



# North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management



Sketch by Jean Craighead George

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## THE TOWLINE

VOL 12 NO 1

### *From the Director*

At the Department of Wildlife Management (DWM) we continue to work amidst the coronavirus pandemic. Some meetings have been cancelled, and some have been switched to telephonic or video meetings, but we carry on to the best of our abilities.

Some of our field work will be delayed, perhaps until next year; some of our field work will be able to continue this summer and beyond. We will take each week as it comes, reassessing as needed.



*Quyanaq,  
Taqulik Hepa*

However, your DWM is always here to assist with any questions or concerns on the health of your harvest, whether marine mammal, terrestrial mammal, bird, or fish. You can email photos and/or mail samples to us and we will get the information back to you in a timely manner. Together we will get through this tough time. Please call us at 852-0350.

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### *Bowhead Whale Population Estimates*

Counting bowhead whales is one of the most important jobs of the Department of Wildlife Management. The International Whaling Commission requires that we have a new population estimate at least once every 10 years to support the AEWIC's quota request. In 2019, we supported two independent projects to estimate abundance, the ice-based count and an aerial survey.

We have used an ice-based survey for decades, beginning in the early 1980s. In 2011, we had great conditions and estimated that 16,820 whales (95% confidence interval [CI] of 15,176 to 18,643) migrated past Utqiagvik during the spring. In 2019, we had more difficult conditions but were able to estimate the population size to be 12,505 whales (95% CI of 7,994 to 19,560). Even though this number is smaller than the 2011 estimate, statistically we think the population is stable for several reasons. Ice conditions were really different in 2019, which may have caused bowheads to swim farther away from the ice edge than normal. We likely

missed more whales than usual that were too far away from our observation perch to count. During the first two weeks of April and after 23 May, we were not able to count because of closed leads and unsafe conditions. Many whales probably passed by that we could not see. Those things make us suspect that our estimate for 2019 was low.

Because the ice is now thinner and less stable, it is becoming more and more difficult for us to count whales from the ice edge. Therefore we are looking for other ways of counting whales. One approach is through aerial surveys. We collaborated with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) to fly a survey in August 2019 from Point Barrow in the west to the Amundsen Gulf in the eastern Beaufort Sea in Canada. That survey resulted in a population estimate of 14,531 whales (95% CI 7,968 to 29,376).

Both of these estimates are now being reviewed by the IWC's Scientific Committee.

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## *NSB Fish and Game Management Committee*

The North Slope Borough Fish and Game Management Committee (NSB FGMC) is an appointed body that was created by an NSB ordinance revised on Nov. 6, 1979 (see Chapter 6.04 of the NSB Code of Ordinances) to advise the NSB and the Department of Wildlife Management regarding wildlife issues. The Committee is comprised of one member from each NSB village, who is appointed by the village's Council and one member-at-large. Meetings are held about four times per year, either in person or via telephone, and the representatives report results of the meeting back to their council.

The NSB-DWM works closely with the NSB FGMC in developing and implementing management programs for subsistence use animals. Since this committee has a representative from each village, it is valuable for the Department to:

- 1) Bring village concerns to the attention of the NSB, North Slope researchers, and State and Federal agency representatives;
- 2) Initiate dialogue on critical issues between Committee members and the DWM, North Slope researchers, and State and Federal agency representatives, and;
- 3) Assist in the local coordination of wildlife studies conducted by the DWM, North Slope researchers, and State and Federal management programs.

An important responsibility of the FGMC and the DWM is to advocate for subsistence hunting rights, especially for State and Federal hunting regulations to be consistent with traditional hunting practices, so attending Alaska Board of Game (BOG) meetings is essential. In early March 2020, NSB FGMC members Eli Nukapigak (Chair), Esther Hugo, and Lee Kayotuk attended the Alaska BOG Region 3 meeting in Fairbanks. They were accompanied by NSB DWM staff Brower Frantz, Dr. Brian Person, Taqulik Hepa, Nicole Kanayurak, and Jaky-Lou Olemaun, as well as Anaktuvuk Pass Mayor Charles Hugo and NSB Mayor Harry K. Brower, Jr. Our team provided testimony in support of some and opposing other State hunting and trapping regulation proposals that the BOG considered:

- we offered proposals for the increased take of brown bear, which BOG supported partially;
- the BOG did not support proposals for changes in regulations for musk oxen and caribou hunts;
- we opposed the increase of caribou harvest for non-residents from 1 to 2 bulls in Unit 26, and the BOG also opposed this proposal;

- we opposed the repeal of the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area. The BOG took no action but will revisit this proposal next March 2021.

Had our team, and other groups, not provided strong opposition to this last proposal, the BOG would have likely eliminated the current Dalton Highway Management Corridor Area. We still have a substantial amount of work ahead of us to ensure they do not support this proposal at the Statewide meeting in March of 2021.

An Alaska BOG Region 5 meeting was held in Nome on January 17-20, 2020 with similar concerns about how proposals would affect our communities. Attendees to that meeting were NSB FGMC members Wanda Kippi, Joe Leavitt, and Eli Nukapigak, and DWM staff members Taqulik Hepa, Brower Frantz, Carla Sims Kayotuk, and Dr. Brian Person. The North Slope team provided testimony to:

- support the reauthorization of the antlerless moose season in unit 26A, which passed;
- support the elimination of registration caribou permit and general season caribou harvest ticket requirements for NSB resident hunters, which failed;
- support an increase in resident bag limit of brown bears from 1 to 2 in unit 26A, which passed;
- and we opposed an increase in nonresident bag limit for caribou, which failed.

The outcomes from BOG meetings around the state will be found in the 2020/2021 Hunting Regulations put out by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in June. The new regulations will be in effect on July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021. To see these regulations and for more information on Alaska state hunting regulations, go to <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm%3Fadfg=hunting.regulations>. You can also call DWM staff at 852-0350 about your questions and concerns.

Current NSB FGMC members include Esther Hugo, Anaktuvuk Pass; Wanda Kippi, Atqasuk; Joe Mello Leavitt, Utqiagvik; Lee Kayotuk, Kaktovik; Eli Nukapigak, Nuiqsut; Leonard Barger, Point Hope; Robert Lisbourne, Point Lay; Raymond Aguvluk, Sr., Wainwright; and William Hopson, member-at-large. Brower Frantz, NSB-DWM Subsistence Research Coordinator, is the Executive Manager for the Committee. Please contact your representative to provide information to the Committee on subsistence activities and concerns from your community or to obtain more information. Individuals, groups or agencies can contact Brower Frantz at 852-0350 to be added to meeting agendas. The next NSB FGMC meeting is tentatively scheduled for June 2020, depending on the status of the pandemic.

## Scavenger Hunt with DWM

Look through the NSB Department of Wildlife Management website pages to answer the questions below!

Start here: <http://www.north-slope.org/departments/wildlife-management>

### Co-Management!

Which Alaska Native Co-Management Organization deals with the animal listed below?

Aġviq

\_\_\_\_\_

Aiviq

\_\_\_\_\_

Ugruk

\_\_\_\_\_

Niġliq

\_\_\_\_\_

Nanuq

\_\_\_\_\_

Sisuaq or Qiłalugaq

\_\_\_\_\_

### What's your Fave?

Click on "Other Topics of Interest" page.  
Write down your favorite animal from these pages:

Common Birds on the North Slope

\_\_\_\_\_

Common Fish on the North Slope

\_\_\_\_\_

Common Invertebrates on the North Slope

\_\_\_\_\_

Common Mammals on the North Slope

\_\_\_\_\_

### Sunauna

1. What is the NSB Fish and Game Management Committee, and who is the representative from your village?

2. On the North Slope, who can you call for these wildlife emergencies?

Marine mammal stranded on the beach

\_\_\_\_\_

Polar bear or brown bear near village

3. Why is the Subsistence Harvest Documentation Program important? List 2 benefits for collecting this data from hunters.

1)

2)

4. Find the "Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Bowhead Whales" webpage. Western science is catching up with traditional knowledge. What is one thing that scientists learned that hunters and whalers on the North Slope already knew about bowheads?

## *Subsistence Research Specialist Training*

The NSB Department of Wildlife Management is happy to announce that we have hired six Subsistence Research Specialists to work in the villages of Anaktuvuk Pass, Atqasuk, Kaktovik, Nuiqsut, Point Hope, Utqiagvik, and Wainwright. We are in the process of hiring a Specialist for Point Lay as well.

Our Subsistence Research Specialists traveled to Utqiagvik, some last fall and some early in 2020, for a training on conducting harvest surveys. The training focused on the importance of hunter/harvester confidentiality, accuracy in data collection, such as identity of harvested item, numbers, size, location, and hunter concerns. Training helps to ensure that we collect quality data that is comparable between villages and between years. The survey summaries are reported by community, not by individual, and you can read harvest reports from previous years on our website:

<http://www.north-slope.org/departments/wildlife-management/studies-and-research-projects/subsistence-harvest-documentation#SHDP>.

The data collected via the community surveys is used to help our Department in making recommendations to state and federal agencies, industry and others, to ensure that North Slope residents can continue to hunt and gather for generations

to come. The data also help to shape our Department studies and priorities.

The Subsistence Research Specialists are also provided with guidance and supplies to work with our Department biologists and local communities in assisting with sample collection of harvested game for our health assessment program, and also to help collect samples from animals harvested and of concern to the harvester.

The quality of data collected for our Harvest Documentation Program requires not only trained Specialists but the cooperation of harvesters. By working together we can gather quality data that will help us collect information needed to support NSB residents, as well as many co-management organizations such as the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-management Council, the Ice Seal Committee, and the Alaska Beluga Whale Committee.

You can expect to be contacted by the Subsistence Research Specialist in your community once or twice per year. If you have questions or concerns, you can contact them any time of the year and they will make sure your concerns are heard by the appropriate DWM staff or other agency. Here are your Specialists: Cora Morry, Anaktuvuk Pass; Olive Kanayurak, Atqasuk; Michael Tuzroyluk, Point Hope; Hattie Aishanna, Kaktovik; Peter Kosbruk, Nuiqsut; JakyLou Olemaun, Utqiagvik; and Larae Agnasagga, Wainwright. You can also contact Carla Sims Kayotuk, Subsistence Research Coordinator who manages this program at 907-640-4317 in Kaktovik.

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## *Caribou Harvest Report*

The NSB DWM has collected subsistence harvest data on fish, birds, marine and terrestrial mammals, and plants utilized by residents of the North Slope beginning in the early 1990's. In some years this program has struggled to consistently collect and analyze these data in all communities due to various staffing, logistic, and financial set-backs. Beginning in 2014, the DWM has made a concerted effort to improve the consistent collection of caribou harvest data due to the decline of caribou populations on the North Slope.

A report for the caribou surveys, Subsistence Harvest of Caribou in Eight North Slope Villages, Alaska: 2014-2018, has been completed and is available on our website or from our office. This report provides information on the methods used to collect and analyze caribou harvest data,

discusses ways that we have tried to improve this program, and presents caribou harvest estimates for each North Slope community. The report was written by DWM Senior Wildlife Biologist Dr. Brian Person, DWM Subsistence Research Coordinator Carla Sims Kayotuk, and DWM Subsistence Research Specialist Frances "JakyLou" Olemaun. Data used in this report was collected in all villages in 2014 for the NSB 2015 Profile and Census, and by S. R. Braund & Associates for all coastal communities in 2015 and for Nuiqsut in 2015-2018. We greatly appreciate their willingness to collect that information for our Department along with their project, reducing the number of surveys expected of our residents.

In short, community caribou harvest was consistently highest in Utqiagvik (average of 3,114 caribou) and Wainwright (average of 888 caribou). Community

*Continued on page 5*

## ***Caribou Harvest Report (continued from page 4)***

caribou harvest was lowest in Kaktovik (average of 182 caribou) and Point Hope (average of 490 caribou). These lower averages are likely the result of variability of caribou distribution and logistical challenges for accessing caribou when they are near those communities.

Average household caribou harvest was consistently highest for the communities of Wainwright (5.8 caribou per household) and Anaktuvuk Pass (7.6 caribou per household) which emphasizes the importance of caribou in these communities. However, caribou are the most important terrestrial resource in all communities on the North Slope.

Currently, our subsistence staff is attempting to conduct caribou harvest surveys over the phone due to the COVID19 pandemic. We recognize this is not the best way to collect this important information but believe it is important to practice social distancing while keeping our employees and community members safe during these times. We appreciate the patience and understanding of those households willing to take part in this work. You can contact Brian Person at 907-852-0350 or Carla Sims Kayotuk at 907-640-4317 for more information.

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## ***Bowhead Whale Population Estimates (continued from page 1)***

We expect that the IWC will accept the ice-based estimate as a number that can be used successfully to support the quota request from the AEW. We are not sure when we will again attempt to count bowheads but perhaps in another 6 or 7 years. Many thanks to

the NSB Mayor's Office, NSB Assembly, NMFS, and the AEW for financial support for the ice-based survey, and to the many people who helped us count whales. We also thank BOEM and NMFS for their efforts to successfully fly the aerial surveys.

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## ***2020 Marine Research Award Recipients: ABWC and Carin Ashjian***

The Alaska Sea Life Center announced the recipients of the 2020 Marine Research Award to be shared by Carin Ashjian and the Alaska Beluga Whale Committee (ABWC). This honor is given to a scientist, team of scientists, or an institution that is acknowledged by peers to have made an original breakthrough contribution to any field of scientific knowledge about Alaska's oceans. These awards were presented at the Alaska Marine Science Symposium in Anchorage on January 28<sup>th</sup>.

The ABWC serves as the co-management partner with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) for four stocks of belugas in western and northern Alaska. Since its creation in 1988, the committee has encouraged and promoted the conservation of and informed, sustainable management of beluga whales through collaboration among Alaska Native subsistence hunters, biologists, and agency managers. They have initiated and continue management of this important resource and conduct scientific research on belugas to address management needs. At the time the ABWC was formed, there was little precedent for hunters and scientists working together.

Today, the committee brings representatives from beluga hunting communities in Alaska; local, state, tribal and federal governments; and beluga researchers together to discuss management and conservation issues, the biology of belugas, and the needs for additional information. Because of the Committee, data is

available on the annual harvest of belugas since 1988, population estimates, satellite tracking of belugas, and genetic sampling from approximately 2,500 beluga whales. The information and transparency shared by the ABWC provide assurances to Alaska, the U.S., and the international community that belugas in western and northern Alaska are being well managed. Representatives from NSB villages attend the ABWC meetings, including from Point Hope, Point Lay, Wainwright, and Utqiagvik. The North Slope Borough helps to manage the annual funding provided by NOAA for meetings and research, and DWM staff have been members of the Committee since the beginning.

The shared recipient, Carin Ashjian of Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in Massachusetts, has collaborated with the NSB on studies in the Beaufort Sea for many years. Carin's research group looked at bowhead feeding and prey availability, and were able to explain the "krill trap" that occurs under some environmental and oceanographic conditions in the western Beaufort Sea. Currently, Carin is part of the Mosaic Expedition, iced in on the research vessel Polar Stern near the North Pole, conducting studies on the life history of zooplankton in the Arctic Ocean. This research is important as not much is known from that latitude. You can follow the expedition here: <https://mosaic-expedition.org/>.

Congratulations to the ABWC and to Carin Ashjian and her research group!



**North Slope Borough  
Department of Wildlife Management**

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Director: Taqulik Hepa  
Deputy Director: Nicole Kanayurak

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*We thank the NSB Assembly and Mayor Brower  
for their continued support. **Quyanaqqak!***

FIND NSB-DWM  
ON [FACEBOOK!](#)

## *Wrap-up of the Fulbright Arctic Initiative*

An important objective of our department is to represent the North Slope in science and technical forums and conduct scientific and Indigenous knowledge research important to wildlife resource management. Dr. Todd Sformo and Deputy Director Nicole Kanayurak wrapped up their participation in the Fulbright Arctic Initiative (2018-2019). This initiative brought together a network of scholars, professionals, and applied researchers from across the Arctic to address key research and policy questions related to creating a secure and sustainable Arctic.

At the end of October 2019, Todd and Nicole presented their research and policy recommenda-

tions to decision makers in Washington D.C. Their cohort focused on the importance of understanding scales of risk in the Arctic and the need to support health and wellbeing in Arctic communities. Four recommendations for Arctic Policy Makers were generated: 1) acknowledge and integrate Indigenous rights and knowledge, 2) take meaningful action to address Indigenous determinants of health, 3) expand monitoring and assessment programs, and 4) implement community-led critical research approaches. You may read the policy brief here:

[https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/event/fulbright\\_arctic\\_policy\\_brief\\_web.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/event/fulbright_arctic_policy_brief_web.pdf)

## *ICC's Emerging Alaskan Inuit Leaders Initiative*

Our Subsistence Research Specialist from Utqiagvik, Frances "JakyLou" Olemaun, was selected to participate in the Inuit Circumpolar Council's (ICC) Emerging Alaskan Inuit Leaders Initiative. Six Alaskan Inuit were selected, out of 54 applicants, and each participant is mentored by senior members of the ICC leadership. This initiative engages and mentors Inuit youth as future emerging leaders, and encourages them to become contributing members of the community, to value their Inuit culture and traditions, and to contribute to the future planning for their communities.

JakyLou is the only participant from the North Slope, and is working with her mentor Nicole Kanayurak on the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) Working Group. PAME, one of six working groups under the Arctic Council, focuses on the protection and sustainable use of the Arc-

tic marine environment. ICC represents Inuit across Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka to ensure that concerns about their lifestyle and culture are being met at an international level.

Since the start of the Emerging Leaders Program, JakyLou has participated in three different meetings with each one being a great learning experience for her. She attended the initiative's kick-off at the ICC Alaska Board meeting in Anchorage in October, an ICC Executive Council meeting in Greenland in November, and a PAME meeting in Norway in February.

JakyLou is learning about ICC and the Arctic Council, Inuit representation at the state, national and international level, and interacting with youth from across the circumpolar Arctic. In turn, the ICC greatly benefits from the youths' perspectives and the development of future leaders.