



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
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F/AKC3:RLM

MEMORANDUM FOR: Howard Braham

FROM: Richard L. Merrick 

SUBJECT: 1997 Steller sea lion survey results

NMFS conducted a special survey of summertime Steller sea lion numbers in Alaska this summer to determine if patterns of increase observed between 1994 and 1996 were continuing. We have now finished the counting and initial analyses, and the results are presented below.

Adult and Juvenile Surveys

We conducted the survey (using similar protocols to past summer aerial surveys) during 10-14 June 1997 in the area from the Kenai Peninsula westward through the eastern Aleutian Islands. Since 1996, a decrease of 10.3% (from 12,196 to 10,505) was observed in nonpup numbers at trend sites in the area (Table 1). This was twice the annual rate of decline observed for the period from 1994 to 1997 (-5.0% per year).

Since 1996, numbers have decreased in the central Gulf of Alaska (-14.4%, from 3,915 to 3,352 nonpups) and in the eastern Aleutian Islands (-13.2%, from 4,057 to 3,520). Numbers in the western Gulf of Alaska appeared relatively stable (-2.9% change from 3,741 to 3,633).

The decrease in numbers at the eastern Aleutian Island trend sites reverses the general pattern of increase seen in the area since 1989. Changes observed in the other two regions were similar to that of the period 1994-97.



The major reason this aerial survey was conducted was to determine if stabilization of populations in three areas was continuing. These areas were: 1) the Marmot Island area, 2) the area between the southern end of Kodiak Island/Shelikof Strait and the eastern edge of the Shumagin Islands, and 3) the eastern Aleutian Islands. Based on the aerial survey it appears that numbers at 6 sites in the Marmot Island area decreased since 1996 (from 1,640 nonpups to 1,253), however, based on the pup count at Marmot Island (see below) numbers may not have decreased as much as shown in the aerial survey. In the second area, numbers at 20 sites surveyed in the area have remained stable or increased slightly since 1996 (4,093 nonpups counted in 1996 and 4,381 in 1997). Finally, numbers at 40 sites in the third area (the eastern Aleutian Islands) have remained stable or decreased slightly from 1996 (from 5,310 to 5,049). The decrease (-4.9%) observed at all 40 sites surveyed in the eastern Aleutian Islands contrasts with the greater decrease (-13.2%) observed at the 10 trend sites there.

Pup Surveys

NMFS conducted a survey of Steller sea lion pups at eight rookeries in the Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska during June - July 1997 (Table 2). Three of the eight sites (the western Aleutian Island sites) have not been counted by NMFS previously, and we do not have comparable data for analysis. Of the remainder, two (the central Aleutian Island sites) increased since 1994, while the others decreased slightly during 1994-97. The three remaining sites were counted in 1995/96. Of these, one decreased (Ugamak Island, -16.6%), while the other two (Marmot and Bogoslof Islands) remained relatively stable.

Note the Ugamak Island decrease follows a period of increasing pup production at the site. It may also be significant that the Marmot Island pup numbers appear to have remained relatively constant since 1994; this was also the case for nonpup numbers there until this year when we observed a drop in the aerial survey count. However, the field team sent to the island in July to count pups found that nonpup numbers had returned to the 1996 level.

cc: Balsiger, Loughlin

Table 1.--Counts of adult and juvenile Steller sea lions observed at rookery and haulout trend sites in three areas of Alaska during aerial surveys in June 1994, 1996, and 1997.

Area	N	Count			Annual percent change	
		1994	1996	1997	1994-97	1996-97
Gulf of Alaska						
Central	15	4,520	3,915	3,352	-10.0	-14.4
Western	9	3,982	3,741	3,633	-3.1	-2.9
Subtotal	24	8,502	7,656	6,985	-6.6	-8.8
Aleutian Islands						
Eastern (without 2 sites) ¹	10	3,694	4,057	3,520	-1.6	-13.2
Total	34	12,196	11,713	10,505	-5.0	-10.3

¹No survey in 1997 at Bogoslof or Adugak Islands

Table 2.--Counts of live Steller sea lion pups observed at eight rookeries in Alaska during June-July 1994, 1996 and 1997.

Rookery	Count of live pups			Annual percent change	
	1994	1996	1997	1994-97	1996-97
Central GOA					
Marmot Island	804	790 ²	762	-1.7%	-3.5%
Eastern Aleutian I.					
Ugamak Island	574	706	589	-0.9%	-16.6%
Bogoslof Island	322 ³	282 ⁴	281	-3.4%	-0.2%
Central Aleutian I.					
Seguam I.	444	nc	463	1.4%	na
Kasatochi I.	215	nc	268	7.3%	na
Western Aleutian I.					
Buldir I.	nc	nc	120	na	na
Aggattu I.	nc	nc	637	na	na
Attu I.	nc	nc	222	na	na
Total	na	na	3,342	na	na

²cliff count

³1993 count

⁴1995 count

National Marine Fisheries Service
Alaska Region
Juneau, Alaska

Status of Regulatory Actions
Through September 19, 1997

FMP Amendments

BSAI 34: Allocating Atka mackerel to jig gear vessels	NOA published 8-15-97, comments on amendment until 10-14-97; proposed rule scheduled to be published 9-22-97 for a 45-day comment period.
BSAI 36/GOA 39: Establishing a separate management category for certain forage fish species	Proposed rule under review by Regional Office.
BSAI 39/GOA 41/Crab 5: License limitation program and multi-species CDQ program for groundfish and BSAI crab	Amendments approved 9-12-97; proposed rule comment period ends 9-29-97.
BSAI 40: Establishing PSC limits for <u>C. opilio</u>	NOA published 7-15-97, comments on amendment until 9-15-97; proposed rule published 8-13-97, comments on proposed rule until 9-29-97.
GOA 46: Remove black and blue rockfish from FMP.	Proposed rule under review by Regional Office.
BSAI 49: Improved retention and improved utilization in BSAI	Amendment approved 9-3-97; final rule under review by WDC Offices.
GOA 49: Improved retention and improved utilization in GOA	NOA published 7-29-97, comments on amendment until 9-29-97; proposed rule published 8-18-97, comments on proposed rule until 10-2-97.
BSAI 50/GOA 50: Donation of Pacific halibut bycatch	Proposed rule being prepared by Regional Office.

Regulatory Amendments

NMFS certified scales program	Final rule under review by Regional Office.
IFQ slime and ice standard deductions	Final rule being prepared by Regional Office.
IFQ revision of "surviving spouse" language	Proposed rule under review by WDC offices.
Observer program extension through 1998	Proposed rule published 9/19/97; comment period ends 10/19/97.
Observer program CGL insurance coverage clarification.	Final rule under review by Regional Office.
Revision of recordkeeping and reporting requirements for 1998	Proposed rule under review by Regional Office.
Seabird avoidance measures for the Pacific halibut fishery	Proposed rule under review by Regional Office.
Scallop fishing season start change to July 1 in PWS and Yakutat Regulatory areas	Proposed rule being prepared by Regional Office.
Catch sharing plan amendment for Area 4 pacific halibut	Proposed rule being prepared by Regional Office.
CDQ fishery retention of undersized halibut	Proposed rule being prepared by Regional Office.
Catch sharing plan amendment for Area 4 Pacific halibut	Proposed rule being prepared by Regional Office
Require processors to use scales to weigh pollock caught in pollock fisheries	Proposed rule being prepared by Regional Office.
Revision of product recovery rates	Proposed rule being prepared by Regional Office.