

Native Harvest and Use of Beluga
in the Upper Cook Inlet
from July 1, through November 15, 1995
(with updated information for the
January through June 1995 period)

Presented To:
The National Marine Fisheries Service
Protected Resources Management Division

By:
The Cook Inlet Marine Mammal Council

March 1, 1996

Abstract

Native beluga hunters of the upper Cook Inlet reported results of their beluga hunts during July, August, September, October, and November of 1995. Seventeen beluga were taken and twelve were reported struck and lost. These statistics are presented by month in this report.

Methods

Throughout the study period, one or more member of each crew, usually including captains, which were thought to have hunted beluga were contacted regarding each hunt. They provided the take and struck and lost information reported herein. The captain, crew, hunt date, and location were recorded for each hunt in the data set. This information, and other details of each hunt were compared during data collection and entry to avoid double counting of animals taken. These data were compiled in PARADOX 4.5 for Windows database management program.

Results and Discussion

Seventeen beluga were reported taken (killed and retrieved) in the Cook Inlet between July 1 and November 15. Twelve were reported struck and lost. These data are broken down by month in Figure 1. None were reported sunk (killed but sunk before being retrieved). Possibly this is because the beluga are fatter and more buoyant during the latter summer months, than earlier in the hunting season.

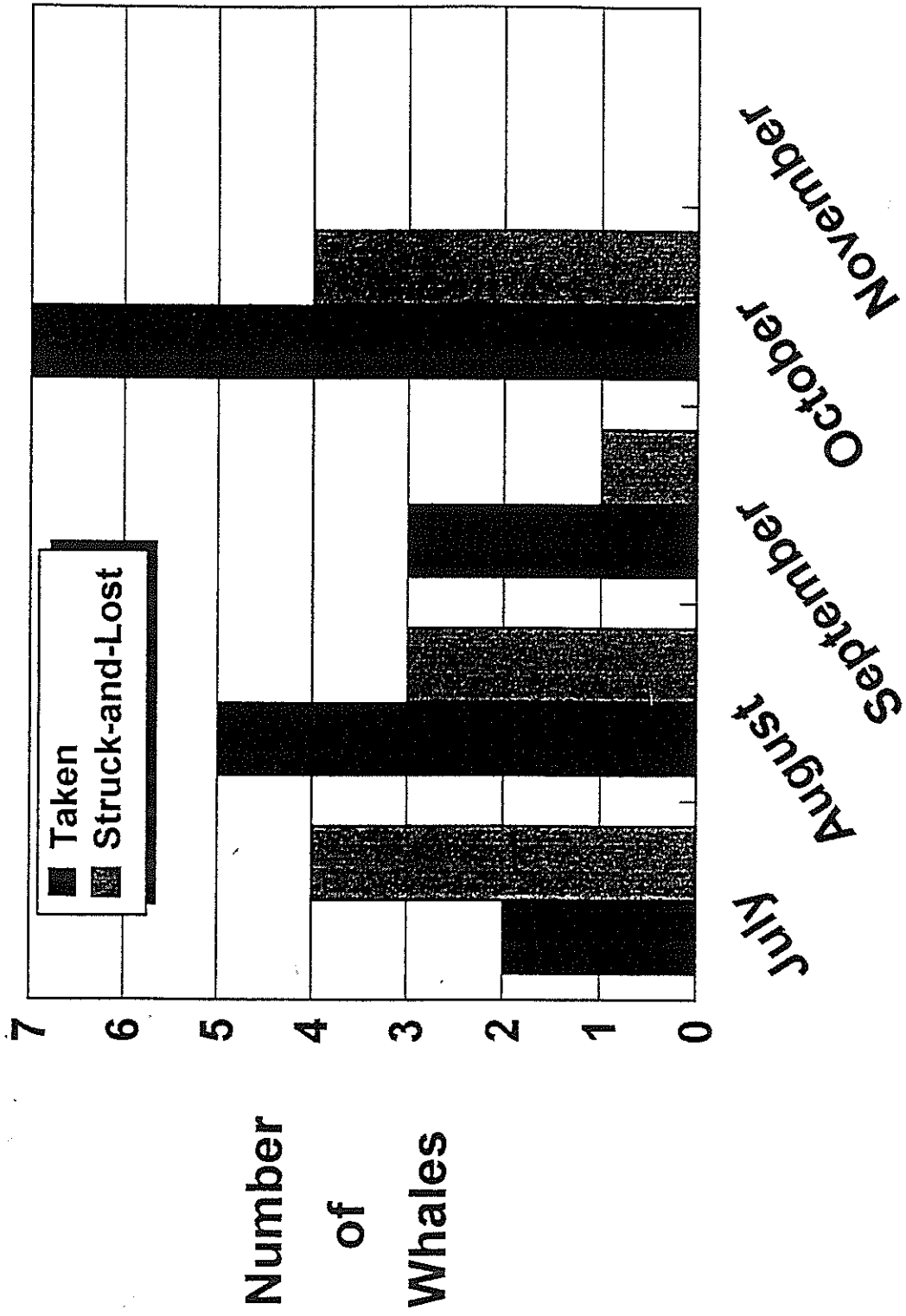
Sex and color were each reported for approximately 50% of the whales taken. All the whales which were taken and their color reported were white, except one which was grayish white. Two thirds were male.

The National Marine Mammal Laboratory (NMML) conducted radio tagging studies of the Cook Inlet beluga from July 18 through August 6 of this report period. This is usually one of the most productive periods for subsistence beluga hunters in the upper inlet. NMML researchers camped at the Native whale hunting camp, at the mouth of the Big Susitna River, where the beluga congregate during this time of the year. The boats, time, and energies of some of the most prolific Native whale hunters were occupied for a month by participation in this research. Other hunters did not hunt or hunted in less productive areas during this time to avoid disturbing the research. This almost certainly reduced the number of beluga which were taken during this report period.

While collecting data for this report, three additional beluga were discovered to have been taken, and one wounded in the Cook Inlet from April throughout June of 1995, which were not included in our report for that period. This brings the total taken for that portion of the 1995 hunting season to 25.

In summary, 42 whales were reported taken (killed and retrieved) during the 1995 hunting season. Eight were sunk. Eighteen were wounded and lost.

Figure 1
Number of Whales Taken or Struck-and-Lost
by Month



1995