 22 recognized populations of polar bears worldwide, and they have been well managed. With regard to Alaska's polar bears, we have two stocks in the Chukchi Sea and Beaufort Sea. The U.S. Geological Survey just released (November 15, 2006) an Open File Report about one of these stocks

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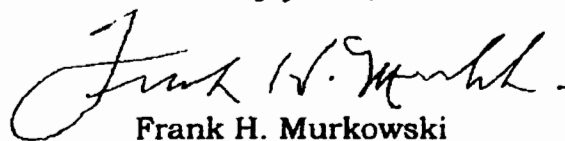
(Polar Bear Population Status in the Southern Beaufort Sea). This report notes a potential decrease in the number of bears in the southern Beaufort Sea. However, the most recent population estimate is not statistically different from population estimates in the late 1980's to early 1990's. Potential changes in the population, including changes in body size and cub survival noted in this report, are of management concern, but do not indicate a threatened or endangered species. Because of the recent release of this report, the State of Alaska has not had time to review it. I have directed my Fish and Game Department and University biologists to review the report. Please delay an ESA listing decision until the State of Alaska has properly reviewed the relevant science and can provide input.

I understand that ice conditions in the Arctic have been changing, but it is also my understanding that it is not 100 percent certain that such changes will continue in the future. This issue warrants close monitoring, but it seems premature to make long-term predictions.

Considering that activities on the North Slope of Alaska comprise a small proportion of the emissions throughout the nation and the world, a listing will likely cause unnecessary delays in the development of resources on the North Slope of Alaska and have other nationwide economic impacts.

Rather than listing the polar bear as threatened, I suggest that you direct federal agencies to work with the State of Alaska, local governments and communities, and industry to develop and implement a formal conservation strategy to ensure the continued health of polar bear populations. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the appropriate federal agency to take the lead on such an effort, and the State of Alaska will work with the agency on this effort.

Sincerely yours,



Frank H. Murkowski  
Governor

cc: Lynn Scarlett, Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior  
David M. Verhey, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Fish, Wildlife, and Parks,  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
John Katz, Director of State/Federal Relations and Special Counsel  
McKie Campbell, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game