

Eskimo Walrus Commission

Quarterly Report 7/1/16-9/30/16

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 July of 2016 EWC staff attended a 5C Arctic in a 2C World Workshop in New York City to provide a voice on the impacts of a warming arctic on its indigenous peoples. This workshop was held in preparation for the White House Arctic Science Ministerial in September 2016, which EWC Director Vera Metcalf attended along with other Alaska Native leaders to further advocate on behalf of EWC communities and the Alaska Native community at large.
- In July of 2016 EWC staff traveled to Savoonga to attend a Joint Marine Mammal Advisory Council (MMAC) meeting. This meeting was held to continue the conversation from the Joint MMAC meeting held in Gambell in May. Jonella White with the Foraker Group facilitated the discussion about updating the Tribal Marine Mammal Ordinances, and building capacity for the Tribal Monitoring program to continue after grant funds have been utilized. This work was funded by grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Oak Foundation, and Pew Charitable Trusts.
- From July- September EWC staff engaged with Kawerak leadership and organizations throughout the state to push back against the state ivory ban laws being passed throughout the United States. EWC staff shared the ivory ban resolution passed by the EWC Executive Committee in June 2016 and received supporting resolutions from many organizations. EWC staff was involved in organizing an information campaign regarding the ivory ban issue, including an effort at the Alaska Federation of Natives convention in October 2016 where Susie Silook spoke out on the issue. EWC staff also participated in a field hearing held by Senator Dan Sullivan regarding this issue and continues to work to protect the right of Alaska Natives to carve and sell legitimate walrus ivory.
- In September 2016 EWC staff attended an Ocean Acidification in the Arctic workshop in Helsinki, Finland. EWC Specialist, Katya Wassillie, presented at the workshop on the impacts of ocean acidification on subsistence marine mammal hunting communities. EWC staff provided feedback on ensuring that research is reflective of the priorities of the indigenous communities of the arctic.
- In late June-early July, EWC Director participated at the IMCC 2016 in St. John's, Newfoundland and attended several marine conservation workshops during the conference.
- In late August, EWC Director attended the ICC Executive Board meeting in Qaqortoq, Greenland with other members from Canada, Greenland, and Russia. The members had briefing notes on various Arctic Council's working groups and plans for a Wildlife Summit TBH in Kuujuaq, CA in November 2017. EWC will be part of this summit. The ICC General Assembly will be held in Alaska in 2018.

On-going Tasks:

- Continue to communicate with USFWS and Kawerak leadership on long-term budget issues and work toward stabilizing EWC financially
- Continue to work on EWC projects, including Traditional Knowledge projects about walrus in EWC communities
- 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 meaningful involvement by the EWC and the Alaska Native community in the Endangered Species Act listing determination by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife continues to be a significant impact to the region, as this has the potential to affect the management of the subsistence walrus harvest in the future. The ivory ban laws being passed in states throughout the U.S. is also a significant impact, and the EWC continues to mobilize efforts to push back on these bans and educate the public about the importance of the subsistence harvest of walrus and the use of ivory as a practical, cultural, and economic resource.

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.



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