



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

May 14, 2004

Dear interested party,

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Alaska Region is developing a Conservation Plan for the Cook Inlet beluga whales. This document is required under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) for all species currently designated as depleted, which includes the Cook Inlet beluga whale. A Conservation Plan brings together various elements within a directed program intended to recover the stock to numbers where it would no longer be considered depleted.

NMFS invites you to a planning meeting on the development of this Conservation Plan for Cook Inlet beluga whales. We want to ensure that we capture suggestions from all interested parties for contributions to this Plan. We will be hosting a planning meeting on May 25, 2004 in the Anchorage Federal Building (222 West 7th Ave, Anchorage, AK) from 10 - 12 pm and 1 - 4 pm in the Executive Dining Room. During the morning session NMFS will introduce the planning process and its intent under the MMPA, describe time frames and opportunity for continued input, and scope the issues which should be addressed in the Conservation Plan. The afternoon session will be an open forum where you are invited to share your ideas and suggestions during discussions on the Conservation Plan. All meetings on the development of this Conservation Plan will be open to the general public, and we encourage your participation in this process. Although no phones or teleconference lines are available in this room, we will accept written testimonies through June 1, 2004. A meeting agenda and draft content section of the Conservation Plan are attached.

Please direct any questions to Barbara Mahoney at (907) 271-3448.

Sincerely,

Kaja Brix
Assistant Regional Administrator
for Protected Resources



COOK INLET BELUGA WHALE CONSERVATION PLAN

INITIAL MEETING - MAY 25, 2004

Anchorage Federal Building
222 West 7th Ave.

10 am - 4 pm

AGENDA

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 10:00 | Introductions and description of conservation plan process |
| 10:15 | Proposed time frames for planning process and plan preparation |
| 10:30 | Overview of workshops |
| 10:30-12:00 | Scoping of issues to be addressed in the conservation plan |
| 1:00-4:00 | Open discussions |

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS
LIST OF TABLES
LIST OF FIGURES
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

1. PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN
2. COOK INLET BELUGA WHALE
 A. Species Description
 i. Status under the Marine Mammal Protection Act
 B. Biology and Life History
 i. Distribution and Movements
 ii. Habitat use and Requirements
 iii. Reproduction
 iv. Natural Mortality
 v. Feeding and Energetics
 C. Population Status
 i. Abundance Estimates and Trends
 ii. Historic Records and Estimated Carrying Capacity
 iii. Depletion Status and Recovery Goals
 iv. Population Model

3. KNOWN AND POSSIBLE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE POPULATION
 A. Natural Factors
 B. Potential Human Induced Factors

4. CONSERVATION STRATEGY
 A. Subsistence Harvest Management
 B. Conservation Management Actions and Recommendations
 C. Outreach and Education
 D. Enforcement

5. MONITORING STRATEGY
6. RESEARCH PLAN
 A. Goals and objectives

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS
8. REFERENCES
9. TABLES
10. FIGURES
11 APPENDICES
 A. Subsistence Harvest Management Plan for Cook Inlet Beluga Whales
 B. Co-management Agreement(s)
 C. Cook Inlet Beluga Stranding Response Plan

DRAFT