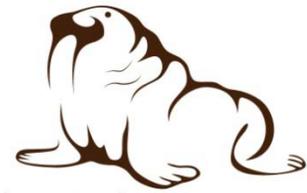


Eskimo Walrus Commission

Quarterly Report-4/1/15-6/30/15



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:

- EWC staff is communicating with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff on Cooperative Agreement funding issues, and continues to request increased funding. Thus far, additional funding has not been identified for the EWC, so adjustments were made to the current Cooperative Agreement scope of work to reflect the funding amount. EWC staff met with Kawerak, Inc. leadership on this issue and Kawerak President, Melanie Bahnke, sent a letter to USFWS Alaska Regional Director Geoffrey Haskett, expressing Kawerak's concern and requesting a meeting to discuss this issue. In preparation for the meeting, EWC staff arranged a telephone poll vote on a resolution from the EWC requesting increased funding from the USFWS. This resolution passed unanimously and a copy is included with this report.
- The USFWS has identified funding for gathering Traditional Knowledge to help inform the decision-making process for the potential Endangered Species Act listing for walrus, and requested the assistance of the EWC in this effort. The idea proposed for how to accomplish this was via a workshop bringing together EWC Commissioners and community members to allow for information to be gathered in one place by USFWS. Also, the workshop would allow for more detailed presentations to the Commissioners on walrus-related scientific research. Due to EWC funding issues, EWC staff is looking at ways to provide Traditional Knowledge for the ESA process in the most financially efficient means possible, which may result in a method other than a workshop being utilized. Once decisions have been made on this, EWC staff will contact Commissioners with detailed information.
- EWC staff has been involved in the response to an incident that occurred in Nome in June, in which an elder from the King Island Native Community was prevented by the Nome Police Department from harvesting an injured walrus. EWC staff has worked closely with Kawerak's Natural Resources Division to ensure that the City of Nome and Nome PD have the correct information regarding walrus hunting regulations and to encourage the implementation of cultural sensitivity training for employees and police officers who are unfamiliar with the cultural traditions, including subsistence, that exist in rural Alaska.
- EWC staff continues to work with the Native Village of Diomedea, Kawerak's Community Services department and the Alaska Division of Community and Regional Affairs to pursue a disaster declaration for the community due to poor walrus harvests since 2013. The EWC is now also in communication with the communities of Gambell, Savoonga, and Wales, who have experienced low harvests as well. EWC staff, along with the other parties involved, are seeking ways to provide relief for the communities, as well as long-term solutions should these conditions continue to occur.
- EWC staff assisted with a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant which was awarded to the Native Village of Gambell to support the continued operations of the Marine Mammal Advisory Councils in Gambell and Savoonga, and the local Tribal Monitors. There have been set-backs in implementation of the grant, and EWC staff has provided technical support to get the project going.
- Throughout the months of April and May, EWC staff conducted Traditional Knowledge interviews with elders and hunters from the King Island Native Community for the TEK project funded by ConocoPhillips. EWC staff contacted the Stebbins Community Association to request permission to conduct the next set of TEK interviews in Stebbins. Unfortunately, ConocoPhillips informed the EWC that full funding will not be provided for this project, so we will be unable to conduct interviews in additional communities as planned.
- Representatives from the Foraker Group traveled to Nome in June to meet with EWC staff to solidify the main elements of a sustainable business plan for the EWC, which will be finalized this summer. This plan, made possible by a grant from the Alaska Community Foundation, will be an asset for the EWC in pursuing funding to further support our organizational operations and efforts.
- EWC finalized a grant agreement with the National Park Service to conduct TEK research in Chukotka for the next three years, and to organize workshops in Nome and Provideniya to allow Chukotkan and Alaskan

hunters to discuss mutual walrus-related concerns. EWC is now in the process of establishing a contract with the Association of Traditional Marine Mammal Hunters of Chukotka to conduct this research, and will soon begin planning for a workshop in Nome in October 2015.

- The EWC was awarded grants from the Oak Foundation and Pew Charitable Trusts, and grant agreements with both organizations are now in place. These grants will allow the EWC to work with the Native Villages of Gambell and Savoonga to expand their existing Tribal Marine Mammal Ordinances, to document the history of the ordinances, and to help other EWC communities develop similar local management structures. These grants also provide funding for EWC staff and leadership to attend the meetings of other marine mammal commissions to identify areas of mutual concern and allow for greater collaboration on such issues. Lastly, funding from the Oak Foundation will allow the EWC to contract with a communications firm to update the EWC website, social media presence, and develop a newsletter. Unfortunately the EWC's proposal to the Alaska Native Fund was not awarded, but EWC staff is currently working on a proposal with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to secure the remaining matching funds needed for the ordinance and commission collaboration work.
- EWC Director, Vera Metcalf, attended a Walrus Spill Response Workshop hosted by Defenders of Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on May 18.
- EWC staff and the EWC Chair attended the Arctic Marine Mammal Coalition and Arctic Waterways Safety Committee Meetings in Anchorage June 7, 8, and 9. The AWSC now has a new website: www.arcticwaterways.org.
- EWC Specialist, Katya Wassillie, co-authored an article on the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification on EWC communities, which was published online at earthzine.org. A copy of the article is included with this report.
- EWC Specialist, Katya Wassillie, presented on the impacts of climate change on EWC communities at the International Funders for Indigenous Peoples regional meeting in Boston, MA on June 5th. Following the presentation, Katya was invited to write an article to be published in Cultural Survival regarding this issue, which is now in progress.
- EWC staff conducted a walrus ivory sale at the Kawerak Regional/Rural Providers Conference in Nome June 1-2, the proceeds of which were sent to the Pacific Walrus Conservation Fund.
- EWC Specialist, Katya Wassillie, relocated to her hometown of White Mountain in May and is now working from a remote office there. Letters were sent to all the EWC Commissioners notifying them of this change, and providing updated contact information. Katya's email address remains the same: ewcspec@kawerak.org, but her new office number is 907-638-6402.

On-going Tasks:

- Continue communicating with USFWS and Kawerak leadership on budget issues and work toward stabilizing EWC financially
- Continue working on a plan for documenting Traditional Knowledge for ESA listing process
- Continue working with Kawerak and the City of Nome to ensure that if similar situations to the recent walrus incident on the Nome waterfront arise in the future, better outcomes can be achieved for everyone in terms of protecting subsistence harvest and public safety
- Continue working with Diomede, Gambell, Savoonga, and Wales on harvest disaster for spring 2015
- Remain proactive in discussions/meetings regarding increased vessel traffic in the Arctic through AMMC, AWSC, and other forums
- Continue seeking support for EWC Resolution 2014-01 and communicating with relevant entities to push for reductions in carbon emissions
- Conduct Pacific walrus TEK research in Stebbins, if permission is granted by the tribe
- Work with the Foraker Group to finalize EWC sustainable business plan
- Work with ATMMHC to establish contract for TEK research in Chukotka and begin planning for walrus workshop in Nome in October 2015
- 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

- Begin working with Strategies 360, a communications firm in Anchorage, on an updated EWC website and communications infrastructure
- Finalize and submit grant proposal with National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for matching funds for ordinance/collaboration work

Significant Impacts to the Region

Climate change continues to be a significant impact to the region, and the root cause of other impacts as well. Harvest disasters declared by the communities of Diomedede, Gambell, Savoonga, and Wales are a significant impact caused by climate change, and the EWC will continue looking for ways to provide relief and long-term solutions. The participation of the EWC in the Arctic Marine Mammal Coalition and the Arctic Waterways Safety Committee is also a significant benefit, as it allows the voice of the subsistence hunters to be heard in matters regarding arctic shipping.

Conclusion

The EWC continues to seek better collaboration and communication with other groups, especially with our member tribes, on issues and concerns related 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.



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