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Résumé of the trade in polar bear hides in Canada, 1975-76by Pauline A. Smith¹**Introduction**

This paper summarizes the regulations, market statistics and trade in polar bear hides in Canada during 1975-76. Annual summaries of these data have been published for 1972-73 (Smith and Jonkel 1975a), 1973-74 (Smith and Jonkel 1975b) and 1974-75 (Smith and Stirling 1976).

The number of polar bear hides sold by the auction companies in Canada in 1975-76 increased slightly, although the number handled was approximately the same as during 1974-75. The downward trend in prices paid for polar bear hides, which had begun in early 1974, continued through 1974 and 1975. In early 1976, however, the prices paid at the auction sales began to recover. The prices paid to the native hunters continued to decline.

The supply

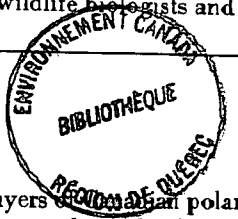
Western Canadian Raw Fur Auction Sales in Vancouver is supplied by individual hunters, Inuit co-operatives, and the NWT Fur Marketing Service. In addition the NWT government markets confiscated hides and the hides of nuisance animals there. The Hudson's Bay Company in Montreal obtains polar bear skins from its northern stores and the NWT Fur Marketing Service, Inuit co-operatives, and individual hunters. Hudson's Bay and Annings in London, England, is supplied through the Hudson's Bay Company in Montreal. Dominion Soudack Fur Auction Sales in Winnipeg is supplied by Inuit co-operatives, individual hunters, and the NWT Fur Marketing Service. The Royal Greenland Trade Department in Copenhagen, Denmark, is supplied with hides taken by native hunters in Greenland.

In Manitoba, skins of nuisance bears killed by conservation officers and RCMP are Crown property and can only be sold by the Manitoba government through sealed tender. The proceeds from the auction go into the Manitoba General Revenue. Usually the sales are held annually. However, due to the small number of hides available no auction was held in spring 1976. Thus, the eight polar bear hides on hand will be auctioned in spring 1977 along with hides taken during 1976.

The Ontario Trappers Association in North Bay is the only official marketing outlet for hides taken by Ontario Indians.

Western Canadian Raw Fur Auction Sales takes a 6% commission, the Hudson's Bay Company and Dominion Soudack take 7%, and the Ontario Trappers Association takes 5%. After an auction by the Ontario Trappers Association, handling charges and the 5% commission are deducted and the balance is divided, 60% going to the Indian hunter and 40% to the Indian band.

Progress Notes contain *interim* data and conclusions and are presented as a service to other wildlife biologists and agencies.

**The market**

The Japanese were still the main buyers of polar bear hides during 1975-76. The interest shown by Canadian dealers increased, probably as a result of lower prices. The US market remained closed.

The prices paid for polar bear hides at the auction sales during the 1975-76 season are given in Table 1. As in 1974-75, many hides were bought back from the auction sales because of lack of interest and low bidding. Unsold hides are stored until the next auction sale or are sold by private treaty. The market was slow throughout the year and no marked trends were apparent. Western Canadian Raw Fur Auction Sales in Vancouver sold a total of 46 of the 158 hides offered at their four auction sales, while the Hudson's Bay Company in Montreal sold only 13 of the 185 hides offered at its February auction, the only public sale of the season. Dominion Soudack Fur Auction Sales in Winnipeg sold 14 of the 22 hides offered at their five auctions. Although the hides moved slowly at the public auction sales, trade by private treaty was much increased from previous years. Sixty-three per cent (78/124) of the hides sold by Western Canadian Raw Fur Auction Sales, 86% (81/94) by the Hudson's Bay Company, and 26% (5/19) by Dominion Soudack Fur Auction Sales, were sold by private treaty. Hides sold by this method after 1 October 1976 will be included in the 1976-77 report. Total sales of hides offered during 1975-76 were 51% (94/185) by the Hudson's Bay Company, 78% (124/158) by Western Canadian Raw Fur Auction Sales and 86% (19/22) by Dominion Soudack Fur Auction Sales. At the Hudson's Bay and Annings in London, England, 92% (60/65) of the hides on hand were sold.

No new polar bear hides were forwarded in 1975-76 from the Hudson's Bay Company in Montreal to Hudson's Bay and Annings Limited. At the end of September 1976 Western Canadian Raw Fur Auction Sales, Hudson's Bay Company, Dominion Soudack Fur Auction Sales, and Hudson's Bay and Annings Limited had inventories of 34, 91, 3, and 5 hides respectively. In 1975-76, there was a 70% turnover of Canadian polar bear hides at the auction houses (i.e. 314 of the 451 hides handled were sold). This turnover rate is slightly higher than in 1974-75 when 60% of the hides handled were sold (Smith and Stirling 1976).

The December 1975 sale by the Royal Greenland Trade Department, the largest handlers of polar bear skins outside Canada, is included for comparison. Unlike the previous year, all hides put up for auction were sold. Again, the prices obtained were on average lower than those gained for Canadian hides, but did show a 13% increase over the December 1974 sale.

In 1975-76, a similar number of polar bear hides (451) was handled by the auction houses, as had been during the previous two years. Similar numbers of new hides were shipped to the auction houses in 1975-76 (242) as in 1974-

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75 (243). This provides a marked contrast to the situation in 1973-74 when 454 new hides were sent. There was a slight increase in the known number of polar bears killed in Canada during 1975-76 (Table 2). It is apparent, as in 1974-75, that many of the hunters preferred to sell their hides locally, rather than through the auction houses where delays in payment are common. Full remittance cannot be made until the hide is sold by the auction house.

The average prices paid by the two major auction houses in Canada and also for the Royal Greenland Trade Department for polar bear hides in 1975-76 all showed increases over the previous year (Table 3). The 70% increase shown by the Hudson's Bay Company was well above the 14% average shown by all the auction houses handling Canadian hides. The highest price (\$1596), comparable with that (\$1500) paid in 1974-75, was again recorded by the Hudson's Bay Company. The lowest price (\$85) was recorded by the Hudson's Bay and Annings.

As in the past, the hides which were in prime condition and had been carefully skinned and prepared brought the highest prices and sold fairly easily. A general complaint of the auction houses was the small number of top-class skins received. The low prices received at the Ontario Trappers Association Fur Sales is a direct reflection of the poor quality of hides taken by Ontario Indians. The hides are often taken during the summer or early fall when the pelts are not in prime condition, and, in addition, are often poorly prepared.

The state of the fur market has a direct but delayed effect on the prices paid to the native hunters. A list of known average prices paid to the native hunters by settlement in 1975-76 is given in Table 4 along with comparable data for 1974-75. This information is based on data collected by NWT Fish and Wildlife Officers, and the Quebec Department of Tourism, Hunting and Fishing.

The marked decrease in prices shown by all settlements for which there were data available for 1974-75 appears to have slowed down during 1975-76. Although there was an overall 19% decrease, changes were not consistent. Thirty-nine per cent (9) of the settlements actually showed an increase, 52% (12 settlements) a decrease, and 9% (2 settlements) no change. The effect of the marketing method on the prices received by hunters in 1975-76, as in 1974-75, is not clear. The hunters selling directly to the fur auction houses, or indirectly through the NWT Fur Marketing Service received, on average, a higher price than through other marketing methods. The average price paid for 35 hides shipped to the auction houses through this service in 1975-76 was \$540, with prices ranging from \$200 to \$900. The NWT government advances up to 75% of the estimated value of the hides to the hunter and the balance is paid when the skin is successfully auctioned.

Eleven hides sold by Sachs Harbour hunters to private individuals brought an average of \$691 and an additional 11 hides by Cambridge Bay hunters, \$627. But 11 hides known to have been sold by Spence Bay hunters to private individuals brought an average of only \$386. Because of the lack of complete data on prices and marketing methods, no definite pattern can be discerned.

The known polar bear harvest for 1975-76 was slightly higher than in 1974-75 (Table 2). This is partly a reflection of the increased quotas allotted to several settlements in the NWT and also an increase in the number of problem bears killed, and the number killed as a result of drug overdoses during tagging operations. Hides of problem and overdosed animals are marketed by the territorial or provincial governments. No overkills were recorded by NWT settlements and hunting in several communities (e.g. Cambridge Bay, Pangnirtung, and Tuktoyaktuk) was delayed until the new year in order to obtain best quality hides and better prices. The polar bear hunting season in NWT and Yukon Territory extends from 1 October to 31 May the following year. Legislation was passed in Quebec in June 1975 to establish a similar hunting season in Quebec. However, implementation is now only beginning. The number of polar bears killed in Quebec decreased markedly and may reflect a decrease in incentive as a result of depressed prices. However, in Quebec, and also in Ontario, residual problems in the hide-tagging programs preclude any accurate estimate of the total polar bear kill. No records exist on the number of bears, if any, killed by Manitoba Indians as no hide tagging program exists in Manitoba. Native hunters in that province are not allowed to sell or barter any polar bear hide taken. Records of nuisance bears killed in the Churchill area each fall are maintained.

As prices appear to be stabilizing, the native hunters may become increasingly more selective about the time of year hunting occurs, and the size and condition of the animal hunted, in order to get the best prices. In general, the larger the hide the more valuable it is (Table 5). Harvesting of polar bears in summer and of cubs at any time produces hides of little value and should be discouraged. Once the Quebec Order-in-Council of June 1975 is implemented, it will leave only Ontario and possibly Manitoba to solve the problem of native hunters taking female polar bears with cubs, and hunting in summer. No legislation specifically protects females with young or bears in dens in Manitoba, but the closed season on polar bears and the apparent lack of hunting by treaty Indians there apparently provide adequate protection.

Inuit-guided sport-hunt

Under the NWT Game Ordinance (1968) a limited sport-hunt at the request of particular settlements has been permitted since January 1970. The tags used for sport-hunts must be allotted from the settlement quotas, and those allotted to sport-hunts that are unsuccessful cannot be used later. During 1975-76, three NWT settlements (Cambridge Bay, Paulatuk, and Tuktoyaktuk) offered a sport-hunt. Of the possible nine bears, six were taken (Table 6). Three sport-hunters were unsuccessful.

The increased interest by the native hunters in the sport-hunt in 1975-76, compared with 1974-75, is probably a reflection of the decreased value of the hide. Native hunters may prefer to service a sport-hunt, rather than hunt themselves, because of the greater financial gain. The cost of the hunt, whether successful or not, varied from \$3500 at Paulatuk and Tuktoyaktuk to \$4000 at Cambridge Bay (c.f. \$3500 at Paulatuk and \$4500 at Pond Inlet in 1974-75).

The cost of the hunt has changed little during the last 3 years whereas the average price paid for a hide at the auction houses decreased markedly (\$1374 in 1973-74, \$585 in 1974-75, \$668 in 1975-76). If prices do stabilize near their present level, the sport-hunt may appear increasingly more lucrative to the Inuit hunter. The cost of the hunt may have to be reduced in order to attract more prospective hunters, and a limited amount of promotion may be necessary. The hunt still had a limited attraction to Americans, who probably form the largest part of the sport-hunting fraternity, because the importation of a polar bear hide into the US is barred through the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Under the same Act, a US citizen required a permit from the Marine Mammal Commission to partake in a sport-hunt in Canada, even though it was legal in Canada. Without a permit prosecution was possible. However, under a June 1977 interpretation of the Act a permit is now no longer necessary.

Legislation affecting the trade in polar bear hides

With Canada's ratification of the Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears (1973) in December 1974, the provinces and territories were obligated to amend their legislation to meet the terms of the Agreement. Of the five countries involved, three (Canada, Norway and the USSR) have now ratified the Agreement which came into effect in May 1976. Denmark and the US have yet to ratify. The terms specify that management practices should be based on the best available biological data. The main problem is now the implementation of management practices in jurisdictions where enforcement is still difficult. The implementation of the quota system proposed by Quebec in January 1975 and further legislation of June of that year may be facilitated by the agreement signed 3 November 1975 by the Quebec Government and the Inuit and Cree people of Quebec. The June 1975 Quebec Order-in-Council established a closed season from 1 June to 30 September and specifically provided protection for bears in their dens, females with cubs, and cubs under 1 year of age. The reduced value of the hides (compared to 1973-74), providing a lower incentive to take polar bears, may also aid the implementations. The regulations controlling the numbers of polar bears harvested in Canada were summarized briefly by Smith and Jonkel (1975a, b), Smith and Stirling (1976) and Stirling and Smith (1976 and in press).

In April 1975, Canada ratified the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (1973) which came into effect 1 July 1975. Polar bears are included in Appendix II to the Convention ('all species which although not necessarily now threatened with extinction may become so unless trade in specimens of such species is subject to strict regulation in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival'). In Canada, where polar bears are not considered to be endangered, they had been placed under reservation and included within Appendix III of the Convention ('subject to regulation within its jurisdiction for

the purpose of preventing or restricting exploitation and as needing the co-operation of other parties in the control of trade'). This reservation was removed on 29 April 1977 because species already listed under Appendix II cannot be included within Appendix III. Polar bears are now in Appendix II for all nations. A close check is required for the export of polar bears, their hides, and any other products thereof, and export permits are now required. Federal legislation applies whether or not the polar bear or parts are being exported to, or imported from, a nation not a party to the Convention. A permanent record of all hides legally exported or imported is maintained by the Federal Government. The problem of illicit trade remains.

Comments

The prices paid for polar bear hides now appear to have stabilized, and it seems unlikely that any marked increases or increases on the scale recorded during the 1972 to 1974 period are likely to recur in the near future. An increased market for novelty furs, such as polar bear, is dependent upon a much improved economic situation. The auction houses are still faced with backlogs of hides and a steady supply of new hides. It is unlikely that the supply will decrease. The implementation of the following management practices would help to increase the marketability and ensure maximum financial return to the hunter:

- i) careful skinning, preparation and handling of the hide;
- ii) taking of hides during period of year when hides are in prime condition, preferably spring, i.e. no summer hunting;
- iii) harvesting of larger animals;
- iv) sale directly to the fur auction houses or, in the NWT, indirectly through the Fur Marketing Service;
- v) an increased sport-hunt.

The auction houses apparently have little problem in selling the hides which are in prime condition. However, at present, few top-class hides are received. It is unlikely that the present situation will change significantly. A potentially large market in the US remains closed because of the regulations in the Marine Mammal Protection Act (1972).

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Table 1

Numbers of polar bear skins offered and sold, and the prices paid (\$) at the auctions during 1975-76. Numbers of skins put up for auction are in parentheses

| Auction House | Type of sale | Date | No. skins sold | Price range | Ave. price | |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|-------------|------------|-----|
| Western Canadian, Vancouver | Auction | Jan. 1976 | 4 (53) | 400-650 | 513 | |
| | | Feb. | 15 (56) | 250-1100 | 587 | |
| | | May | 4 (43) | 300-800 | 346 | |
| | | June | 23 (50) | 500-950 | 688 | |
| | | Sub-total | | 46 | 250-1100 | 627 |
| | Private treaty | Sept. 1975-Aug. 1976 | 78 | 300-1050 | 695 | |
| | | Total | 124 | 250-1100 | 670 | |
| Hudson's Bay Co., Montreal | Auction | Feb. 1976 | 13 (113) | 800-1200 | 1020 | |
| | | Private treaty | Dec. 1975 | 81 | 100-1596 | 892 |
| | | | Sept. 1976 | | | |
| Total | | 94 | 100-1596 | 910 | | |
| Dominion Soudack, Winnipeg | Auction | Jan. 1976 | 5 (12) | 400-800 | 580 | |
| | | Mar. | 0 (17) | | | |
| | | May | 1 (16) | 750 | 750 | |
| | | June | 0 (14) | | | |
| | | Sept. | 8 (17) | 400-900 | 678 | |
| | | Sub-total | | 14 | 400-900 | 648 |
| | Private treaty | April-June 1976 | 5 | 250-600 | 490 | |
| | | Total | 19 | 250-900 | 607 | |
| Ontario Trappers Assoc., North Bay | | Feb. 1976 | 5 | 295-600 | 498 | |
| | | April | 10 | 125-725 | 388 | |
| | | June | 2 | 750-805 | 778 | |
| | | Total | 17 | 125-805 | 466 | |
| Manitoba Govt., Winnipeg | 8 skins - no auction held in 1976 | | | | | |
| Hudson's Bay and Annings, London, England | | Mar. 1976 | 15 (65) | 324-534 | 439 | |
| | | May | 1 (46) | 458 | 458 | |
| | | Sept. | 44 (45) | 85-435 | 333 | |
| | | Total | 60 | 85-534 | 440 | |
| Royal Greenland, Copenhagen | | Dec. 1975 | 60 (60) | ?-1206 | 528 | |
| Total no. Canadian skins sold | | 1975-76 | 314 | 85-1596 | 668 | |

Table 2
Known polar bear kill in Canada 1974-76

| Jurisdiction | 1974-75 | | 1975-76 | |
|--------------|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|
| | Recommended quota | Kill | Recommended quota | Kill |
| NWT | 475 | 464† | 501 | 519† |
| Ontario | 30 | 18 | 30 | 15 |
| Manitoba | 35 | 11 | 35 | 8 |
| Newfoundland | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Quebec | 42 | 66 | 42 | 37† |
| Yukon | 6 | 0 | 6 | 2 |
| Norway | 5* | 1 | 5* | 0 |
| Total | 593 | 560 | 619 | 581 |

*Allowed to Norway for protection of life under the Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears (1973).

†Includes problem bears, killed in self-defence, and from drug overdoses. Hides of these bears still enter the fur market.

Table 3
Comparison of average prices (\$) paid for polar bear hides at auctions 1974-75 and 1975-76

| Auction house | 1974-75 | 1975-76 | % increase |
|---|---------|---------|------------|
| Western Canadian | 637 | 670 | 4 |
| Hudson's Bay Company | 534 | 910 | 70 |
| Royal Greenland Trade Department | 466 | 528 | 13 |
| Ave. (all auction houses handling Canadian hides) | 585 | 668 | 14 |

Table 4
Average known prices (\$) paid to hunters for polar bear hides 1974-75 and 1975-76. Numbers of skins are in parentheses

| Settlement | 1974-75 | 1975-76 | % change |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Arctic Bay, NWT | 959 (11) | 620 (5) | -35 |
| Broughton Island, NWT | 607 (14) | 355 (2) | -42 |
| Cambridge Bay, NWT | 500 (14) | 627 (11) | +25 |
| Cape Dorset, NWT | 675 (4) | 620 (5) | -8 |
| Chesterfield Inlet, NWT | 325 (2) | 550 (3) | +69 |
| Clyde River, NWT | 738 (37) | 363 (36) | -51 |
| Coppermine, NWT | 65 (1) | 800 (1) | +1131 |
| Coral Harbour, NWT | 809 (64) | 502 (32) | +38 |
| Eskimo Point, NWT | 953 (8) | 394 (8) | -59 |
| Fort Chimo, Que. | | 600 (3) | |
| Frobisher Bay, NWT | 375 (2) | 400 (1) | +7 |
| Gjoa Haven, NWT | 333 (10) | 567 (1) | +70 |
| Grise Fiord, NWT | 579 (7) | 352 (19) | -39 |
| Hall Beach, NWT | | 535 (1) | |
| Holman Island, NWT | | 600 (2) | |
| Igloolik, NWT | 451 (8) | 378 (8) | -16 |
| Ivujivik, Que. | | 450 (2) | |
| Lake Harbour, NWT | 700 (1) | 400 (1) | -43 |
| Pangnirtung, NWT | 357 (7) | 443 (7) | +24 |
| Pond Inlet, NWT | 566 (11) | 536 (9) | -5 |
| Rankin Inlet, NWT | 475 (2) | 475 (7) | 0 |
| Repulse Bay, NWT | 388 (12) | 340 (5) | -12 |
| Resolute, NWT | 588 (12) | 412 (5) | -30 |
| Sachs Harbour, NWT | 690 (15) | 691 (11) | 0 |
| Sanikiluaq, NWT | 373 (7) | 576 (16) | +54 |
| Spence Bay, NWT | 620 (11) | 464 (24) | -25 |
| Tuktoyaktuk, NWT | 735 (10) | 832 (12) | +13 |
| Wakeham Bay, Que. | | 120 (1) | |
| Ave. (all settlements) | 612 (277) | 493 (238) | -19 |

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Table 5
Prices paid (\$) for various-sized hides at Hudson's Bay Company Fur Sales during 1975-76

| Size* | No. hides | Price range | Ave. price |
|---------------------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| XXXL (>405 cm) | 27 | 450-1596 | 1077 |
| XXL (345-405 cm) | 41 | 300-1400 | 916 |
| XL (290-345 cm) | 21 | 400-1500 | 774 |
| L (255-290 cm) | 3 | 100-650 | 383 |
| LM (215-255 cm) | 1 | | 500 |
| All hides | 94† | 100-1596 | 910 |

*Size of hide = length + width.
†Includes one unclassified hide.

Table 6
Numbers of sport-hunters by settlement 1975-76

| Settlement | No. tags allotted | Sport-hunters | Successful sport-hunters |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| Cambridge Bay | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Paulatuk | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Tuktoyaktuk | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| Total | 9 | 9 | 6 |