

**Steve Smith
Member
Dallas Safari Club**

Testimony on HR 991

**House Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs Subcommittee
The Committee on Natural Resources
May 12th, 2011**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I am here today speaking as a citizen who has suffered the taking of my property because of federal regulatory action. I appreciate the opportunity today to tell my story.

I was raised in a small east Texas community and learned the values of hunting and wildlife conservation from my father who introduced me to hunting at the age of nine. I took my first deer at about age eleven with my mother sitting with me in the deer stand. She too developed a love for hunting and the outdoors. My father, knowing my enthusiasm for the sport of hunting and the outdoors, encouraged me to pursue a career with a firearms or ammunition company as a tester, so I could travel the world as a hunter. We were both particularly fascinated with hunting in Africa which seemed so exotic to us. However, after seeing a television show on hunting the polar bear in the Arctic, my dad thought that would be the ultimate hunt. He passed away when I was in high school and never got to experience more than the duck and deer hunting we shared together. But I never forgot our conversations about that ultimate hunting trip.

After attending college and working for several years I was fortunate enough to be able to afford to resume the hunting that I loved so much as a young man. I hunted several North American species in the U.S. before turning my focus to hunting in other parts of the world.

In January of 2008 I decided to inquire about the possibility of hunting polar bear in the Arctic and after getting referrals from others in the hunting community I contacted a booking agent who informed me that the waiting list to hunt polar bear was about five years. I was disappointed but decided to focus on other upcoming hunts and travels. As an after thought I told the agent that if there happened to be a cancellation to please contact me. He laughed and said that in his twenty years of booking hunts no one had ever cancelled a polar bear hunt.

So you can imagine my shock when in March that same booking agent called to inform me that another hunter needed to cancel his hunt. The hunt date was early May of

2008. I didn't have much time to prepare but jumped at the opportunity. I began purchasing the necessary cold weather gear, booking flights and lodging and working with a firearms expert on how my rifle would respond in the Arctic conditions.

Besides the adventure, I knew that my participation in this hunt would help conserve the bear population and provide an income source to the Inuit people. When I arrived in Resolute, Nunavut, Canada the day before my guided hunt was to begin, I met many of the locals whose livelihood depended on hunting. My guides and I were going to hunt from dogsleds just as their ancestors had been doing for several generations. They were a wealth of information on the polar bear habitat and population. The subject of a possible ruling by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife which could prohibit future importation of polar bear trophies to the United States did come up, but the people of Resolute could not really understand the concern since they had lived with and hunted these bears for generations and felt that they were in no way endangered. They already understood and practiced careful conservation of these bears which they considered a very precious natural resource.

After many days of inclement weather, challenging frozen terrain on a bumpy dogsled, and hunting and sleeping in subzero temperatures, I was elated to have success on this difficult yet exhilarating hunt. After encountering and passing on several bears which were either females or young males I took a male polar bear which was later determined to be twenty-three years old. His facial hair was worn off from years of diving through the ice and his teeth were old and broken. I took this bear on the 11th of May 2008, which was three years ago yesterday.

Of course I wanted to bring my bear home to create a taxidermy mount as a symbol of this amazing experience. I had contacted U.S. Fish and Wildlife prior to departing for the hunt to insure that my paperwork was prepared and submitted properly. After returning from the ice I faxed the remaining required information to them while still in Canada. I made arrangements for my bear to be expedited to my taxidermist in Texas. This is also when I was informed by the people of Resolute that the U.S. Interior Department had made it's ruling on the status of the polar bear. The ruling took effect on May 15 – four days after I took my bear. The local people were understandably disappointed and many voiced their opinion that this ruling was interfering with the way in which they had conserved and harvested polar bears.

I had properly submitted my paperwork to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for their mandatory 30-day review period. I hope you can understand my surprise and dismay when the Interior Department listed the polar bear as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ruling was then made effective immediately – something which I don't fully understand and for which I have never been given a reason. Not only was I shocked to hear this ruling, but even more astounded to learn that the importation of my legally hunted polar bear, which was indeed taken prior to the Interior Department ruling, was not going to be allowed. As a result of this ruling, U.S. hunters are now banned from importing these legally-harvested polar bears into the United States under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. With that, I basically lost my investment in this trip.

While I'll never lose the experience, the polar bear taxidermy mount, which would have been my lasting trophy, cannot happen under current laws, and this regulation effectively confiscated my legally taken polar bear. Right now, the bear hide and skull are in cold storage in Baltimore, Ontario, Canada. I hesitate to spend the money to have the taxidermy work done in Canada without knowing when, or if, I will ever be able to import it to my home, and yet the longer the hide sits unmounted in storage, the greater the risk that it will be ruined. I find it distressing that the government required me to abide by a 30-day review period before importation, but with this ruling it instantaneously changed its import policy.

I am asking you to support enactment of HR 991. This simple bill will do only one thing—it will allow me and the other 40 similarly affected bear hunters in this country to import the bears we legally hunted. It will not change the ESA listing. It will not allow future bear imports. It will simply restore my property to my possession.

This issue is not about hunting. It's a simple matter of returning property that was effectively taken by regulatory action. I made an enormous investment in my polar bear expedition and the government has effectively stripped me of my property. With the addition of storage fees and other expenses I have now spent in excess of \$50,000.

This is a deeply personal issue that has had an enormous impact on me. In the three years since my hunt I have shared my story with many people, both hunters and non-hunters, and I have yet to find anyone who agrees that this denial of import of my legally taken trophy is fair or appropriate. I do not understand why there is any opposition to the importation of these legally and ethically hunted polar bears. I am not questioning others rights to champion bears if they feel their cause is just, but I am questioning why there is such a determined effort to blocking the importation of these particular bears since, to put it bluntly, these forty-one bears are beyond saving. Shouldn't their focus be elsewhere?

I sincerely hope you will consider, co-sponsor, and support enactment of HR 991.

I would like to thank the Dallas Safari Club in assisting me in my effort to testify today and appreciate the position the Club has taken to help move this legislation forward.

Mr. Chairman, thank you once again for the opportunity to tell my story to the Committee. I appreciate your careful consideration of this legislation.