



# North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management



Sketch by Alan Grainger, George



FALL 2015

## THE TOWLINE

VOL 7 NO 2

### From the Director

*Quyanaq* to all of the successful whalers and hunters who provide food for our community. We feel very privileged to work with you to ensure that our subsistence resources are sustainable into the future for our children.

The DWM has been busy as usual with issues related to subsistence resources, this year especially with caribou, polar bears, and migratory birds. You can read more about these topics, as well as some of our bowhead findings, in this



newsletter. You can also find out about the new name and future of our NSB Shell Baseline Studies Program.

Our staff takes our role in representing the North Slope seriously and we are here to listen to the hunters. Please contact us with your questions or concerns regarding subsistence resources. The hunters are our eyes and ears on the land and water. Please continue the important task of sharing your traditional knowledge with our young hunters.

*Qiksiksrautiqaqniq,*  
Taqluk Hepa

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### US Russia Polar Bear Treaty

The Oct/Nov2015 issue of the Mayor's "North Slope News" mentioned our recent travel to Russia to try to delay the pending quota on Chukchi Sea polar bears. The U.S. and Russian governments continue to plan for a quota (58 total bears, 29 in Alaska and 29 in Russia), although it seems unlikely that it will be implemented in January 2016. The quota applies to communities that harvest polar bears in western Alaska from Icy Cape to the south (including Point Lay and Point Hope) and in Chukotka, Russia.

Despite scientific updates at the October meeting in Russia, we continue to be concerned about the implementation of a quota without the support of reliable science or traditional

knowledge. Currently there is no good estimate of the number of bears in the Chukchi Sea population. The quota is also based on an estimate of how many cubs are born and survive each year. Both of those numbers need to be updated for an accurate quota calculation.

The DWM is working with the Alaska Nanuq Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the State of Alaska, and others to gather information on Chukchi Sea bears to determine whether a quota is needed and at what level. We

will keep the North Slope communities informed as we learn more about a possible quota. For questions or concerns, please contact Andy VonDuyke, Michael Pederson, or Robert Suydam at 852-0350.



KMStafford

## Cross Island Whaling by Craig George

Cross Island is a crescent shaped, barrier island in the mid-Beaufort Sea. It's about 2-3 miles long and less than a mile wide, and located about 16 miles north of Prudhoe Bay, one of the largest oil fields in the US. Cross Island is the furthest offshore of all barrier islands which makes it a good whale hunting area. The Island served as a navigational landmark for the 19<sup>th</sup> century Yankee whalers and traders but has a much longer Iñupiat cultural history.

The Island is in relatively deep water and is within the southern edge of the fall bowhead migration route. Its location also gives hunters close access to leads in winter. The Island's history is closely associated with Taaqpak, a famous whaling captain from the early 1900s through 1940 who whaled at Cross Island. In 1937, Reverend Klerekoper of Barrow, visiting Taaqpak during a dogsled trip to Canada, wrote "There is something contagious about the calm, large personality of Taaqpak." Taaqpak also showed his grandson Malik Ahkivgak, a great whaler from Barrow, whale bones that had eroded out of the bank on Cross Island, evidence the Iñupiat had been whaling here for centuries.

Cross Island is still the hub of whaling for the village of Nuiqsut. Relatives of Taaqpak and others hunt bowheads there each fall. The village of Nuiqsut receives an annual quota of 4 whales through the AEW/C/NOAA co-



Bowhead skulls from previous hunts

management agreement. The mood of the Island has not changed in 100 years and is still captivating.

In September 2015, I stayed there with Jimmy Oyagak's crew. There were several crews on the Island, camped in plywood cabins set on the west end of the island near a natural harbor. The Island has the feel of spring whaling as the crews are there for the entire whaling season, visiting and interacting like they do on the ice, sharing food, company, stories and helping each other with various whaling tasks. The crews set out in skiffs and mostly hunt east of the Island. When a whale is killed it is towed to the island and hauled ashore with a powerful winch. After the quota is met and the hunt ends, the meat and *maktak* are transported to the mainland.

I was there when Carl Brower (Taalaak) crew landed their whale – a 48'1" female – on September 2nd. The crew secured webbing around the *itiġruġaq* and the powerful winch pulled the big whale from the water in a few minutes. In my 30+ years working with whalers, I don't recall seeing a large whale pulled up so quickly.

In my short 7 day visit, I learned 7 years of new information. It's a fascinating place and the Oyagak and other crews were perfect hosts. Eli Nukapigak showed me where some of the old bones described by Taaqpak were again resurfacing. The Nuiqsut whalers landed 3 whales this fall and the community will enjoy plenty of whale meat and *maktak* for the feasts.

## Killer Whale Predation or ....?

On 4 October 2015 a 25'1", male bowhead whale was landed at Barrow, Alaska. Hopson I crew found the whale floating "belly up" about 20 miles east of Point Barrow. Initially, it was thought to be a whale that had been struck, died, and sunk some days earlier. Bowheads typically float after death but some sink. Those that sink, can be lost if the harpoon pulls out as the animal is pulled from the sea floor to the surface. Typically about three days later they will surface buoyed by internal gasses and, if the "stinker whale" is found, the *maktak* is salvaged.

NSB-DWM biologists and wildlife veterinarian were present to examine the animal. The whale's "belly" had a gaping opening about 6 feet in length, initially thought to be caused by the build-up of gasses and internal stress. Upon further inspection, bite marks consistent with killer whale, or orca, predation were found on the flukes and flippers and no whaling harpoon or evidence of a previous strike was found.

During the butchering process, the crews found no evidence of a harpoon entry wound or weapons associated with hunting. However, there was a large bruise in the

muscle and, to some extent, the blubber on the whale's right side. This type of blunt trauma is consistent with ramming by killer whales or from ship strike injuries. The baleen length and other characteristics of the animal indicate it was a calf which is consistent with killer whale predation behavior where they typically prey on the calves of large whales – and not on adults.

While the evidence is uncertain as to the exact cause of death, it is clear that this whale was not killed by hunters. Further examination of the evidence and consultation with outside experts familiar with killer whale and ship strike injuries is underway.

NSB-DWM biologist Craig George's records and recollections indicate no similar case has been documented for a landed bowhead whale in the last 35 years. Records from aerial and beach surveys of killer whale predation on bowhead calves is rare. However, evidence of killer whale predation on beach-cast gray whale calves along the northeast Chukchi coast and Barrow area is relatively common. Craig's analysis of bowhead scarring (see Spring 2013 newsletter) indicated that most older bowhead whales (over 55 feet long) have killer whale attack scars making this find less surprising.

## Iñupiaq Matching

Draw a line from the *Iñupiaq* name to the English name for these Bowhead Whale Shares

<b><i>Agliguaq</i></b>	<b>Baleen</b>
<b><i>Aqikkaq</i></b>	<b>Behind Belts</b>
<b><i>Itigrugaq</i></b>	<b>Blowhole</b>
<b><i>Ninjq</i></b>	<b>Chin</b>
<b><i>Qinaq</i></b>	<b>Common Shares</b>
<b><i>Sakiq</i></b>	<b>Flipper</b>
<b><i>Suqqait</i></b>	<b>Flukes</b>
<b><i>Taliguaq</i></b>	<b>Jawbone</b>
<b><i>Tavlu</i></b>	<b>Lip</b>
<b><i>Tavsi</i></b>	<b>Peduncle</b>
<b><i>Uati</i></b>	<b>Tongue</b>
<b><i>Utchik</i></b>	<b>Two Belts</b>

Note: *Iñupiaq* name spellings vary between regions.

## Bowhead Whale Captain's Serving

Bowhead whale is a healthy food that is high in omega fatty acids, protein, vitamins A, D and E and some essential minerals. Enjoy your *niqipiaq!*

Place the *Iñupiaq* name in the space above the Picture

*Aqikkaq*  
*Inaluaq*  
*Muqpauraq*  
*Siigñaq*



*Taqtu*  
*Uumman*  
*Uunaalik*  
*Uuruq*



## Aqviġmiñ Niqit

For dividing shares in Barrow:

- ◆ The *qinaq*, *uati*, *itigrugaq*, *aqikkaq* and *tavsi* are part of the captain's share.
- ◆ Half of the *tavsi*, plus other foods, are served to the community the day after butchering is completed, and the *uati* is saved for feasts.
- ◆ One *taliguaq* is for the harpooner, and the other is shared by the other whaling crews during the spring hunt, and by those helping to butcher during the fall hunt.
- ◆ One third of *utchik* is for the captain, and two thirds is shared by those helping to butcher the whale.
- ◆ One half of *suqqait* and *sakiq* are for the captain, and half is shared by those crews helping tow the whale.
- ◆ *Ninjq* is distributed to the whaling crews and people who help butcher the whale.

References: *Iñupiatun Uqaluit Taniktun Sinunijit*. 2014. Compiled by Edna Ahgeak MacLean. Barrow Whaling Captains Association Rules, revised 2012.

## Seal Hunters: Find Tags on Harvested Animals?

The NSB-DWM and ADF&G are working with hunters to better understand movements of ice seals. In 2014-15 seals were tagged with satellite transmitters near Barrow, Wainwright, Kotzebue Sound, Norton Sound and Hooper Bay. These seals move between the Beaufort Sea and Bristol Bay during their migration and could be encountered anywhere along their travels.

Harvesting a seal with a transmitter tag will not get the hunter in trouble, and these animals are safe to eat as no drugs were used in their capture. However, tags are expensive and they can be reused if there are returned. If you do harvest a seal with a tag, please contact NSB DWM at 907-852-0350 or ADF&G at 1-800-478-7346. If you wish to remain anonymous, have someone from your IRA or Village call us. If you have a camera, please take pictures of the tag on the seal and the surrounding skin as this will help us to design better tags in the future.



Seal with satellite transmitter tag on the top of the head.



Spotted seal with satellite transmitter tag on the back and one on the rear flipper.

This research is conducted under NMFS permit #15324. To find out more about the research you can visit the NSB-DWM website at [www.north-slope.org/departments/wildlife-management/studies-and-research-projects/ice-seals](http://www.north-slope.org/departments/wildlife-management/studies-and-research-projects/ice-seals) or ADF&G website at [http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=marine\\_mammalprogram.icesealmovements](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=marine_mammalprogram.icesealmovements). You can also contact Andy Von Duyke at 852-0350.

Thank you for helping with this important research. Together we will work toward healthy sustainable seal populations for future generations.

## Bowhead Genetics Workshop

DWM staff attended a Bowhead Whale Genomics Symposium at the Battelle Memorial Institute in Ohio on 14-15 October. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and plan for the future of the bowhead whale genetics program. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) is interested in bowhead genetics to better understand stock structure, or how different groups of bowheads are related to one another. Bowheads are also of great interest to a variety of scientists because of their uniqueness as a species harvested by Inuit hunters, as the only fully arctic baleen whale, and because they can live up to two centuries while remaining in remarkably good health. Cancer has so far not been detected during examinations of about 700 landed whales.

The entire bowhead 'genome' has been sequenced which means that its entire set of DNA molecules has been mapped. The DNA found in each bowhead cell include about 2.9 billion 'base pairs' or building blocks. Now that this has been completed, scientists can read the actual "blueprint" that builds bowhead whales, which allows bowheads to function and adapt to their environment.



Bowheads migrating past Barrow in spring

Several presentations were given on other species, such as eagles, to demonstrate how the full DNA map is used to improve understanding of the species and for conservation. A study team from University of Rochester gave a presentation on the cancer fighting mechanisms in bowhead whales. They have identified some of the same anti-cancer genes that are found in humans and other mammals. The current challenge is to figure out why bowhead genes are so effective at suppressing cancer. This research will also help to understand the mechanisms that allow for long lifespans.

Understanding bowhead genetics will be useful in discussions within the IWC Scientific Committee to help explain the high survival rate and significant increases in the Bering Chukchi Beaufort stock of bowheads, all of which is considered in the 6-year review of management advice which affects the quota. We will continue to work closely with other scientists and hunters to address the most important questions about bowhead genetics. If you have any questions, please contact Craig George or Robert Suydam at 852-0350.

## *AMBCC Making History for Alaska Native Art by Todd Sformo*

Alaska Native artists create and sell works of art made from the natural materials of bowhead whale (listed as Endangered), polar bear (listed as Threatened), and ringed seal (listed as Endangered); however, the use of a single feather in a work of art is criminal, even though these feathers come from legally harvested birds taken during subsistence hunts. This state of affairs has been contested by the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council (AMBCC), including North Slope members Taqulik Hepa (Director, NSB-DWM) and Michael Pederson (Subsistence Resource Specialist, NSB-DWM).

The goal of our Department and the AMBCC is to amend the law to allow the use and sale of non-edible migratory bird parts, such as feathers from lawfully harvested birds during subsistence hunting, in works of art. The request to change the law was set in motion by a proposal of the Suq'piaq (Kodiak) Area Island Villages in May 2012 (Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak, Old Harbor Tribe, Ouzinkie Tribe, Akhiok Tribe, Native Village of Afognak, and Port Lions Tribe Migratory Bird Representatives). While the proposal comes from specific tribes, its potential consequences go beyond that region to all Alaskan Natives.

There are specific, and sometimes frustrating, procedures that the AMBCC must follow. The proposal to rectify this situation, however, was greeted eagerly by the AMBCC Technical Committee in January 2013 and forwarded to the AMBCC in September 2013, where it

was also enthusiastically received. A Handicraft Committee was created in April 2014 (Chair Dr. Todd Sformo, Wildlife Biologist, NSB-DWM) made up of no less than 11 members from all three voting branches of the AMBCC: Native Caucus, State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Handicraft Committee met 12 times, invited attorneys and the director of the Silver Hand program (which authenticates Alaska Native Art) to provide input, revised many drafts, and on 7 April 2015 submitted the final version that was unanimously supported by the three voting bodies of the AMBCC. This allowed the proposed legislation to make its way to the USFWS's Pacific Flyway Council and Service Regulations Committee in the summer of 2015, where it was equally well received and accepted.

Final step and note of caution: It's not law yet. In April 2016, the proposed change will need to be finalized and published in the Federal Register. Also, the proposal had to wind its way among three signed treaties involving US, Russia, Japan, and Mexico, likely resulting in less than 30 species of migratory birds that may be used in the sale of Alaska Native art and handicraft. Continued efforts by this committee strive to increase the number of migratory bird species available for use, and a species list will be made available soon.

The hard work conducted in the spirit of co-management should be regarded as one highpoint of the AMBCC and a long-awaited recognition of the rights and traditions of Alaskan Natives.

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## *NSB-Shell Baseline Studies Program has a new name — CAASP*

Earlier in 2015, the North Slope Borough-Shell Baseline Studies Program renamed itself as the Collaborative Alaskan Arctic Studies Program (CAASP). We wanted to attract other partners in addition to the NSB and Shell. When Shell announced this fall that they were leaving Alaska, our name change became even more important. With Shell leaving Alaska, our studies program is in transition. We are currently planning for the next steps. We know that Shell does not expect to provide new funding but we will continue to talk to them about the studies they have helped fund. We are now evaluating our priorities, looking for other partners, and looking for other sources of funding.

Our steering committee has provided valuable insights into what concerns and questions need to be addressed. Those ideas have come primarily from North Slope villages. CAASP involves representatives from the villages, the NSB, Shell, and independent scientists. Scientists, hunters, and village representatives working together to set study priori-

ties is unique and could be valuable for other oil companies, Federal and State agencies, and others. We thank each of our committee members for the time and contributions they have given to this program. We also hope to continue to operate the steering committee in the future, if we can find the funds.

Even though Shell is leaving Alaska, we expect to continue collecting baseline information in 2016 from funding they have provided. Those studies include: satellite tracking of ringed, spotted and bearded seals, stress monitoring of bowheads, a laboratory test of exposure of juvenile salmon to spilled and dispersed oil, and genetics studies of polar bears and belugas. We will also be working on a variety of reports for the villages, agencies and scientists. Those reports include: movements of surface currents of the Beaufort and Chukchi seas, forage fish in the western Beaufort, traditional knowledge of belugas whales, contaminant levels, and calving surveys of caribou. Please contact Robert Suydam or Craig George at 852-0350 if you have any questions or suggestions about CAASP.



## North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management

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# ECRWSS BOXHOLDER

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

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## Update on Caribou Herds

Both the Western Arctic and Teshekpuk caribou herds have declined by 50% over the past 6 years. Both of these populations were at all-time highs in the mid-2000s and both hunters and managers anticipated that they would decline because herds naturally fluctuate. One of the main concerns was how quickly the herds declined which prompted changes in hunting regulations for the first time in many decades. These regulation changes are an attempt to reduce the harvest of cows, and prohibit the harvest of cows with calves, to hasten the recovery of these herds.

There is some very encouraging news about these herds. Calving rates were greatly improved in both herds in 2015. Seventy-eight percent of col-

lared cows had calves in the Western Arctic Herd and 79% of collared cows had calves in the Teshekpuk Herd. Also, cow mortality rates were lower in 2014-2015 than the previous several years. Hunters have been reporting that caribou are in good body condition as well.

Aside from determining calving rates, the ADF&G was able to conduct a photo-census of the Teshekpuk Herd in July, and they are counting the caribou in those photos this fall. Weather conditions prohibited a photo-census of the Western Arctic Herd in 2015. While this information is good news, there are still half the number of caribou on the landscape this year which is making it difficult for communities on the fringe of the herds' range to harvest enough meat to satisfy their needs. Our hope is that the herds continue to recover, making for better harvests in the future.

## For Caribou Hunters

The new regulations in effect for Anaktuvuk Pass, Point Hope and Point Lay allow for residents to take 5 caribou per day. Bull season is closed as of October 15<sup>th</sup> and will be open again as of February 1<sup>st</sup>. Cow season is open this fall/winter until April 30<sup>th</sup>. Calves cannot be taken.

For Atqasuk, Barrow, Nuiqsut, and Wainwright, the winter is divided into two parts. From October 16<sup>th</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>, hunters can take 3 cow caribou per day, with no bulls or no calves taken. And, from January 1<sup>st</sup> to March 15<sup>th</sup>, 5 caribou per day can be taken including no more than 3 cows and no calves. As of March 16<sup>th</sup>, only bulls can be taken until July 15<sup>th</sup>.

For more information on these regulations, contact Brian Person at NSB-DWM at 852-0350 or Ryan Klimstra at the ADF&G at 852-3464.

## Tagging Your Harvest

Remember to get your harvested animals sealed within 30 days of harvest. For polar bear and walrus hunters, you can contact Mike Pederson at NSB-DWM at 852-0350, Ernest Nageak at the Barrow USFWS Office at 852-2058, or Tommy Olemaun and Joe Sage at Native Village of Barrow at 852-4411. There are also taggers in Kaktovik, Nuiqsut, Point Hope, Point Lay and Wainwright to help get your catch tagged.

For brown bear, sheep, lynx, moose, wolf and wolverine, you can contact Ryan Klimstra at the ADF&G office in Barrow at 852-3464.

