

Eskimo Walrus Commission

Quarterly Report 10/1/16-12/31/16

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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:

- From October – December 2016 EWC staff continued to engage with Kawerak leadership and organizations throughout the state to push back against the state ivory ban laws that include walrus ivory 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 with Kawerak regarding the ivory ban issue including an effort at the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) convention in October 2016. Vera also provided written testimony at 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 arts and crafts.
- In October 2016 EWC Specialist Katya Wassillie arranged to travel to Manokotak and Togiak to conduct interviews for the Traditional Ecological Knowledge About Walrus project. Unfortunately, Katya was unable to make it to the communities, and this work will be rescheduled by EWC staff for another time. Through this project, funded by ConocoPhillips, EWC staff has thus far conducted interviews with members of the King Island community to develop a report that supplements the 2004 report "Conserving Our Culture Through Traditional Management."
- In October and November 2016, EWC staff made arrangements for the EWC Annual Meeting which took place at the Egan Center in Anchorage November 16-17. The EWC Annual Meeting was attended by Greg Siekiniec, Regional Director of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and various U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff, staff from the Marine Mammal Commission, U.S. Geological Survey, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, as well as other organizations, and dialogue occurred between EWC Commissioners and the agencies on many important issues and research topics. EWC elections were held and the results are as follows:
 - Chair (1 Year): Charlie Brower from Barrow
 - Vice Chair (2 Years): Benjamin Payenna from King Island
 - Executive Committee Seat A (1 Year): Enoch Oktolik from Wainwright
 - Executive Committee Seat B (1 Year): Stephen Schaeffer from Kotzebue
 - Executive Committee Seat C (2 Years): Kenneth Kingeekuk from Savoonga
- In November 2016 EWC Director Vera Metcalf attended the Alaska Sea Grant Advisory Council Meeting and the Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska Board Meeting in Anchorage.
- In November and December 2016 EWC Director Vera Metcalf attended an Ocean Acidification workshop in Anchorage sponsored by the Alaska Ocean Observing System and Alaska Ocean Acidification Network.
- In December 2016 EWC Chair and staff attended the Arctic Marine Mammal Coalition and Arctic Waterways Safety Committee meetings in Anchorage. Through these forums work continues on a draft waterways safety plan for mariners to operate safely in arctic waters and to minimize conflicts between subsistence hunting and other users of the waterways.
- In December 2016 EWC staff collaborated with Andrea Medeiros with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Public Affairs office to strategize on minimizing the impacts of media and other interest in the Point Lay haul-out and to develop a plan for including haul-out and stewardship information on the EWC website. EWC staff continues to work on developing the content for the website and coordinating a time to travel to Point Lay to meet with the tribe directly regarding these efforts.
- In December 2016 EWC staff posted announcements on the EWC Facebook page to work with Strategies 360, a communications firm based in Anchorage, on a social media audit to improve EWC outreach efforts. EWC staff also continued work on finalizing the EWC newsletter with Strategies 360.

- In December 2016 EWC staff received a copy of the draft Species Status Assessment for Pacific Walrus from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which is part of the ongoing Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing determination. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requested a review of the document within 30 days, and EWC staff requested an extension of the review period in order to have adequate time to provide comments. EWC staff continues to work on conducting this review.

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
- Continue review of draft Species Status Assessment for Pacific Walrus
- 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.
- Conduct outreach to other EWC communities to determine interest in developing local management structures similar to Gambell and Savoonga
- 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. Other impacts to the region include climate change, which continues to impact the subsistence practices of communities, as well as the physical infrastructure due to extreme weather conditions.

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.