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## United States Department of the Interior

### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199

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Agenda Item B-6: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Report  
September 28, 2011

#### **Pacific Walrus**

This year is shaping up to perhaps beat the 2007 low for ice extent in September and we began to see walrus a month earlier than last year along the northwest coast from Barrow to Point Lay. One large haulout of 8,000 to 20,000 animals formed in late August about three miles north of Point Lay. A number of precautions have been implemented to reduce disturbances, e.g., flight and marine advisories, airspace closure, hunting management, etc. We are also engaged with the Village of Point Lay, North Slope Borough, and ADFG to coordinate a mortalities enumeration and sampling program as well as testing the feasibility of collecting tissue samples for genetic analyses.

In addition, the Service has begun a pilot study to test the feasibility of conducting a range-wide genetic mark-recapture project to estimate population size and demographic parameters like survival rates by age/sex classes.

#### **Northern Sea Otter**

The Service conducted sea otter surveys in the western Aleutian Islands in August 2011. Overall, the sea otter counts appear to have been lower than two years ago – only slightly lower at Attu and Agattu Islands, but considerably lower at Amchitka and Kiska Islands. A field report on the survey findings will be completed this fall. The Service is also in the process of reviewing comments on the draft recovery plan for the threatened Southwest Alaska Distinct Population Segment of the northern sea otter, and will be making any necessary revisions before finalizing the plan this fall.

#### **Polar Bear**

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) require the Service to develop recovery (ESA) and conservation (MMPA) plans to identify and implement future conservation, management and research activities. At the international level, the polar bear Range States (U.S., Canada, Russia, Denmark, and Norway) agreed in March 2009 to develop national “action plans” by 2011 to address polar bear conservation in relation to climate change and other stressors so that there will be a coordinated approach to conservation and management

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of polar bears throughout their range. In 2010 we began the process to develop a single plan that would meet requirements set forth under both the ESA and MMPA and help us meet our obligations to the other polar bear Range States.

Since October 2010, the Service has held a series of public workshops in Anchorage to introduce the Conservation/Recovery Planning process, develop response strategies, and discuss recovery criteria with our conservation partners. Representatives from the State of Alaska, Alaska Native organizations, other federal agencies, NGOs, and the oil and gas industry all attended these workshops and provided valuable feedback. The Service intends to develop, and share for comment, future Plan drafts based on workshop results and the input of other polar bear experts.

### **Short-tailed Albatross**

The short-tailed albatross population continues to exhibit an average annual growth rate of approximately 7 percent (Hiroschi Hasegawa, unpublished data, 2011). This positive news on the recovering short-tailed albatross population also brings some concern about the increased probability of taking a short-tailed albatross in the commercial longline fishery because there are more birds occupying the fishing grounds. Historically, most short-tailed albatross interactions with hook and line fisheries in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska occurred during late August through early October. Considering the two takes that occurred last year in late August and mid-September in the Bering Sea, we are hopeful that fishermen take extra care to use streamer-lines and other avoidance techniques such as night setting and moving to alternative fishing areas when short-tailed albatrosses are spotted in the area.