

North Slope Borough/Shell Baseline Studies Program
Steering Committee Teleconference

October 17, 2011 9:00a.m.

PURPOSE OF MEETING:

To develop recommendations for Baseline Studies for the 2012 calendar year.

CALL TO ORDER:

Robert Suydam, Interim Chair thanked everyone who called in and asked for introductions.

INTRODUCTIONS:

Members:

Name	Representing	Name	Representing
Robert Suydam	NSB DWM	Craig George	NSB DWM
Sue Moore	Independent Scientist	Tom Weingartner	Independent Scientist
Victoria Broje	Shell	Ray Koonuk, Sr.	Pt. Hope
Bill Tracey, Sr.	Pt. Lay	Brandon Southall	Independent Scientist
Michael Macrander	Shell	Hajo Eicken	Independent Scientist

Members Not Present:

Samuel Kunaknana	City of Nuiqsut
Harry Lord	City of Kaktovik
Ransom Agnasagga	City of Wainwright
Don Nungasak	Barrow

Non Member Attendees:

Malissa Langley	Support Staff for Steering Committee NSB DWM
Kamalei Hepa	Support Staff for Steering Committee NSB DWM
Nicole Kanayurak	Wildlife Intern NSB DWM

Robert: Let's get started and call this meeting to order. Ray would you like to do the Invocation.

INVOCATION – Ray Koonuk Sr.

OPENING REMARKS:

What we would like to do today is to talk about the possible studies, the projects that might be funded in 2012. Initially I was hoping to actually have some priorities that everybody had provided me and summarize those and then talk about the priorities but a couple of reasons I think it's better to talk about the projects first and then here in the next couple of days have folks

rank these studies and then if we need to have another call or another discussion about the studies for 2012 and how the priority ranking comes out. We can do that sometime in the next month or so again with the desire to get some RFP's out if we need to sometime in the next month or two so we can actually get some of these projects done next year. If that makes sense to everybody and if there aren't any comments or questions. We will begin with the projects list here in a second, any questions?

Ray Koonuk, Sr., voiced his concerns regarding the lack of participation by the village representatives that were not present and what efforts had we made to contact them. Kamalei addressed the committee and explained that she did receive commitments from Ransom and Don but they were not present and they did not call with an explanation. We have not been able to reach Harry nor Samuel but we will continue to try or request a replacement member to be nominated. Ray went on to say that this was not a good time because AFN is being held in Anchorage; Robert agreed and asked Ray to help keep us informed on upcoming events in the community.

Concern was raised regarding the sick walrus and seals and discussion on efforts that could be put in place to maybe establish an emergency response study within the Baseline Project and to give this study some priority because of the urgency of the situation.

Seals started being seen in July and it wasn't until mid August that there were a fair number of sick seals on the beach here in Barrow. We also heard reports from Wainwright and we sent out the fliers to the villages in August. Researches to include NSB Biologist, Raphaela Stimmelmayer, went down to study walrus in Pt. Lay there were observations that some of the walrus appeared to be sick also. Samples were sent out for testing and we still don't know what the cause was of the disease, but the Veterinarians are thinking it is probably a virus but the viral work that has been completed so far has not come back with any kind of positive results in terms of indentifying what the virus is and so this is one that we are concerned about. NMFS is considering listing this as an unusual mortality event and so it's definitely an issue that is a concern to us all.

There was discussion regarding the purpose of the steering committee; how they would choose what studies were needed and to try to give the North Slope Communities a voice in identifying what are the most important baseline studies. Also, to let the research community set the research agenda but to also allow specific studies to be conducted through the Department of Wildlife Management by sole source or to go out for RFP.

Michael pointed out that was important for the members of the steering committee to keep up to date, plugged in and cooperate with the research community and to gain leverage with other work we are doing and get more out of our money. Ex: Everyone whose project gets funded through this program should not have to go and get its own vessel that is too expensive. If we can identify projects early enough and get them on board industry funded work or NFS funded work it would stretch our dollars a lot further.

The committee discussed the ability to sole source with known scientists in specific fields of study. The committee agreed that being able to do this would benefit the response to an emergency situation.

The Committee reviewed 18 studies with emphasizes on adding health components to some of the studies and to expand the information in terms of what is going to be included in the studies. We will ask the Project Administrator to write up a couple of pages to include the following: What are the primary objectives? Are the methods sufficient enough to meet objectives? What is the Timeline? What are the Milestones? and What is the connection with other studies? Then with some of the more general projects/studies maybe what we can do here in Barrow is try to enhance the paragraph or two under each one of the studies just so the committee has more information to make decisions on.

Item #1 Continuation of the Tagged Ring Seal Study.

Committee members agreed to the continuation of this program into 2012 with some additional information added for clarification and Michael indicated that Shell would support this project continuation and expansion in 2012.

Item #2 Continuation of the Drifter Study.

Leander and Todd worked with Tom and his colleagues at UAF trying to get drifters out and there was equipment failure. The university is seeking reimbursement and so some of the 2011 money may be available for 2012. There has been some discussion with Scott at the oil research institute in Cordova who suggested not to only putting out the surface drifters that are at the top meter water column but also putting out some oil spill drifters that are right at the surface. This information would go into oil spill projectory models but would also be useful for other projects as well.

Tom stated the intent of the project this past year was to release the Drifters throughout the season. The purpose of last year's program was to try to work together with the North Slope Borough, we at the university had funding to deploy at the survey areas off shore and we thought it was ideal for the borough to deploy near shore so that we could get two areas of concern covered more or less simultaneously. However this was to proceed, I would not try to scatter things in shore and off shore but rather focus on one area. Again it comes down to numbers and if you have drifters being released all over the place you have a problem or concern that you are seeing a lot of outliers as opposed to something you can make statistical sense out of it. However it is to proceed, my suggestion would be to concentrate on one area and I do like the idea of multiple deployments through the open water season.

The Committee would like to see this project expanded to include near and off shore studies and to may be put out Drifters in the Lease areas in 2012.

Item #3 We will hold a workshop to bring together scientific and traditional knowledge experts to discuss currents and ice movements of the Chukchi Sea.

Expand the information to include sending out a survey to all the communities and compiling the data to present at the workshop.

Item #4 Measure acoustic habitat or soundscape of the Beaufort and Chukchi Sea.

This study would help document the ambient sounds in the Beaufort and Chukchi Sea and how those change with human activities in the ocean. With this project we don't put out new instruments in 2012 but we need to contribute to the analysis of data that are already in hand. This project isn't one that we really have to get a lot of details until after March if we decide to move forward in funding this project.

Item #5 Assess the forage fish of the Chukchi and Beaufort seas, especially Arctic Cod but maybe forage fish in general and also sea birds and other fishes.

This study may include answering the following questions: What are oceanographic conditions like that influence Arctic Cod? What is the distribution? How does it vary from time to time or year to year? So this project will be somewhat of a broad base RFP that could involve a lot of different things to include allowing the research community to help us carve out some of the specifics for how the project would move forward.

Tom indicated that Franz Mueter with UAF is also being funded under the CIAP program for fisheries studies in the Chukchi Sea and he is willing to find out the scope of their program. We either coordinate with their program or wait until their program is done before we move forward with anything else.

Item #6 Better document the diets and food habits of marine mammals and birds either through direct studies using stomach contents or through indirect studies like looking at isotope or fatty acids.

In some cases we have a decent idea of what they are eating like Bowhead Whale but in other species we have less information such as Beluga Whales and so we are trying to fill in some of those gaps is important and relates to the forage fish we just talked about, possible disease issues or health assessments in Marine Mammals so there is a lot of other connections with this project and with others.

Item #7 Document impacts from helicopters on important subsistence resources, including marine mammals and caribou.

Robert addressed the committee stating that this is a project that relatively little work has been done on the North Slope. At one point there was a study where helicopters and planes were flown over molting geese and they studied their behavior. Of course hunters have told us lots about how helicopters and planes disturb caribou. And so this study might be a bit of a challenge to implement at least in terms of western science and trying to do a kind of exposure studies by

exposing caribou to helicopters or something like that. Of course away from villages or hunting areas but to try and better understand how helicopters disturb subsistence resources.

The committee agreed with Robert's summary and then added that using a webcam and the communities' observations may be helpful. Craig added that Steven Braun has completed studies regarding caribou in the central arctic and suggested that it would be helpful to include his documentation in our study. Bill recommended using the Planning Department as a resource to give us a heads on the permits that have been filed for helicopter use.

The general feeling is that this may require a broad RFP and writing up a RFP to say here are what the issues are and how do we address it: Is the initial step a local knowledge or traditional knowledge study? Is it using the approach of having folks in the villages tell us where caribou are and later look at where helicopters are to be and how these two things interact? Might it be a study that uses information from where we know helicopters might be and when and designing a study that way? We obviously need to expand on this paragraph but also to ask for the research community to provide some ideas on how we go about dealing with this. We need help making this sure this RFP is written in the best possible way.

Item #8 Implement a study to determine the impacts of oil fouling of bowhead baleen.

This project came about because over the last 30 years we have been talking about what if a spill occurred and what it might do to the bowheads. The question of how oil might foul baleen and what the impacts might be to the feeding efficiency of whales. Also how the spilled oil might affect eyes or skin or lungs or other health aspects of bowheads or other marine mammals are obviously really valid ones.

The members discussed this in length and decided in keeping the oil fouling of bowhead baleen as a specific study with more information of course but keeping that specifically and perhaps adding another project about the potential for spilled oil including dispersants and how they might impact cetaceans or just marine mammals in general and in multiple different ways and trying to get some additional guidance from the research community about those kinds of questions. The study should also include looking at oil and dispersed oil so there is that comparison and of course having a control with no oil or dispersed oil is necessary as well.

Item #9 Establish a health assessment program of marine mammals.

This project has been initiated in 2011 Michael is about to get a proposal in the next week about this and the initial approach for this is: that the approach the NSB took is to look at stress hormones and how they relate to body condition and then reproductive condition and such. The Borough is writing up a proposal right now for a larger health assessment program for marine mammal through the coastal impact assistance program and so a lot of this is underway but there may be some specific things to be addressed in 2012 that aren't captured at this point. This program would be appropriate to address the current disease problem we have with the seals and of course to include in this project how it relates to diets and food habits as well as movements of

animals all that kind of thing.

The NSB doesn't have a vision for how this would work at this point but maybe what we could talk to Raphaela and get some guidance from her and then figure out the best way to move forward whether it's looking at oil content of blubber; whether it's looking at exposure to diseases or some other thing let's see if we can get some more specifics from her and perhaps change the project accordingly.

Sue suggested getting guidance from Terri Roles, Marine Mammal Health, she provides an overall assessment of things for NOAA.

Item #10: Work with fish and wildlife and the USGS to monitor walrus particularly those hauling out near Pt. Lay and Icy Cape to better understand why walrus are using those areas and then what might be the impacts on habits nearby.

There are a lot of studies ongoing and the committee wanted to be able to use that information if possible. There was a concern regarding not disturbing the mammals any more that is absolutely necessary by using webcams and to also incorporate acoustic monitoring.

Michael pointed out that there is a lot of information that can be collected without the walrus even being there. If we are trying to identify what are the physical or biological characteristics that makes an area attractive to walrus haul-out some of that information can be collect without walrus being there and should be done so. Some of the sampling to be done is not right at the haul-out area. There are tagging studies as well as acoustic studies to help us identify hot spots where these animals are going and likely feeding from the haul-out so lots of information again and also one piece of information I believe webcams were funded to be deployed by national fish and wildlife foundation along the Chukchi Coast. That is something that maybe coming down the road.

Item #11: Consider working with BOEM and Industry on why Hanna Shoal is important for walruses.

It seems that there is a fair amount of work starting up there but maybe there is some additional work that is needed. Michael stated that a lot of work is to be done over the next two years, five and half million has been funded. I do think and I have had a lot of conversations with Ken Dunton, project lead, on how industry might add to that. I think that there are potentially areas to marine animals and birds. There is room for some thinking around Hanna Shoal region and ways we could add to an existing study.

Item #12: Baseline studies on currents, bathymetry, fish, bird and mammal use of Kasegaluk and Kuk Lagoons.

Kuk Lagoon at Wainwright and Kasegaluk Lagoon stretches just south of Wainwright down quite a ways to Pt. Lay both of these areas are important to a variety of marine mammals and

birds and so gathering more information about how those systems work could be valuable and perhaps putting out a broad RFP for this study is the right approach.

Good literature search is necessary and to tie in with Issue #3 workshop on scientific and traditional knowledge with that additional information it may suggest a better study that anyone might come up with at the moment.

The committee members discussed this project thoroughly and the suggestion was to revise this study into an early phase that is summarizing what is known about the lagoon systems using lesser knowledge perhaps having a workshop that gathers local and traditional knowledge and then next step at some point in the future to might be to do some field work.

Item #13: Establishing protocols for handling and storage of environmental samples, biological samples enhancing the archives that exist and if we can combine this one with #9 health assessments of marine mammals and early focus on the biological samples at this point and then move onto the next one.

Item #14: Collect polar bear through hair snare.

The hair is used to extract DNA to hopefully better understand how many animals are using the area by using genetic capture gives us some idea of frequent use; sex ratio using the area. This project was wildly successful in Barrow at least collecting samples this last year and it is being tried in Kaktovik this fall and winter and little bit of effort to put out at Cooper Island this summer.

The committee agreed to ask Jason to write a two page summary that provides more information that may include rubbing posts and hunter samples.

Item #15: Literature review of seismic impacts on marine mammal prey. Michael you said it may overlap with a JIP

There is a lot of information that is out there and it is important that as a function of this research initiative that we have an independent NSB funded and administered look at this information and assessment.

Do an RFP for somebody to do a literature review on seismic impacts on two marine mammal prey items.

Item #16: To better monitor ship traffic in the Beaufort and Chukchi seas.

This is a project that Todd Sformo has been thinking about doing. He has been working with Alaska Marine Exchange in collecting data here and it sounds like one of the limitations is actually shore based stations for monitoring ships and so for this one maybe what we can do to

provide more information to exactly what this project would actually be so that the committee has more information to help develop priorities is to ask Todd to develop a two page summary background information.

Tom: As you folks in Barrow know we have a radar installation on the Point. We have been working with the National Marine Exchange and we put one of their antennas out there because we wanted to see if that power unit could in fact finally provide sufficient power for the instrument but also to make sure there isn't electro interference between our generator system and their antenna. That study is ongoing right now the initial results suggest that there is no problem they are working very well together. In addition the radar themselves that we are using to map the surface currents have the potential to track vessels it has been done somewhat successfully off of New Jersey and we are working with Rutgers University who developed that approach and manufactured the radar to develop that approach and now we are going to try to use it up in this area. So that is some stuff that is ongoing I don't know where it is going to lead it may be successful it may not but that is the potential part of the solution.

The committee would like Todd to call Tom to work together on the two page write up.

Item #17 Develop projects related to subsistence hunting and economies, that may include impact studies or studies of hunters use areas and so this one is pretty vague at this point.

With the 2011 monies we are trying to get Steven Braun to work with us and folks from Wainwright to document hunters use areas, important areas using the technique he does.

One gap area is specific harvest areas and Steve has documented is broad use areas and they are shaded by effort but there are GPS system that really fine tune the use areas. We might to focus this.

Instead of literature review as such how about GIS based review of what's on hand now and value would be added by the fine tuned study Craig is talking about. Instead of going through a list of past studies it would be good if somehow that could be summarized in a map form.

Committee recommends changing the study to be more a literature review about subsistence economy and subsistence hunting and figure out what the information needs are and what the gaps are. Initial step is the literature review and then using that information to focus the question more.

Item #18: Enhance outreach and education program.

Robert suggested that with the studies we are doing get information back to people by having Leslie write up a proposal or we can make it a component with each of the individual study. I would like to see a outreach with each study.

The Committee was very impressed with Leslie's presentation at the September Meeting and would like to see outreach completed with each study.

Robert: Thank you for your input. Provide more information for each project. Reorganize with some of the connections. Get list of projects back out to committee within two or three week have folks prioritize them and then have a discussion about projects we want to move forward with 2012. Go over at the next meeting.

Next Meeting will be in Fairbanks

Robert: We will do a Doodle Poll and/or call to find out where they want to meet. Call members in villages for quorum. Are there any additional items for agenda, topics or issues before we adjourn? Have Malissa and Kamalei sort out two day meeting would be great but if necessary we can have a one day meeting and if need be to get a quorum, we will do a teleconference.

Bill: Agenda Item Discuss putting container in each communities for storage of equipment for the scientific study and could also double as office during the study.

Bill: Last couple of years we have had mystery algae I'm just curious weather this dead mass of vegetation is being released from ice pack and is it making its way to us. Found out it was an Algae or something. If that happens again and find out what it is do something about it.

Robert: This program we may be able to structure this program so that we can have a strike force. Ok we will put on agenda.

Craig: I agree kind of swat team response for emergencies.

Robert: If nobody has anything else we will use Bob's relaxed rules of order we will go ahead and adjourn. Thank you.

Meeting Adjourned 11:45am