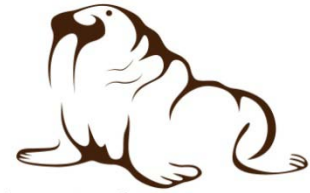


Eskimo Walrus Commission

Quarterly Report-7/1/15-9/30/15



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 submitted a request for 2016 compact funds from Kawerak in the amount of \$97,000, which was approved by the Kawerak board during their September meeting. This will be used to cover the shortfall in funding from the USFWS cooperative agreement for EWC staff salaries in 2016.
- EWC staff collaborated with colleagues at Kawerak's Natural Resources Division and from the Arctic Marine Mammal Coalition to develop a revised proposal for the gathering of Traditional Knowledge (TK) for the Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing determination for walrus. More information on the revised proposal will be presented during the 2015 EWC Annual Meeting and input from EWC Commissioners will be requested to help guide this research plan.
- EWC staff participated in a media teleconference in August with the USFWS and the Native Village of Point Lay regarding concerns about potential disturbances at the Point Lay walrus haul-out. The Native Village of Point Lay requested that the media, tourists, and others refrain from visiting the community to photograph and/or observe the haul-out due to the dangers of disturbance, as well as out of respect for the community and its stewardship role with the haul-out.
- EWC staff responded to media inquiries along with the USFWS and the Native Village of Point Hope following a report of 25 walruses found dead near Cape Lisburne in September. USFWS Office of Law Enforcement is investigating the report.
- EWC collaborated with Kawerak's Community Services Division in the coordination of 10,000 lbs of frozen fish donated by SeaShare to be transported to the communities of Gambell, Savoonga, Wales, and Diomedea in July. These communities declared harvest disasters due to record low walrus harvests during the spring 2015 season and other recent hunting seasons. Efforts to obtain additional disaster support from the State of Alaska are ongoing.
- EWC staff has continued to provide technical support to the Native Village of Gambell in the implementation of their National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant for the operation of the Marine Mammal Advisory Councils and the Tribal Monitors on St. Lawrence Island. EWC is working with Gambell to coordinate a Joint Marine Mammal Advisory Council meeting in the fall/winter of 2015 or early 2016.
- EWC staff submitted a grant proposal to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for work on the expansion and duplication of Tribal Marine Mammal Ordinances in EWC communities, and to collaborate more effectively with other marine mammal commissions on issues of mutual concern. If funded, this will provide the remaining matching funds needed for the Oak Foundation grant received by the EWC in 2015.
- EWC staff has continued to work with the Foraker Group on the development of a sustainable business plan for the EWC. With USFWS cooperative agreement funding continuing to decrease, alternative funding strategies are needed for the EWC to remain a viable organization. This work is funded by a grant from the Alaska Community Foundation and will be finalized by December 2015.
- EWC staff has coordinated with research partners in Chukotka to begin the project funded by the National Park Service, "Traditional Knowledge of the Native People of Chukotka About Walrus." A pilot study was conducted in one Chukotkan community in the summer of 2015, and EWC staff is communicating with the Association of Traditional Marine Mammal Hunters of Chukotka (ATMMHC) to finalize details for the 2015 bilateral walrus workshop. The workshop will be held December 14-16 at the Kawerak office in Nome, and 14 Chukotkan walrus hunters and researchers will be in attendance.
- EWC finalized a contract with Strategies 360, a communications firm in Anchorage, to update the EWC's communications infrastructure, including a new website, newsletter, and an improved social media presence. EWC staff met with Strategies 360 in August to develop priorities and an action plan for this work, which is funded by a grant from the Oak Foundation.

- EWC Specialist, Katya Wassillie, published an article in the September 2015 issue of Cultural Survival Quarterly. The article highlighted the impacts of climate change on walrus subsistence communities and the efforts of the EWC on this issue.

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 TK 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
- 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 conduct a bilateral walrus workshop in Nome in December 2015 and to coordinate Traditional Knowledge research in Chukotka throughout the next 2 years
- 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
- 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 continues to be a significant impact to the region, and a main focus of the EWC's work. Kawerak's support of the EWC in its time of financial need is also a significant impact, as it allows the EWC to continue to provide services to its member communities without interruption or decreased capacity for the coming year. Long term solutions must be identified, however, in order to ensure that Alaska Native co-management entities, including the EWC, have the capacity to actively and meaningfully participate in management decisions into the future. This is of particular importance considering the impacts of increasing pressures from climate change on our communities and their resources.

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.