

WWF Unimpressed by Ban on Chukotka Bear Hunting Quota

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A one-year-old female polar bear playing at Krasnoyarsk's zoo Thursday. **Ilya Naymushin**

A government decision not to lift the country's long-standing ban on hunting polar bears this year has more to do with a lack of mechanisms to reign in poaching than with preserving the endangered species, the World Wildlife Fund said Thursday.

A [statement](#) on Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's web site published earlier this week said the government has decided against using its quota of 29 animals, laid down in a joint agreement with the United States.

The U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission last year for the first time decided to allow a harvesting quota of 58 animals — split evenly between both countries — that may be hunted by natives for traditional and cultural purposes.

The shared polar bear population straddling the Bering Strait numbers some 2,000 animals, according to the commission's [data](#).

Vladimir Krever, a wildlife preservation expert with the World Wildlife Fund's Moscow office, said the decision not to use the quota was probably made because authorities could not meet the conditions set in the treaty with the United States.

"They must have monitoring and enforcement systems in place in Chukotka, but currently there are no mechanisms to control the catch," he said by telephone.

Krever said probably 30 animals are being killed illegally in Chukotka each year. He added that the hunting quota was originally introduced in a bid to curb rampant poaching.

Putin's statement did not give an explanation for why the quota will not be used. The prime minister has championed protection and research of the polar bear, which also serves as the mascot of United Russia, the country's ruling party, which he heads.

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