



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

1011 E. Tudor Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199



IN REPLY REFER TO:

FWS/AFES

OCT 01 2012

Agenda Item B-6: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Report
September 28, 2012

Endangered Species Act Issues:

Seabirds:

The first documented observations of short-tailed albatross (or any albatross species) in the Chukchi were reported in August. A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) seabird observer and ship crew members working as part of the Arctic Ecosystem Integrated Survey recorded and photographed a subadult short-tailed albatross on August 18, 2012. The bird was about 70 miles north of Cape Lisburne and 90 miles west of Pt. Lay. We have since learned of a separate reported observation made earlier in August; specifics have not yet been received, but that bird was farther north and close to the ice at the time. These observations may mark an unusual event; be the result of increased sampling effort in the Chukchi; or indicate that birds are moving in response to changing ocean conditions. They may also indicate a re-establishment of historic wanderings by a recovering population. With support by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, USFWS observers have surveyed marine birds in the Chukchi, Bering, and Beaufort Seas each year since 2010, and surveys will continue in 2013.

Marine Mammals:

The Service, with input from National Marine Fisheries Service and Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), is developing new recommendations and guidelines for commercial fishers and support vessels operating in proximity to Pacific walrus haulouts.

For further information on these issues, contact Sonja Jahrsdoefer, Endangered Species Coordinator at (907) 786-3323 or Sonja_Jahrsdoefer@fws.gov.

Federal Subsistence Management:

Returns of many Alaskan Chinook salmon stocks were poor in 2012. Of particular concern were returns that were so low to warrant restrictions in subsistence fisheries. The Chinook salmon returns on both the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers were the lowest on record. As the season progressed, the ability to make escapement to ensure the future of these runs was in question. Service and ADF&G managers jointly took drastic action to protect Chinook salmon, including substantial reductions and eventual closures to all directed subsistence Chinook salmon fishing, and restrictions on fishing for other subsistence salmon species to protect Chinook salmon. Additionally, there were no

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directed commercial openings for Chinook salmon on either system, and sport fishing was closed.

Chinook salmon returns were poor for many populations elsewhere in southwest and southcentral Alaska; including the Karluk River on Kodiak Island; Nelson River on the Alaska Peninsula; and Kenai River in Cook Inlet.

Reasons for these low returns are not known, although ocean conditions, by-catch in high seas fisheries, and in-river harvests are likely contributing factors. In response to poor Chinook salmon returns across the State, Governor Parnell announced the formation of a panel of agency scientists to examine this issue and make recommendations for further research. The Service is working with ADF&G on this effort.

For information, contact Jerry Berg, Subsistence Coordinator at (907) 786-3519 or Jerry_Berg@fws.gov.

Aleutian and Bering Sea Islands Landscape Conservation Cooperative (ABSI LCC):

The Steering Committee of the ABSI LCC will meet in September to review its draft Science Plan. This plan is structured around six landscape-scale stressors: climate variability and change; commercial fisheries; invasive species; marine shipping; ocean acidification, and contaminants and pollutants. Although included in the list of stressors for completeness, the ABSI LCC Steering Committee does not anticipate focusing on commercial fisheries, as there are considerable resources already directed to this topic.

Funding was provided in FY12 to support two projects examining the potential impacts of climate change on seabirds and migratory birds.

The mission of the ABSI LCC is to promote coordination, dissemination, and development of applied science to inform conservation of natural and cultural resources in the face of climate change and other landscape-scale stressors.

For further information on this or other LCCs in Alaska, visit: <http://alaska.fws.gov/lcc/index.htm>. For ABSI-specific information, contact Doug Burn, ABSI LCC Coordinator at (907) 786-3807 or Douglas_Burn@fws.gov.



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SEP 26 2012

Mr. Ken Hansen
Assistant Special Agent in Charge
National Marine Fisheries Service, Office of Law Enforcement
1211 Gibson Cove Road
Kodiak, Alaska 99615

Dear Special Agent Hansen:

Thank you for contacting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service or we), Marine Mammal Management Office requesting recommendations to provide to marine vessels that may be operating near Pacific walrus haulouts in Bristol Bay. We appreciate your interest in ensuring that any marine vessel activities that may occur in Bristol Bay minimize potential impacts to the Pacific walrus.

In addition to the enclosed Fact Sheet entitled *Guidelines for Marine Vessel Operations near Pacific Walrus Haulouts in Bristol Bay*, we are pleased to offer the following additional recommendations:

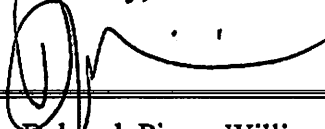
- Continue to enforce the Round Island and Cape Peirce 3 to 12 nautical mile (5.6 to 22.2 kilometers [km]) Federal walrus protection area closures for vessels with Federal Fisheries Permits (FFP's) engaged in fishing operations.
- ~~Establish a safe travel corridor through the Round Island and Cape Peirce Federal walrus protection areas and mandate use of that corridor for vessels with FFP's that are engaged in tendering operations. We are available to work with the National Marine Fisheries Service and other agencies to identify an appropriate location for such a corridor.~~
- Prohibit operation of deck machinery such as winches and cranes or anchoring by vessels with FFP's within the Federal walrus protection areas.
- Recommend compliance with the following guidelines:
 - Request mariners to maintain a separation buffer from walrus hauled out on land or ice to avoid disturbance. Mariners should assume that known haulouts will be occupied during the months of May through September. Mariners must also note that State waters (0 to 3 nautical miles or 0 to 5.6 km) around Round Island, within the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary are closed to all access without prior authorization under State regulations.

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- Vessels 50 feet (~15.24 meters [m]) in length or less should remain at least 0.5 nautical miles (~926 m) away from hauled out walruses.
 - Vessels 50 to 100 feet (15.24 to 30.48 m) in length should remain at least 1 nautical mile (1.9 km) away from hauled out walruses.
 - Vessels greater than 100 feet (30.48 m) in length should remain at least 3 nautical miles (5.6 km) away from hauled out walruses.
 - All vessels should refrain from anchoring, or conducting tendering or fishing operations within 3 nautical miles (5.6 km) of hauled out walruses.
- When traveling in Bristol Bay in the vicinity of known walrus haulouts:
- Travel in a predictable manner and avoid sudden changes in speed or direction.
 - Vessel operators should take every precaution to avoid harassment of concentrations of feeding or swimming walruses, which is a violation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Vessels should reduce speed and maintain a minimum of 0.5 nautical miles (926 m) exclusion zone around feeding walruses. Vessels may not be operated in such a way as to separate members of a group of walruses from other members of the group. When weather conditions require, such as when visibility drops, vessels should adjust speed accordingly to avoid the likelihood of injury to walruses.

Once again thank for contacting our office. If you have additional questions regarding our recommendations please contact Jonathan Snyder, on my staff, at telephone: (907) 786- 3819.

Sincerely,



Deborah Pierce Williams
Chief, Marine Mammals Management

Enclosure

cc: Paul Liedberg, Refuge Manager, Service, Togiak National Wildlife Refuge
Doug McBride, Fisheries Supervisor, Service, Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office
Ed Weiss, Round Island Manager, Alaska Department of Fish and Game



Guidelines for Marine Vessel Operations Near Pacific Walrus Haulouts in Bristol Bay

Please Do Not Disturb!

There are five regularly used walrus haulouts in Bristol Bay, located at Round Island and Hagemeister Islands and Capes Peirce, Newenham, and Seniavin. During the months of May through December, walrus may be encountered in the water and resting on land in these areas. Round Island is part of the State of Alaska Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary and has developed regulations specific to state waters in that area. The guidelines listed here do not supersede or amend the regulations adopted by the State of Alaska for Round Island and mariners need to make themselves aware of those regulations when in the vicinity of the Sanctuary.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act prohibits the TAKE of all marine mammal species in U.S. waters. TAKE is defined as "to harass, hunt, capture, or kill, or attempt to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal." Harassment is defined under the MMPA as "any act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance which has the potential

to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild; or has the potential to disturb a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild by causing disruption of behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering." TAKE is further defined by regulation to include feeding or attempting to feed a marine mammal in the wild. Some exceptions are made for authorized scientific research and subsistence hunting by Alaska Natives.

Marine mammals swimming or hauled out on land, rock or ice are sensitive to boats, and human presence. Noises, smells, and sights may elicit a flight reaction. Trampling deaths associated with haulout disturbance are among the largest known sources of natural mortality for walrus. Frequent or



Pacific walrus fleeing a terrestrial haulout in response to human induced disturbance.

USFWS

prolonged disturbances may even result in long term haulout abandonment. Your vessel may not be the only one that day that has interacted with a particular group of walrus, please be aware that increasing levels of disturbance may occur with each successive interaction.

Signs of disturbance to animals hauled out on the beach may include any of the following behaviors (generally listed in increasing intensity of disturbance):

- Several individuals raising their heads simultaneously
- Increased vocalizations
- Increased interactions among individuals in the herd
- Aggressive behavior by animals towards the disturbance
- Movement towards the water
- Hurried entry into the water

Much of the disturbance that impacts marine mammals in the water is related to underwater sound produced by a vessel's engines and propellers.

Cautiously move away from the animals if you observe any of the following behaviors:

- Rapid changes in direction or swimming speed
- Erratic swimming patterns
- Grouping up and "head bobbing" to investigate the source of the disturbance
- Escape tactics such as prolonged diving, underwater exhalation, underwater course changes, or rapid swimming at the surface
- Females attempting to shield a calf with her body or by her movements

GUIDELINES FOR VESSEL OPERATIONS

Marine motor vessels should maintain a separation buffer from walrus hauled out on land or ice to avoid disturbance. Mariners should assume that known walrus haulouts will be occupied. Mariners should also note that state waters (0 – 3 nautical miles) around Round Island, within the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary are closed to all access without prior authorization under state regulations.

- Marine vessels 50 feet in length or less should remain at least a 0.5 nautical mile away from hauled out walrus.
- Marine vessels 50 - 100 feet in length should remain at least 1 nautical mile away from hauled out walrus.
- Marine vessels greater than 100 feet in length should remain at least 3 nautical miles away from hauled out walrus.

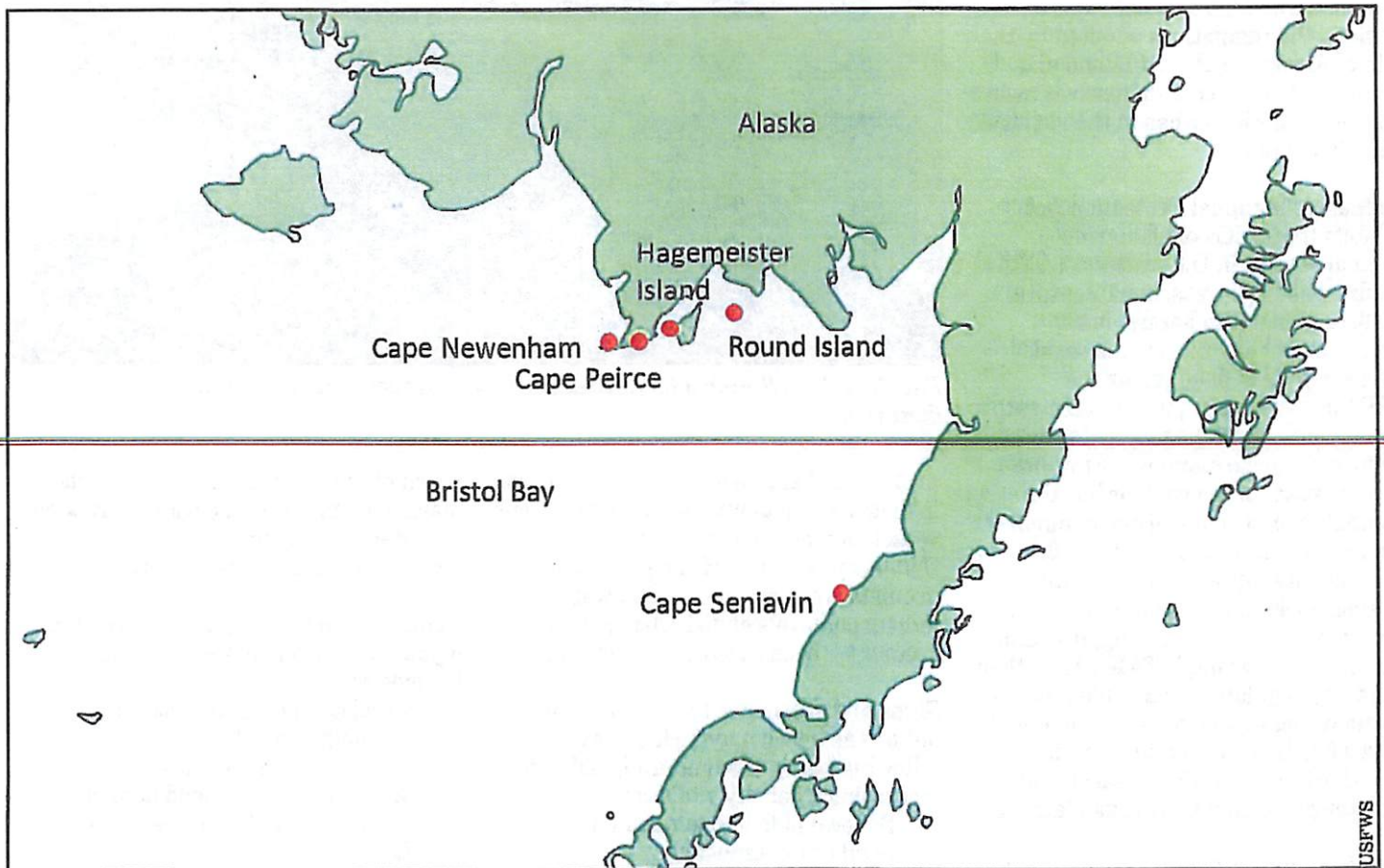
- All vessels should refrain from anchoring, or conducting tendering or fishing operations within 3 miles of hauled out walrus.

Sound carries a long way across the water and often reverberates off of cliffs and bluffs adjacent to walrus haulouts amplifying the level of noise. Reduce noise levels near haulouts. Avoid sudden changes in engine noise, using loud speakers, loud deck equipment or other operations that produce noise when in the vicinity of walrus haulouts.

Vessels traveling in a predictable manner appear to be less disturbing to swimming walrus. Avoid excessive speed or sudden changes in speed or direction when approaching or departing walrus haulout areas. Vessel operators should take every precaution to avoid harassment of

concentrations of feeding or swimming walrus. Vessels should reduce speed and maintain a minimum 0.5 - nautical mile exclusion zone around feeding walrus. Vessels may not be operated in such a way as to separate members of a group of walrus from other members of the group. When weather conditions require, such as when visibility drops, vessels should adjust speed accordingly to avoid the likelihood of injury to walrus.

Harassment or pursuit of marine mammals is prohibited by law. Never attempt to herd, chase, or separate groups of walrus.



The Five Regularly Used Pacific Walrus Haulouts in Bristol Bay

For more information, contact:
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907/786 3800 or 800/362 5148
<http://alaska.fws.gov>

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