

# DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

## I. MISSION

The Department of Wildlife Management facilitates sustainable harvests and monitors populations of fish and wildlife species through research, leadership, and advocacy from local to international levels. The Department diversifies funding opportunities through the submission of grant proposals focusing on subsistence species and issues of the highest interest to North Slope residents.

## II. DEPARTMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

The Department of Wildlife Management is responsible for helping to assure participation by Borough residents in the management of wildlife resources, by keeping these resources at healthy population levels, and to assure that residents can continue their subsistence harvest of wildlife resources. Our studies help provide the factual documentation of the subsistence needs of North Slope Borough (NSB) residents. With industrial activity expanding into new areas, arctic warming trends already affecting the marine and land environments, and some special interest groups trying to further regulate subsistence hunting, it is very important that we continue to work toward the following goals.

## III. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

### **GOAL 1: DOCUMENT THE CONTINUED IMPORTANCE OF SUBSISTENCE BY MAINTAINING ACCURATE, AREA-SPECIFIC HARVEST RECORDS**

Obj. 1.1: Continue to collect and report on subsistence harvest data for North Slope communities.

### **GOAL 2: DETERMINE THOSE GEOGRAPHIC AREAS IMPORTANT TO SUBSISTENCE-USE ANIMALS**

Obj. 2.1: Document movements of the Teshekpuk Lake Caribou Herd, bowheads, ice seals, and belugas to determine important habitat use areas and migratory routes.

Obj. 2.2: Collect information on key subsistence species in areas that may be impacted by oil and gas activities.

Obj. 2.3: Critically review any proposal for critical habitat designation for any Endangered Species Act-listed North Slope species or population

### **GOAL 3: ENHANCE THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIOLOGY OF SUBSISTENCE-USE ANIMALS AND THEIR HABITAT FOR ENHANCED LOCAL PARTICIAPTION IN MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE SUBSISTENCE HARVEST**

Obj. 3.1: Estimate the size of the bowhead whale population at ~10 year intervals to help ensure safe harvest levels. Data from the 2011 survey are currently being analyzed.

Obj. 3.2: Evaluate the impacts of industrial development and other stressors on subsistence species by monitoring such things as: hearing, general health, reproduction, stress hormones, etc.

Obj. 3.3: Determine the contaminant levels and general safety of subsistence foods and the health of subsistence species populations.

Obj. 3.4: Conduct baseline studies on the community structure and habitat parameters of important prey species for marine mammals. This includes species composition, distribution and abundance of zooplankton and fish in marine, fresh and estuarine waters of North Slope.

**GOAL 4: COMMUNICATE, COOPERATE, AND COLLABORATE WITH STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES REGARDING STUDIES AND THE EVALUATION OF DATA FOR STRONG LOCAL INPUT INTO MANAGEMENT OF SUBSISTENCE-USE RESOURCES**

Obj. 4.1: Continue to support the goals and objectives of the Alaska Beluga Whale Committee and Ice Seal Committee, in part through the collection and analysis of biological data from

subsistence harvested animals and movement data through the use of satellite telemetry.

Obj. 4.2: Continue monitoring Lesser Snow Geese and Black Brant colonies and habitat quality along the Chukchi and Beaufort Sea coasts.

Obj. 4.3: Estimate winter survival of caribou and determine what factors influence it. Utilize these data to monitor impacts of oil and gas exploration to winter survival of caribou.

Obj. 4.4: Develop a Teshekpuk caribou herd population model to evaluate the sustainability of this resource to subsistence users. Use the model results to determine information gaps and to help direct an effective and economically efficient monitoring program.

Obj. 4.5: Determine the winter movements and diet of arctic fox in developed and undeveloped areas on the North Slope and use this information to better understand the potential transmission of rabies and other zoonotic diseases.

**GOAL 5: WORK CLOSELY WITH THE BOROUGH'S FISH AND GAME MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS FOR SUBSISTENCE-USE ANIMALS**

Obj. 5.1: Hold three to four meetings per year, either in person or by teleconference of the NSB Fish and Game Management Committee.

Obj. 5.2: Have members bring their communities' concerns to the committee, the Department, researchers, and State and Federal agencies and take information back to their City and/or Tribal Councils.

Obj. 5.3: Use the committee to assist in local coordination and involvement of community members in research conducted by the NSB, industry, independent researchers, and agencies.

**GOAL 6: IN CONSULTATION WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS, THROUGH APPROPRIATE STUDIES, AND THE REVIEW OF EXISTING INFORMATION, IDENTIFY AND ASSESS INDUSTRIAL IMPACTS LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT PEOPLE, WILDLIFE, OR THE ENVIRONMENT**

Obj. 6.1: Continue to communicate with BP, Pioneer, Eni, Exxon, ConocoPhillips, Shell, and the responsible federal and state agencies to review the effectiveness of the monitoring and mitigation programs in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas for impacts to bowhead whales and other marine mammals.

Obj. 6.2: Assist the Mayor's Office, Law, Health, and Planning Departments in preparing Borough comments regarding proposed industrial activities, including drilling and seismic operations.

Obj. 6.3: Assist the Mayor's Office and the Planning Department in the design of monitoring programs and other permit conditions to be imposed on industrial operations.

Obj. 6.4: Research the potential effects of anthropogenic development and climate change on local subsistence species.

Obj. 6.5: Collaborate with industry operators and responsible oversight agencies in the design, conduct, and review of research efforts focused on the North Slope onshore or offshore environments or wildlife populations.

**GOAL 7: CONTINUE REVIEW OF MAJOR TECHNICAL, PROGRAM AND POLICY PROPOSALS AND DOCUMENTS THAT MAY AFFECT THE BOROUGH'S ENVIRONMENT, WILDLIFE RESOURCES, OR SUBSISTENCE USERS, INCLUDING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS & ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS**

Obj. 7.1: Continue to assist the Mayor's Office and Planning Department in dealings with the federal Bureau of Land Management regarding its management plan for oil and gas leasing

and activities within the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A).

- Obj. 7.2: Assist the Mayor's Office in developing positions and comments related to the Endangered Species Act, including critical habitat designation for polar bears and the listing of ringed and bearded seals.
- Obj. 7.3: Help represent the Borough in dealings with the federal Army Corps of Engineers, and other federal and state agencies, the involved companies, and affected North Slope communities regarding the Point Thomson Development Project.
- Obj. 7.4: Help represent the Borough in dealings with the State of Alaska as it annually considers new information relevant to the Best Interest Findings (BIFs) for the North Slope, Beaufort Sea, and North Slope Foothills Areawide Oil and Gas Lease Sale.
- Obj. 7.5: Help represent the Borough in dealings with the multiple federal and state agencies and other parties regarding efforts associated with the North Slope Science Initiative.
- Obj. 7.6: Assist the Mayor's Office in dealings with the National Marine Fisheries Service and Bureau of Oceans and Energy Management as the agencies work to finalize an EIS considering

the potential impacts of arctic offshore seismic and exploration activities.

- Obj. 7.7: Help represent the Borough in dealings with state and federal agencies and the oil and gas industry in the review of offshore exploration and development proposals, including Shell's proposed 2013 activities, and ConocoPhillips' proposed 2014 activities.
- Obj. 7.8: Continue to assist the Planning and Health Departments in work with the Bureau of Oceans and Energy Management, Bureau of Land Management, Army Corps of Engineers, and the State of Alaska, in advocating for the inclusion of analysis of potential human health impacts in all North Slope oil and gas leasing, exploration, and development planning processes.
- Obj. 7.9: Help represent the Borough in dealings with the State of Alaska, responsible federal agencies, and potential industry operators concerning onshore exploration applications, including projects proposed by Great Bear Petroleum and Repsol.

**GOAL 8: CONTINUE TO DEVELOP A BASELINE STUDIES PROGRAM IN COLLABORATION WITH SHELL**

Obj. 8.1: Continue to work with the Steering committee and provide recommendations and priorities for studies needed to fill data gaps.

Obj. 8.2: Conduct baseline studies on a variety of topics or contract outside scientists to provide information needed to make wise decisions about oil and gas activities, especially in offshore areas of the Beaufort and Chukchi seas.

**GOAL 9: DEVELOP A THOROUGH HEALTH ASSESSMENT PROGRAM FOR IMPORTANT SUBSISTENCE SPECIES WITHIN THE NORTH SLOPE BOROUGH**

Obj. 9.1: Investigate and provide expertise and regional leadership in the on-going investigation of the Unusual Mortality Event (UME) of ringed seals and walrus, which began in 2011.

Obj. 9.2: Collect and analyze biological samples from marine mammals to better understand health status in a time of a rapidly changing climate and increasing human activity.

**GOAL 10: PROVIDE LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AT THE ARCTIC RESEARCH FACILITIES (ARF/BARC) AT UIC-NARL TO APPROPRIATE VISITING SCIENTISTS AND FOR THE BOROUGH'S RESEARCH PROGRAM**

Obj. 10.1: Provide modest logistical support for visiting scientists on projects of importance to the

Borough, such as those involving bowhead whales, polar bears, eiders, seals, fish, sea ice, and climate change.

**GOAL 11: CONDUCT OUTREACH AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES TO INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE DEPARTMENT'S STUDIES ON SUBSISTENCE-USE WILDLIFE AND OTHER ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO THE NSB**

Obj. 11.1: Provide educational materials and lecture presentations for Iisagvik College, NSB schools, and the public to help students, teachers, and others become aware of departmental studies and their value in managing wildlife and maintaining subsistence access to wildlife.

Obj. 11.2: Distribute information about animals and activities important for subsistence which has been collected by the Department of Wildlife Management and/or collaborators to the Assembly, Mayor's Office, and to village residents through newsletters, our website, memos, radio shows, lectures, etc.

Obj. 11.3: Involve North Slope students in hands-on educational opportunities at the facilities of our collaborator's, such as Mystic Aquarium and Colorado State University.

**GOAL 12: REPRESENT THE BOROUGH IN A WIDE RANGE OF TECHNICAL FORUMS TO PROVIDE FOR**

## **THE PROTECTION OF THE BOROUGH'S WILDLIFE RESOURCES AND SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES**

- Obj. 12.1: Represent the Borough and the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC) at meetings of the International Whaling Commission (scientific committee, humane killing workshop, Commission Meeting, etc.).
- Obj. 12.2: Represent the NSB at major marine mammal scientific meetings such as the Biennial meeting of the Society for Marine Mammalogy, the Alaska Marine Science Symposium, etc.
- Obj. 12.3: Represent the interests of the Borough and its residents at a variety of technical forums and meetings, including: Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council, Indigenous Peoples' Council for Marine Mammals, Gates of the Arctic Subsistence Resource Commission, Alaska Nanuuq Commission, Ice Seal Committee, Eskimo Walrus Commission, Alaska Beluga Whale Committee, International Whaling Commission, Inupiat-Inuvialuit Polar Bear & Beluga Whale Agreements, Steller's Eider Recovery Team, North Slope Science Initiative, Alaska Coastal District Association, Alaska Coastal Management Program Stakeholder Working Group, and various meetings convened by the U.S.

Coast Guard, National Park Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Bureau of Oceans and Energy Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Alaska Departments of Natural Resources, Environmental Conservation, and Fish and Game.