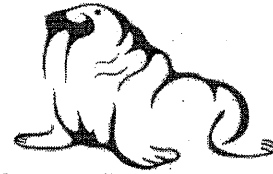


# Eskimo Walrus Commission

## Quarterly Report-1/1/16-3/31/16

### Cooperative Agreement Award F12AC01628



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:

- Following the EWC Annual Meeting in December 2015, EWC asked Kawerak's Social Science Director, Julie Raymond-Yakoubian, to represent them in the US Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) sponsored science committee meetings for the Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing determination for Pacific walrus. Through Julie's participation in the committee, it became clear that the listing determination process was not designed to meaningfully include Traditional Knowledge components. EWC requested that Julie discontinue her participation in the committee when the EWC decided to suspend its involvement in the scientific committee meetings in January until an intention to fully and properly incorporate TK was considered in the ESA listing determination process.
- After the EWC Annual Meeting EWC staff followed up with the FWS regarding the Traditional Knowledge research to be included in the ESA listing determination. The Service did not agree to the methods or focus that the EWC was proposing for this work, although groundwork had already been developed during the Annual Meeting. EWC staff contacted members of the EWC Executive Committee for approval before informing the FWS that the EWC would no longer be involved in the ESA listing determination discussions as they are currently being conducted. The EWC sent a letter to Dan Ashe, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, requesting a review of the process, as it did not properly involve the EWC or Traditional Knowledge information.
- The EWC was informally contacted in early March by Robin Gregory, a consultant from the University of British Columbia hired by FWS, who was beginning conversations with the FWS on conducting a workshop to gather Traditional Knowledge for the ESA listing determination. Robin requested EWC's participation in assisting in workshop plans and attendance. The EWC informed Robin of the history between the EWC and the FWS on this issue that led to EWC discontinuing its involvement in any planning meetings and explained the reasons why a workshop would be inadequate for collecting Traditional Knowledge for this process. At that point Robin said if the EWC chose not to participate in the workshop, he would inform the FWS that he would not participate either, and not contact the EWC again. The EWC subsequently received communications from Robin continuing to request our participation in such a workshop, and informing the EWC that the workshop was moving forward with or without EWC participation. Currently, EWC does not support the workshop as planned by the FWS and outside entities to be conducted in early June, as the use of a single workshop is not an adequate method for gathering Traditional Knowledge for such a significant decision. Instead, EWC will continue to request an extension to the ESA listing determination to allow for proper participation by the EWC, adequate tribal consultation, and for the Traditional Knowledge research to be conducted following accepted anthropological methods.
- The EWC Director hosted the Marine Mammal Commission (MMC) "Arctic Listening" session in Nome during their Arctic communities travel in February. EWC staff also attended the Indigenous People's Council on Marine Mammals (IPCoMM) meeting in Anchorage in February, which was designed to coincide with the MMC meeting in Anchorage. IPCoMM presented issues to the MMC regarding funding and capacity for Alaska Native Marine Mammal groups, the proper use of Traditional Knowledge in decision-making, and several other important issues.
- The EWC Director attended the Arctic Waterways Safety Committee (AWSC) meeting in Juneau in early March, during which time the Alaska legislature was approached for funding to support the AWSC.
- EWC staff and several subsistence hunters from the Bering Straits region attended the Arctic Science Summit Week in Fairbanks in March, and participated in sessions on walrus research priorities, and the walrus haul-out management needs in both Chukotka and Alaska. Walrus researchers and subsistence advocates from Chukotka also attended and participated in these sessions.

- The EWC Specialist attended the Qayassiq Walrus Commission meeting in Dillingham in March and proposed conducting Traditional Knowledge interviews in QWC communities. Approval was given by the QWC for this research and outreach was conducted to the communities of Manokotak, Togiak, and Twin Hills soliciting their participation. This work is funded by a grant from ConocoPhillips and will result in a report in the format of the previous EWC Traditional Knowledge report, "Conserving Our Culture Through Traditional Management."

#### **On-going Tasks:**

- Continue to communicate with USFWS and Kawerak leadership on long-term budget issues and work toward stabilizing EWC financially
- Will continue to request an extension to the ESA listing determination for Pacific walrus to ensure that the subsistence community is properly involved in the process and that the Traditional Knowledge research conducted for this decision is done correctly and meaningfully
- 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 working with the Native Villages of Gambell and Savoonga to plan a Joint Marine Mammal Advisory Committee Meeting in May/June 2016 and discuss capacity building for the local management structure and the potential expansion of the Tribal Marine Mammal Ordinances
- Contact other marine mammal commissions to coordinate EWC attendance at their annual meetings and communicate with EWC Commissioners on potential issues on which EWC can propose to collaborate
- Continue working with Strategies 360 on an updated EWC website and communications infrastructure, as well as media training
- Continue working with the communities of Gambell, Savoonga, Diomedede, and Wales on their economic disaster declarations due to low walrus harvests through participation in regular teleconferences with Kawerak's Community Services Division, the State of Alaska, and other entities.
- Continue developing reports to submit to granting agencies for the various EWC grant-funded projects currently underway, including a workshop report from the EWC Walrus Workshop in Nome in December 2015.

#### **Significant Impacts to the Region**

The lack of involvement by the subsistence community in the ESA listing determination process currently underway for Pacific walrus is a significant impact to the region. This decision has the potential to impact EWC if local hunters and local voices are not included within the full ESA regulatory process of Pacific walrus that would further result in impacting the food security of subsistence users. The FWS continues to operate on a decision deadline of the fall of 2016, which is not an adequate time frame in which to make up for the lack of involvement thus far. EWC will continue to request an extension of this deadline to allow for the voices of the subsistence community to be properly include, and for their Traditional Knowledge to be correctly documented and utilized in the ESA determination.

#### **Conclusion**

The EWC remains committed to being actively involved in co-management activities related to the Pacific walrus, including seeking funding to incorporate the interests of Alaska Natives to self-manage and to offer research opportunities to federal agencies and other organizations. 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.