

# Flight Advisory for Pacific Walrus



## Chukchi Sea Coast

**The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seeks your support and cooperation in minimizing disturbances to walrus herds resting along the Chukchi Sea coast of Alaska.**

### **HAULOUT LOCATIONS**

Walrus are known to congregate on isolated beaches and barrier islands along Alaska's Chukchi Sea coast in late summer and early fall (August – October) when concentrations of sea ice are low. Known haulout areas include: Cape Lisburne, Point Lay barrier islands, and Icy Cape. Walrus may be sporadically encountered anywhere along the coast between Cape Lisburne and Icy Cape.

**THESE ARE IMPORTANT RESTING AREAS FOR PACIFIC WALRUSES.** With the loss of summer sea ice over the continental shelf observed in recent years walrus are being forced to use land based haulouts rather than sea ice which is their preferred habitat. Between feeding cycles, they come to shore to rest at isolated resting areas (haulouts) distributed along the Chukchi Sea coast.

**WALRUSES ARE SENSITIVE TO HUMAN DISTURBANCES.** Although responses to human activities are variable, walrus will often flee haulouts in response to the sight, sound, or odor of humans or their machines. Trampling deaths associated with haulout disturbance is one of the largest known sources of natural mortality for walrus. Frequent or prolonged disturbances may even result in haulout abandonment.

**HARASSING OR DISTURBING WALRUSES IS AGAINST THE LAW.** Any human activity, including operating an aircraft, vehicle, or boat, or approaching on foot, in a manner which results in harassing walrus is prohibited under provisions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Harassment includes any act which has the potential to injure or disturb walrus and includes acts which disrupt behavioral patterns including, but not limited to migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering.

**YOU CAN HELP MINIMIZE DISTURBANCE TO WALRUSES RESTING ALONG THE CHUKCHI SEA COAST.** Walrus are particularly sensitive to changes in engine noise and are more likely to stampede off beaches when planes turn or fly low overhead. Aerial photography and/or circling of manned aircraft or unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) (drones) within the vicinity of a walrus haulout poses a high potential for disturbance and is specifically discouraged. In an effort to prevent disturbances, please follow these general guidelines when operating aircraft near walrus herds.

**Pilots of single engine aircraft and UAS devices should not knowingly fly over or fly within 1/2 mile of walrus hauled out on land or ice to avoid causing a disturbance. If weather or aircraft safety require flight operations within 1/2 mile of walrus, small single engine aircraft should maintain a 2000' minimum altitude.**

**Pilots of helicopters and multi-engine aircraft should not knowingly fly over or fly within 1 mile of walrus haulouts on land or ice to avoid causing a disturbance. If aircraft safety requires flight operations within 1 mile of walrus haulouts, helicopters and multi-engine aircraft should maintain a 3000' minimum altitude.**

**If aircraft safety requires flight operations below these recommended altitudes, please pass inland or seaward (within safe gliding distance to shore) of the haulout site at the greatest lateral distance manageable for safe operation of the aircraft (1 mile if possible).**

Please note these are only guidelines, and may not prevent disturbances in all situations. You are responsible for operating your aircraft in a manner which does not cause disturbance or violate the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

### **THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP AND COOPERATION**

To report incidences of disturbance or harassment please contact:

U.S Fish and Wildlife Service  
Division of Law Enforcement:  
1011 E. Tudor Road  
Anchorage Alaska 99503-6199  
Toll free: 1-800-858-7621

For questions about walrus haulouts please contact:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Marine Mammals Management Field Office  
1011 E. Tudor Road  
Anchorage Alaska 99503-6199  
Toll free: 1-800-362-5148  
<http://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/mmm/>