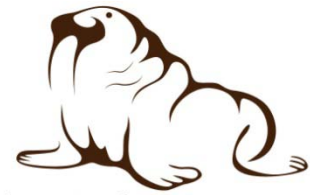


Eskimo Walrus Commission

Quarterly Report-10/1/15-12/31/15



Eskimo Walrus Commission

"To protect the pacific walrus population."

The Eskimo Walrus Commission (EWC) represents 19 walrus hunting coastal communities in Western and Northern Alaska. EWC has 2 staff positions (Director and EWC Specialist) that maintain daily office operations.

The following highlights administrative activities to date:

- Consulted and worked with the Foraker Group on a sustainable business plan for the EWC that was completed in December 2015. This work was funded by the Alaska Community Foundation. The project allowed the EWC to look at alternative funding strategies and ways to remain a viable organization as cooperative agreement funds continue to decrease.
- EWC staff met with Strategies 360, a communications firm in Anchorage, in December to further update the EWC's communications infrastructure, specifically developing the EWC website. EWC staff also received the first installment of its media training, which included a session with Rhonda McBride from KTVA to learn about how to work with reporters on stories related to walrus and the EWC's work. This is funded through the Oak Foundation to improve the EWC's capacity as an organization and effectiveness in its stewardship and advocacy roles. The draft EWC website is now online and will be further updated with Strategies 360 in the coming months. The website can be viewed at www.eskimowalruscommission.org.
- Assisted Environmental Law Institute in October/November in the completion of the "Alaska Native Procedure for Marine Mammal Consultation Handbook" funded by the Marine Mammal Commission.
- Participated in a Co-Management Symposium in Fairbanks in November with state/federal wildlife managers, Alaska Native leaders, and UAF faculty and students to discuss cooperative agreement models for fish and wildlife resource management. EWC was able to bring the EWC Vice Chair and EWC Specialist to Fairbanks to participate through funding from the Oak Foundation and the Foraker Group to increase the EWC's capacity through mentorship and leadership building opportunities.
- Throughout October and November the EWC communicated with the FWS on revising the proposal for Traditional Knowledge research for the ESA listing determination for walrus. The EWC submitted an alternative proposal and received notification from the FWS that the proposal would have to be submitted as a contract bid instead of having the funding added to the cooperative agreement budget as originally planned. The EWC was unable to clear this up prior to the EWC Annual Meeting, but went ahead with plans for the meeting according to the proposal submitted to the FWS.
- Held EWC annual meeting at Downtown Marriott Anchorage in December to discuss administrative issues, provide commissioners with information on the Endangered Species Act listing process for walrus and the Traditional Knowledge research to be conducted for this process. EWC re-elected Chairman Charlie Brower (Barrow) and two new Executive Committee members, Kenneth Kingeekuk (Savoonga) and Stephen Schaeffer (Kotzebue). The EWC Vice Chair, Elmer Seetot Jr. (Brevig Mission), and the third Executive Committee member, Benjamin Payenna (King Island), are now beginning the second years of their 2-year terms. The EWC passed a resolution requesting technical support from the North Slope Borough as we deal with the ESA listing determination process for walrus.
- Attended the Indigenous People's Council on Marine Mammals meeting in Anchorage in December, and again were able to bring the EWC Vice Chair and EWC Specialist to participate through capacity-building funding from the Oak Foundation. Among the items discussed were co-management funding needs, capacity building for Alaska Native Organizations, the blood quantum requirement for marine mammal hunting, an MOA with AFN regarding marine mammal subsistence issues, and an update to the umbrella agreement between IPCoMM, Department of Commerce, and Department of Interior from 2006.
- EWC staff attended the Arctic Waterways Safety Committee meeting in December in Anchorage, in conjunction with a Research Cruise Workshop intended to mitigate conflicts between research vessels operating in the arctic while marine mammal subsistence hunting is occurring.
- EWC coordinated with research partners in Chukotka on the "Traditional Knowledge of the Native People of Chukotka About Walrus" project, funded by the National Park Service, and brought 9 hunters and walrus biologists from the Association of Traditional Marine Mammal Hunters of Chukotka (ATMMHC) and EWC

members to Nome in December for a bilateral walrus workshop held at the Kawerak office. Kawerak's Natural Resource staff, University of Alaska's Marine Advisory Program, and Smithsonian's Arctic Center participated in the workshop. Complications arising from weather and flight cancellations resulted in parts of the workshop being conducted with some of the EWC's Alaska contingent separately from the Chukotkan contingent, but the workshop was a success nonetheless. Plans were further developed for Traditional Knowledge research about walrus in Chukotka over the next 2 years, and priorities for walrus-related issues were identified by workshop participants. A workshop report will be drafted in the coming months.

On-going Tasks:

- Continue communicating with USFWS and Kawerak leadership on long-term budget issues and work toward stabilizing EWC financially
- Work with USFWS to finalize the plan for gathering Traditional Knowledge for the ESA listing determination
- Respond to media inquiries as they arise regarding incidents related to walrus and the impacts of climate change on walrus
- Remain proactive in discussions/meetings regarding increased vessel traffic in the Arctic through AMMC, AWSC, and other forums
- Begin planning workshops in Gambell and Savoonga on Tribal Marine Mammal Ordinance expansion
- Contact other marine mammal commissions to coordinate EWC attendance at their annual meetings and communicate with EWC Commissioners on potential issues to propose collaboration on
- Continue working with Strategies 360 on an updated EWC website and communications infrastructure
- Continue working with the communities of Gambell, Savoonga, Diomedes, and Wales on their economic disaster declarations due to low walrus harvests through participating in regular teleconferences with Kawerak's Community Services Division, the State of Alaska, and other entities.
- Work to ensure that subsistence users have a meaningful voice in the ESA listing determination for walrus and begin working with the USFWS on an updated management plan in preparation for a potential change in the legal status of Pacific walrus under the ESA

Significant Impacts to the Region

Climate change remains a significant impact to the region and a main focus of the EWC's work. Funding is another significant impact, affecting the capacity of organizations such as the EWC to effectively be involved in management processes that impact the subsistence community. The potential ESA listing of walrus is one of these management processes impacting the region. In order to be done right, the ESA listing determination will require active participation and input from the walrus subsistence community through the Traditional Knowledge research conducted by the EWC, and other avenues. The EWC will work to ensure that subsistence users have a voice in this process as it moves forward.

Conclusion

The EWC remains committed to being actively involved in co-management activities related to the Pacific walrus, including seeking funding mechanisms to incorporate the interests of Alaska Natives to self-manage and to offer research opportunities to federal agencies and other organizations. The EWC also continues to seek better collaboration and communication with other groups, especially with our member tribes, on issues and concerns related to walrus management and wellbeing. The EWC is continually working to make progress on the strategic initiatives identified in the 2013 EWC Vision Navigation workshop, and remain an effective organization in a changing political, environmental, and social arctic environment.