



Ice Seals:

Frequently Asked Questions

1) Who is the National Marine Fisheries Service?



- The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is the federal government agency responsible for management and conservation of whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, and sea lions.
- Our main offices are located in Juneau and Anchorage as well as Seattle, WA.

2) What is the Ice Seal Committee and how do they co-manage ice seals?

- The Ice Seal Committee (ISC) is an Alaska Native Organization dedicated to conserving seal populations, habitat, and hunting in order to help preserve native cultures and traditions. The ISC co-manages ice seals with NMFS by monitoring subsistence harvest and cooperating on needed research and education programs pertaining to ice seals.

3) What are ice seals and why are they called that?



- In Alaska, “ice seals” is a general term that refers to bearded, spotted, ringed, and ribbon seals.
- These species are called ice seals because they have their pups on the sea ice.

4) Are seals being listed as endangered?

- Currently (2008), no seals in Alaska are listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).
- December 2007: The Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) filed a request with NMFS under the ESA to list the ribbon seal as threatened or endangered.
- May 2008: The CBD filed a request with NMFS under the ESA to list the bearded, ringed, and spotted seals as threatened or endangered.
- December 2008: NMFS will decide whether to propose listing ribbon seals under the ESA.
- May 2009: NMFS will decide whether to propose listing bearded, spotted, or ringed seals under the ESA.
- If NMFS proposes to list a seal species under the ESA, it will take another year before a final decision is made to list the species or not. This time period allows the public to comment on the proposed listing and to provide additional information to be considered by NMFS prior to making its final listing decision.



5) Who can I contact for more information?

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6) Who is the Center for Biological Diversity? Why are they worried about ice seals?

- The Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) is a large nonprofit conservation organization concerned with the protection of endangered species and wild places. They are located in many states, including Alaska.
- The CBD has a campaign to address both global warming and endangered species. The CBD asked NMFS to list ice seals under the ESA because CBD is concerned about the effects of predicted global climate change on ice seals' sea ice habitat.
- By law, NMFS must recognize the CBD's requests, because they present substantial information indicating that listing ice seals under the ESA may be warranted.
- In accepting the CBD's requests, NMFS has not yet agreed that listing is needed, but rather that the requests contain enough scientific information to justify a review of the seals' conservation status.



7) If seals are listed as endangered, will we be able to hunt them?

- The Endangered Species Act (ESA) allows for the subsistence harvest of ice seals by Alaska Natives.
- Subsistence hunting can be regulated under the ESA, but only when the harvest is found to negatively affect the species.
- Currently, ice seal populations appear to be high and harvest by Alaska Natives relatively low.
- To the best of our knowledge, subsistence hunting does not appear to be negatively affecting ice seal populations.
- Therefore, NMFS does not anticipate that listing ice seals under the ESA would lead to any regulation of subsistence hunting.

8) We have limits on many subsistence resources but not seals. Will this change?

- If populations of ice seals declined to very low levels over time, limits could be put on the harvest of them.
- If the current situation changes, NMFS will work with the Ice Seal Committee to find the best approach to ensure that healthy populations of ice seals and a sustainable subsistence harvest of ice seals by Alaska Natives continues into the future.

9) Commercial fishing has an impact on seals. If restrictions are placed on hunting, will commercial fishing be restricted?

- If ice seals are listed, NMFS must consider many activities that may affect them, including fishing, oil and gas activities, and subsistence harvest.
- If any ice seals are listed under the ESA, a Recovery Plan will be written to determine the appropriate course of action needed to restore the species.
- That plan may recommend restrictions on activities which are shown to prevent or slow the recovery of the species.