

**ICE SEAL COMMITTEE**

**CO-MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

**Hilton Anchorage Hotel – Anchorage, Alaska**

**January 19, 2012 @ 9:00 am**

1. Call to Order
2. Invocation
3. Roll Call (BBNA, AVCP, Kawerak, Maniilaq, NSB)  
NMFS (3 members)  
A quorum for a Co-Management meeting is 6 members
4. Select Chair by Consensus
5. **Adoption of a Management Plan for Ice Seals in Alaska**
6. Old Business
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
7. New Business
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Adjournment

# ICE SEAL MANAGEMENT PLAN



Ice Seal Committee  
Unanimously Adopted on January 20, 2012  
Anchorage, Alaska

# ICE SEAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

## INTRODUCTION

Four species of ice-associated seals, bearded (*Erignathus barbatus*), ribbon (*Histiophoca fasciata*), ringed (*Phoca hispida*), and spotted (*Phoca largha*) seals, inhabit the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort seas in the Alaskan Arctic. Collectively, they are known as ice seals and are vital resources for Alaska Native communities, as well as key ecological components of Arctic marine ecosystems. Ice seals are highly dependent on suitable sea ice conditions and distribution, and therefore may be particularly vulnerable to climatic change, offshore oil development, or other environmental impacts that could alter their habitat. Further studies are needed to document the seals' population status, stock structure, trends in abundance, seasonal movements, diving behavior, life history, diet, and harvest rates.

Ice seals are hunted in coastal Alaska from Bristol Bay to the Beaufort Sea and are an important traditional subsistence resource in many, if not all, coastal villages.

Ice seal hunters, tribes, and researchers have become more concerned about ice seals because of several recent events:

- Reduction in sea ice habitat associated with climate change
- Changes in snow and ice cover of arctic waters
- Offshore oil & gas development
- Increased ship traffic
- Environmental contamination
- Natural predation, prey availability and noise protection

Representatives from the five ice seal hunting regions (Bristol Bay, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Bering Straits, Northwest Arctic & Arctic Slope), National Marine Fisheries Service, and other interested parties, organized the Ice Seal Committee in 2003 to address ice seal concerns. A co-management agreement was signed with National Marine Fisheries Service in 2006. The Ice Seal Committee (Bristol Bay Native Association, Association of Village Council Presidents, Kawerak, Inc., Maniilaq Association, and the North Slope Borough) is dedicated to ice seal conservation, habitat protection, and preservation of the traditional ice seal subsistence harvest. The means to achieve these goals is through ice seal co-management between hunters and the National Marine Fisheries Service, and through self regulation by hunter groups. This management plan outlines the principles by which the members of the Ice Seal Committee will manage ice seals.

## ICE SEAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

- I. **CONSERVATION:** Maintain healthy ice seal resources for subsistence use and public enjoyment by future generations.
- II. **HARVEST:** Encourage the safe and efficient harvest, processing, and use of ice seals; and reduce the number of struck and lost ice seals through regional management plans.
- III. **USE:** Ensure that ice seals are used as fully as possible, in a non-wasteful manner.
- IV. **REPORTING and MONITORING:** Obtain accurate harvest information and biological samples from each region in order to provide information needed to make sound management decisions.
- V: **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT:** Educate and promote understanding about ice seal issues among subsistence harvesters, users, resource managers, and other interested parties.
- VI. **RESEARCH:** Obtain biological information necessary for sound management and conservation of ice seals; and incorporate appropriate traditional ecological knowledge.
- VII. **ENFORCEMENT:** Oversee enforcement of regional management plans and hunting guidelines; promote enforcement of habitat protection laws, in order to maintain healthy ice seal populations for future generations; and ensure hunting opportunities for the subsistence users.

## MANAGEMENT PLAN GOALS

- Maintain healthy ice seal populations in Alaska waters
- Provide for adequate subsistence harvest of ice seals
- Protect hunting privileges for Alaska Native subsistence hunters

## **I. ICE SEAL CONSERVATION**

**Goal** - Maintain healthy ice seal populations for subsistence use and public enjoyment by future generations.

- A. Habitat protection
  - i. Identify and protect areas that are important for pupping, , feeding, migrating, and other biological processes.
  - ii. Identify important habitat concentration areas and suggest ways to mitigate impacts from industrial and commercial activities in these areas.
- B. Subsistence harvest
  - i. Base harvest levels on population abundances and cultural, traditional and nutritional needs.
  - ii. Without adequate biological information, the harvest will be based on current community needs
- C. Industrial and commercial activities
  - i. Identify and monitor activities that may adversely affect ice seal populations and the ability for subsistence users to hunt ice seals
  - ii. Provide recommendations to minimize effects upon ice seals and hunting
- D. Information exchange
  - i. Encourage the international exchange of information
- E. Management plans
  - i. Develop joint management plans for shared ice seal stocks
  - ii. Encourage and assist regions to develop regional management plans
- F. Disease and health monitoring of the ice seal population

## **II. ICE SEAL HARVEST**

**Goal** - Encourage the safe and efficient harvest, processing, and use of ice seals; and reduce the number of struck and lost seals through regional management plans

- A. Subsistence harvest
  - i. Establish harvest guidelines for ice seals by the communities' needs
  - ii. Establish requirements needed to keep the number of struck and lost ice seals to a minimum
  - iii. Determine subsistence uses of ice seals in each region
  - iv. The ISC supports local efforts to maintain a cultural ethic of avoiding waste and unnecessary loss, so that all harvest goes towards community cultural and nutritional needs.

### **III. ICE SEAL USE**

**Goal** – Ensure that ice seals are used in a non-wasteful manner

- A. Ice seal use
  - i. Local consumption is the first priority, which includes traditional and customary uses
    - i. Includes sharing, bartering, and customary trade in ice seal products with other Alaska Natives that are non-commercial in nature
  - ii. Other legal uses maybe allowed if affected villages and the Ice Seal Committee are consulted and the subsistence priority is met. Affected communities need to be consulted, involved, and approve and support the use
    - i. Research
    - ii. Live capture (as approved by the ISC)
    - iii. Tourism
  - iii. The ISC prohibits the re-introduction of rehabilitated marine mammals into subsistence populations of marine mammals.

### **IV. ICE SEAL REPORTING AND MONITORING**

**Goal** - Obtain accurate harvest information and biological samples from each region in order to provide the information needed to make sound management decisions.

- A. Harvest reporting and monitoring
  - i. Regional representatives will report all harvested and struck and lost ice seal information to the Ice Seal Committee Information will be used to assist in making management decisions
  - ii. Forms will be completed, whenever possible, that will identify: species, gender, age (jaw), morphometrics, , hunting area, and hunting effort
  - iii. Harvest monitors will be hired from villages, whenever possible
    - i. They will collect harvest information, measure harvested ice seals, and collect biological samples
  - iv. Hunters will cooperate with harvest monitors and provide harvest data and harvest samples
  - v. Harvest surveys shall not overburden rural residents or regional, tribal, state, and local Alaska Native Organizations. Therefore, sampling schemes will be designated to limit the burden.

## V. ICE SEAL OUTREACH

**Goal** - Educate and promote understanding about ice seal issues among users, resource managers, and other interested groups

- A. Promote hunter education
  - i. Improve hunting, harvest methods, and harvest reports
- B. Involve users and others
  - i. Who will participate in planning, prioritizing, and conducting research and in making regulations and management decisions
- C. Provide information to the public, appropriate resource management agencies, and/or other interested parties
- D. Serve as a contact for information exchange about ice seals
- E. Establish a training program to directly involve local people in harvest monitoring, collecting biological samples, and research.

## VI. ICE SEAL RESEARCH

**Goal** - Obtain biological information and traditional ecological knowledge necessary for sound management and ice seal conservation

- A. The Ice Seal Committee recommends the following biological studies:
  - i. Determine ice seal stocks in Alaska
  - ii. Determine population abundances
  - iii. Develop population models for each ice seal stock
  - iv. Create models using the following information: population size, birth rate, gender composition, age composition, age at sexual maturity, and mortality
  - v. Determine effects of man-made disturbance and noise
  - vi. Determine stock movements (migration patterns)
  - vii. Identify critical areas for pupping, migration, and feeding
  - viii. Examine the interactions between fisheries and ice seals
  - ix. Determine harmful contaminants
  - x. Monitor the prevalence of disease in the ice seal population
  - xi. Compile and incorporate traditional ecological knowledge on ice seals into proposed and current research activities
  - xii. In the absence of biological information on sustainable harvest levels, and to minimize the burden on subsistence users, the ISC recommends further research on biological indicators of potential future population declines, such as poor body condition or changes in distribution.

- B. The Ice Seal Committee recommends the following subsistence studies:
  - i. Document ice seal use, how they are hunted, and their cultural and subsistence importance to ice seal hunting communities in Alaska.
  - ii. Identify user groups (subsistence and non-consumptive users).
  - iii. Compile information on ice seal harvest on hunting locations, , hours, methods, etc.
  - iv. Conduct a feasibility study, upon request, on other potential uses of ice seals, including tourism and live capture (as approved by the ISC).

## **VII. ICE SEAL ENFORCEMENT**

**Goal** - Oversee enforcement of regional management plans and hunting guidelines; and promote habitat protection laws to maintain healthy ice seal populations for future generations and to ensure future hunting opportunities for subsistence users.

- A. Establish enforcement procedures
  - i. For each region, through consultation with the Ice Seal Committee
    - i. Regional plans and for other agreements entered into with management agencies
- B. The Ice Seal Committee will hold a special hearing if there is an infraction left unresolved at the regional level.
  - i. The Ice Seal Committee will decide the penalty of any infraction in a timely manner
- C. If a person or entity willfully disregards the decisions made by the Ice Seal Committee, the infraction will be referred to National Marine Fisheries Service, Office of Law Enforcement



**AGENDA**

**ICE SEAL COMMITTEE**

**Hilton Anchorage Hotel – Anchorage, Alaska**

**January 19-20, 2012 @ 1:00 pm**

1. **Call To Order** (Chairman – John Goodwin)
2. **Invocation**
3. **Roll Call** (Establish a Quorum – 3 Members)
4. **Introductions & Welcome Remarks**
5. **Approval of Agenda**
6. **Election of Officers**
  - a. Chair
  - b. Vice-Chair
  - c. Secretary/Treasurer
7. **Approve Minutes from Previous Meeting**
  - a. July 13-14, 2011 Meeting
  - b. October 11, 2011 Special Meeting via Teleconference
8. **Financial Report** – Grant #NA11NMF4390135 – Mike Pederson
  - a. Interim Report for January 19, 2011 (see Progress report)
9. **Regional Reports**
  - a. Bristol Bay Native Association
  - b. Association of Village Council Presidents
  - c. Kawerak, Inc.
  - d. Maniilaq Association
  - e. North Slope Borough Dept. of Wildlife Management

**10. Research**

- a. Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game
  - i. NMFS funded
  
- b. National Marine Mammal Laboratory
  - i. NMFS funded
  - ii. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management funded
  
- c. Kotzebue IRA
  - i. FWS Tribal Wildlife Grant funded

**11. Federal Agency Report**

- a. National Marine Fisheries Service
  - i. Endangered Species Act Update – Barbara Mahoney, Tammy Olson

**12. OLD BUSINESS**

- a. Ice Seal Management Plan
- b. Update on Kawerak's Ice Seal & Walrus Research Project
- c. Logo for the ISC (Focus on a seal itself or multiple seals, ice habitat, and similar hunting tools, etc.)

**13. NEW BUSINESS**

- a. Ice Seal & Walrus Disease Outbreak
  - i. NSB Dept. of Wildlife Management (Jason Herreman, Raphaela S.)
  - ii. Kathy Burek-Huntington, AK. Veterinary Pathology Services
- b. Unusual Mortality Event (UME)
  - i. On-Site Coordinator, NSB DWM
  - ii. NMFS
- c. ASRC Energy Services. Update on Operations & 2011 Seal Sightings. Meghan Larson.
- d. Oil & Gas Development
  - i. Oil Spill Contingency Plans (Ice Seals/Marine Mammals)
  - ii. Invite Alaska Clean Seas to next ISC meeting
  - iii. Discuss response & rehabilitation for stranded/oiled seals from a spill
- e. ISC By-Laws - Amendments

**14. Time & Place of Next Meeting**

**15. Adjournment**

**DRAFT AGENDA**

**ICE SEAL COMMITTEE**

**Via Teleconference  
February 13, 2012 @ 9:00 am**

1. Call To Order (Chairman – John Goodwin)
2. Invocation
3. Roll Call (Establish a Quorum – 3 Members)
4. Introductions & Welcome Remarks
5. Approval of Agenda
6. OLD BUSINESS
  - a. Proposed Bearded Seal Research Study in Kotzebue, Alaska from University of California-Santa Cruz
7. Time & Place of Next Meeting
8. Adjournment

**ICE SEAL COMMITTEE**

**c/o North Slope Borough Dept. of Wildlife Management**

**P.O. Box 69**

**Barrow, Alaska 99723**

**Phone: 907.852.0351 / Fax: 907.852.0351**

February 29, 2012

Chief, Permits and Conservation Division

Office of Protected Resources

National Marine Fisheries Service

1315 East-West Highway

Room 13705

Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

**Reference: File # 15142:**

**Acquisition of Wild Bearded Seals for Sensory Assessment at Long  
Marine Lab, Santa Cruz, California**

*Via Fax: 301.713.0376 or email: [NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov](mailto:NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov)*

Dear Chief:

Please accept this letter as a response to the permit application noted above.

The Ice Seal Committee (ISC) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have signed a co-management agreement to conserve ice seal populations, habitat, and subsistence hunting in order to preserve Alaska Native cultures and traditions. As you are aware, the ICS is composed of many Natives from diverse communities who respect the intrinsic value of our entire region's wildlife. The ISC represents the regions of Bristol Bay, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Bering Straits, Northwest Arctic and the Arctic Slope with nearly 60 ice seal hunting communities. In addition, we depend on seals for our health and way of life. The ISC represents

the only consumptive user group of ice seals in the United States, and based on its experiences regarding ice seals and their environment, many subsistence users are still unsure of the benefits of the proposed research. We approve of the science in the permit application but have reservations that need to be addressed.

In early February 2012, the ISC passed a motion, with one abstention, to approve the proposed activity of capturing up to two young-of-the-year bearded seals over the duration of the project. Having these animals permanently placed in captivity in the Long Marine Laboratory facility for the purpose of studying the auditory systems in this species and developing recommendations for mitigating impacts from industrial development in their habitat is a lofty goal. On the matter of keeping seals permanently in captivity, it is the position of the ISC not to support re-introduction into the wild of ice seals that have been held in captivity. This is because re-introduction may pose a risk to animals in the wild from various diseases or infections. While we are aware that the quarantine and health assessments conducted before releasing animals back into the wild attempts to reduce the risk to zero, we believe there will always remain some risk that we do not want to take, while the risk posed to wild stocks from holding them permanently in captivity is zero. We are pleased that you will follow our recommendations that ensure that the seals required for research will remain in captivity once the research is completed, and we do support that plan for the eventual and humane long-term placement of these animals. Because the North Slope Borough has an educational partnership with the Mystic Aquarium in Connecticut, it would be beneficial if the captured seals can be placed there, although this is not a formal requirement, just a suggestion.

#### General ISC comments and clarifications:

The ISC understands that research will be conducted with oversight by NMFS. Healthy conditions for bearded seals will be given the utmost attention, and the highest standards of research will be followed; the highest priority given to the welfare of the animal is, of course, understood; however, the ISC would also like to stress that the highest priority given to the welfare of the animal in the field, too; therefore, the permit application notes that if the initial capture of bearded seals are found to be unsuitable or die during the proposed research, that there is no intention to proceed with repeating this effort to obtain additional animals.

On Page 5 of the permit application, the last paragraph states: “The activities to be conducted have been planned with the participation and support of the Native Village of Kotzebue and the native Ice Seal Committee of Alaska, which works closely with NMFS in managing ice seal species in Alaska”. This is a false statement. The ISC has neither participated in the planning of this project nor has the ISC supported this project in the past. The ISC was only made aware of this project in July 2011.

On Page 11 of the permit application, the last paragraph states: “The information to be gained from this research project will be shared with the NVK and the ISC and can be used by resource managers within these groups to improve understanding of the possible negative effects of anthropogenic activities on bearded seals. Therefore, we have worked closely with both of these entities in planning the proposed effort”. This is again a false statement. Please remove these statements from the permit application.

It is important to the ISC that the proposed research is done independently of any influences from the oil and gas industry. This does not appear to be the case as funding support is from a research consortium made up of oil and gas producers. This is a concern of the ISC that we may not be able to review progress reports and baseline data before research results are released to the public, and that industry may be privy to certain results. These concerns should be addressed specifically and in detail before the ISC agrees to allow the research to be conducted:

1. Is it the case that funding support is from a research consortium made up of oil and gas producers? If so, please provide a list of sponsors and their level of funding
2. On what dates will the ISC review progress reports?
  - 2a. Do oil and gas sponsors review progress reports and raw data before the ISC?
  - 2b. Will oil and gas sponsors be allowed to make changes to the interpretations of the results (typically, the Discussion sections of papers and reports)? Will the ISC be allowed to make changes to the interpretations of the results (typically, the Discussion sections of papers and reports)?
3. Will the ISC have access to raw data? If so, when? If not, why not?

The ISC also would like to be informed if any ringed or spotted seals were incidentally taken during this project.

Regional comments and concerns on the proposed research:

The Arctic Slope region feels that this project would provide valuable information on acoustic research for evaluating the effects of future development proposals in the Arctic. Information is currently lacking in this area. In reviewing recent offshore seismic and drilling program proposals, it would have been nice to have direct research for bearded seals. It is difficult to support this but a lot of the activities that are occurring are not going to stop.

The Bristol Bay region states that the charge of the ISC is to ensure ice seals are protected and be available for subsistence hunters. We want to make sure the noise of any offshore activity does not interfere with the availability of ice seals. This proposed research will enhance the knowledge of our understanding of the hearing of ice seals.

The Northwest Arctic region stated that the results from this study can be used to comment on NEPA documents, proposed oil and gas activities and the process for these activities is already occurring, such as scoping comments. We support this proposed permit, so we can get more information to develop mitigation measures as offshore activity increases. There is a need for research to look at the physiological impacts not seen in the natural environment. More information will allow us to make better decisions. The region is interested in at what noise levels will the seals hearing be affected. It is preferably that a pup and adult be captured if possible.

The Bering Straits region has serious reservations on the study results. The Bering Strait is a tunnel of activity due to increased shipping, and, in theory, the hearing profile studies on bearded seals will augment Alaska Native traditional knowledge of ice seals. The Bering Straits region feels that it is important to adequately understand the full effect of potentially damaging sounds which will be transmitted to marine mammals as a result of resource development; however, the region disagrees with the researcher on the benefits of this study for subsistence users. Because

of the way the research is proposed, it is unlikely that the affected regions in Alaska will benefit from this sound study by using as yet unknown sound sources or levels and will not be any closer to the knowledge required to appropriately take mitigation measures from seismic noise. The current state of knowledge has not been updated with results from parallel studies at Long Marine Lab on ringed or spotted seals. That study has not entered the phase of seismic sound replication and has not determined the potentially damaging effects on those seals. It is unacceptable that we do not know when the researcher would give the results necessary to better understand damage from seismic noise when asked about seismic noise. Sound sources in this permit application will be scaled down, and it is very likely this research will yield a false positive. Alaska Native hunters contribute a great deal to the understanding of ice seals. In the Bering Strait region, ice seal hunters consider seals vital to life. Past harvest studies of ice seals indicate that the Bering Strait residents' reliance upon ice seals is vital and crucial, and is amongst the largest harvest of ice seals in Alaska in total, or on a per capita basis. We are intimately aware of the nature of hearing among ice seals in our own way such as throughout legends and stories and in our interaction with seals which spans generations. The region understands that we must review and comment on development activities in the Arctic Ocean in a meaningful way, but the proposed research does not get us any closer to confirming or not confirming our suspicion that seismic activity on marine mammals is potentially deadly.

On a positive note, the ISC is pleased that the Native Village of Kotzebue (NVK) has been participating in ice seal research for many years, including developing live capture techniques that have been instrumental in moving forward the knowledge of ice seals and community participation in field research. The proposed capture activity would occur in the late fall (September/October) when only year-of-the-young bearded seals are present in the shallow portion of northeast Kotzebue Sound. During this time of year, the animals are easily identified (as to species) and tracked in the shallow water and capture occurs using nets placed in their line of travel in which the seals become entangled. Capture would occur only during daylight hours, and the seals would be secured and removed from the nets within minutes of becoming entangled. During this time of year, the seals are found usually as individuals well away from other seals, so disturbing more than one animal at a time and/or other subsistence users pursuing their subsistence activities can be avoided. It is the safest and most reliable method found to date from many years of live seal capture experiences by the NVK. As a subsistence user who has

worked since 2004 on live capturing of ice seals, John Goodwin would be the lead on the capture activity. The ISC has full confidence in his ability to safely capture bearded seals.

Alex Whiting of the NVK and John Goodwin would serve as co-investigators on this effort and would be involved in all parts of the planning and carrying out of the capture effort. The activity will utilize the refined methods of seal capture in shallow water developed during previous capture and tagging efforts in Kotzebue.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns regarding this permit request. We look forward to your responses.

Sincerely,

Molly Chythlook                      2/29/2012

Molly Chythlook  
Secretary

**DRAFT AGENDA**

**ICE SEAL COMMITTEE**

**Via Teleconference  
April 16, 2012 @ 1:30 pm**

1. Call To Order (Chairman – John Goodwin)
2. Invocation
3. Roll Call (Establish a Quorum – 3 Members)
4. Introductions & Welcome Remarks
5. Approval of Agenda
6. OLD BUSINESS
  - a. Ice Seal Committee Logo Contest
  - b. Adoption of “The Subsistence Harvest of Ice Seals in Alaska – A Compilation of Existing Information, 1960-2010”
7. Time & Place of Next Meeting
8. Adjournment



