



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

National Marine Fisheries Service  
P.O. Box 21668  
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

May 20, 2021

Simon Kinneen, Chair  
North Pacific Fishery Management Council  
1007 West Third, Suite 400  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Dear Mr. Kinneen:

We are writing to inform you that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has begun revising the 2007 Conservation Plan for the Eastern Pacific Stock of Northern Fur Seal pursuant to section 115(b) of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). The MMPA requires conservation plans for marine mammal species or stocks that are designated as “depleted.” NMFS designated the northern fur seal stock of the Pribilof Islands (St. Paul and St. George) to be depleted in 1988 due to their population decline to less than 50% of levels observed in the late 1950s, and the stock (now known as the Eastern Pacific stock) remains depleted.

NMFS staff have briefed the Council’s Ecosystem Committee and Scientific and Statistical Committee on various aspects of the fur seal research and management over the past few years and we will continue to do so. Our efforts to more regularly engage the Council on northern fur seal issues stemmed from the December 2016 Scientific and Statistical Committee meeting and subsequent Council minutes from 2017 requesting the agency report on the status, trends, and plans for research and management of fur seals, as well as Ecosystem Committee discussions recognizing the need to update the Conservation Plan. NMFS briefed the Ecosystem Committee during the June 2018 Council meeting and provided an extensive background and review of our activities under the Conservation Plan. At that time we noted that our intent was to revisit the Conservation Plan after we completed the revision of the regulations for the subsistence use of fur seals on the Pribilof Islands. We concluded that rulemaking in 2019 and have been working with our tribal co-management partners to implement the new regime for subsistence use, and we are now returning to the Conservation Plan.

We intend to revise the plan with input and participation from our tribal co-management partners on St. Paul and St. George Islands. The tentative timeline is to complete a draft of the conservation plan by the end of the calendar year and publish a notice of availability for public comment. We request an opportunity to update the Council on our progress during your October 2021 meeting. Please have Council staff contact [michael.williams@noaa.gov](mailto:michael.williams@noaa.gov) or [killai.gibson@noaa.gov](mailto:killai.gibson@noaa.gov) to schedule the presentation(s).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JB", with a stylized flourish at the end.

James W. Balsiger, Ph.D.  
Administrator, Alaska Region

