

# Eskimo Walrus Commission

## Quarterly Report 4/1/16-6/30/16

### Cooperative Agreement Award F14AC01135



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:

- In May of 2016, EWC staff helped to organize a Joint Marine Mammal Advisory Council (MMAC) meeting in Gambell, AK. The Savoonga MMAC was in attendance, along with EWC staff and Jonella Larson-White, a facilitator from the Foraker Group. Discussions at the meeting included updates from the Tribal Monitor on the previous harvest season, clarification of roles regarding the reporting and management structure on the ground for Tribal Marine Mammal Ordinances (TMMO), potential options to explore for funding to continue to support the Tribal Monitoring program, and an examination of the ordinances to address any needs for updates since their initial adoption in 2010. The Joint MMAC also gave consent for the ordinances and the history document to be used as examples in other EWC communities for the development of their own community-based management and monitoring structures. Plans were made to hold a follow-up meeting in Savoonga later in the summer.
- Throughout May and June 2016, EWC hosted an Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP) intern along with Kawerak's Social Sciences program. Brandon Bachman, the ANSEP intern, spent his two months at the EWC office in Nome, and provided assistance with the new EWC website and in transcribing Traditional Knowledge interviews for an ongoing EWC grant project. Brandon also worked on several Traditional Knowledge projects for the Social Sciences program, which involved a trip to Shishmaref and a boat excursion to Mary's Igloo with Social Science and Natural Resources staff to look at anthropological sites. EWC and Social Science programs plan to coordinate EWC and Social Science programs plan to coordinate Year 2 of ANSEP in 2017.
- In May and June of 2016, EWC received requests for assistance from several member communities regarding the workshop being held by the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in early June in Anchorage. Communities were concerned about the short notice and lack of background information at the time they received requests for their participation. EWC staff helped the communities to draft letters expressing these concerns, and sent background information to the communities on the Endangered Species Act listing process as it has unfolded from the perspective of the EWC.
- In early June 2016, EWC staff attended the Polar Bear Summit that was organized by the North Slope Borough in Nome, AK, with the support of the Marine Mammal Commission. During the summit the situation of the Alaska Naniuq Commission (ANC) was discussed, and many EWC Commissioners were in attendance, as they are also Commissioners for the ANC. Another major discussion centered on the upcoming harvest quota for polar bears, which is a result of the U.S.-Russia bilateral treaty signed in 2000. The EWC is continuing to monitor the situation of the ANC and the polar bear quota as it unfolds, as the proceedings impact our membership and the context of marine mammal co-management.
- In June 2016, EWC organized an executive committee meeting via teleconference to discuss the ongoing issue of ivory ban laws being passed in various states throughout the U.S. The EWC Executive Committee passed EWC Resolution 2016-01 "A Resolution Opposing the Inclusion of Walrus, Mammoth, and Mastodon Ivory in African Elephant Ivory Ban Laws in the United States." EWC staff forwarded the resolution to the Alaska Congressional delegation, as well as other statewide and international Native organizations, including the Alaska Federation of Natives and the Inuit Circumpolar Council. Several EWC communities have passed supporting resolutions as well as the Kawerak Board of Directors.
- In June 2016, EWC Director Vera Metcalf attended a Marine Mammal Commission meeting in Washington, D.C., which included meetings with top agency officials and members of Congress to communicate the needs for funding on marine mammal issues as well as the co-management issues being explored more closely by the MMC during their recent hearing sessions in Alaska.
- In June 2016, EWC submitted a grant proposal to ConocoPhillips for the remainder of the matching funds needed for the project funded by the Oak Foundation and Pew Charitable Trusts, with in-kind support

from Kawerak and the Wildlife Conservation Society. The grant will allow EWC to work on updating the Tribal Marine Mammal Ordinances in Gambell and Savoonga, and work with other EWC communities to develop similar ordinances if they so choose. The grant will also allow EWC to continue to develop its communications infrastructure, including the website, Facebook page, and an upcoming newsletter. Lastly, this grant will provide travel support for EWC staff and leadership to collaborate more closely with other Alaska Native marine mammal organizations on issues of mutual concern.

- In June 2016, EWC staff worked with Strategies 360 to develop the first draft of the new EWC newsletter. The newsletter is expected to be released in the next few months and will greatly improve our communication with our member communities.
- In June 2016 EWC Director Vera Metcalf attended CHOW 2016 hosted by NOAA in Washington, D.C .

#### **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, and that discussions on the potential management structure for walrus if listed under the ESA is included as an essential component of consultation
- 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, as well as discussions on other impacts to walrus and subsistence communities, including climate change and ocean acidification
- Continue working with the Native Villages of Gambell and Savoonga, as well as Foraker Group to 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

#### **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 included, 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. 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.