



## **The Subsistence Harvest of Northern Fur Seals On St. George Island in 2009**

Report prepared by:

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## **DISTRIBUTION LIST**

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## INTRODUCTION

Laqux, northern fur seal (*callorhinus ursinus*) is an important customary traditional food for Unangan of St. George Island, Alaska. Together, the Traditional Council of St. George and U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service coordinate, monitor, and manage the subsistence harvest of northern fur seals to safeguard their existence. The 2009 subsistence fur seal harvest was conducted in accordance to 50 CFR §216 Subpart F on St. George Island.

## METHODS

The Island Sentinel of the St. George Traditional Council Kayumixtax Eco-Office monitored the 2009 subsistence fur seal harvest for the Aleut Community of St. George Island and in accordance with the Co-management Agreement between the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Aleut Communities of St. George. Within this context, management and activities were conducted under cooperative agreement with the National Marine Fisheries Service. During the 2009 subsistence fur seal harvest information was collected on:

- a) the number of sub-adult male fur seals harvested,
- b) incidence of by-products and waste during the harvest process,
- c) the occurrence of older male seals judged to be 124.5 cm or more in length,
- d) females seals killed or injured during the harvest operation,
- e) the number of seal deaths due to overheating,
- f) number of seals entangled in marine debris and the number of seals disentangled,
- g) evidence of oil contaminated seal pelts,
- h) other types of fur seal mortality,
- i) weather conditions at the time of the harvest,
- j) any other unusual conditions related to the harvest,
- k) research conducted during the harvest, and visitors requesting to view or film the harvest.

## RESULTS

### *Fur Seals Harvested*

The 2009 subsistence fur seal harvest season on St. George Island was conducted in 9 harvests; the harvest season began on 8 July, 2009. The final harvest took place on 7 August, 2009. A total of 113 sub-adult male fur seals were taken for subsistence from 3 harvests at Northeast haulout and 6 at Zapadni haul out. One female was also struck and killed at Zapadni haul out on August 7<sup>th</sup> 2009. The total number of Fur Seals killed was 114.

**Table 1**

Table 1: Dates, locations, weather, numbers of harvests and sub-adult male fur seals harvested at the locations for the 2009 Subsistence Fur Seal Harvest on St. George Island, Alaska.

Date	Haul-out	Roundup	Temp F	Wind Direction	Wind MPH	Weather	Harvested
7/8/2009	Northeast	10:01	40-45	SSW	5-10 mph	overcast/mist	7
7/13/2009	Zapadni	10:36	40-45	SSE	15 mph	fog/mist	14
7/15/2009	Northeast		40-45	SSW	5-10mph	overcast/mist	15
7/23/2009	Zapadni	14:12	45-50	VAR	0-5 mph	overcast	12
7/29/2009	Northeast	14:21	45-50	SSW	15-20 mph	overcast	7
7/31/2009	Zapadni	10:02	40-45	SSE	10-15 mph	overcast/mist	13
8/3/2009	Zapadni*	10:08	40-45	NE	5-10 mph	overcast/fog	15
8/5/2009	Zapadni*	11:10	40-45	NNE	15-20 mph	overcast/fog	9
8/7/2009	Zapadni*	10:33	40-45	ENE	15 mph	overcast	22**

\* On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, the harvests were moved from Northeast haul to Zapadni haulout due to a lack of sufficient SAM's in relation to a large number of adult males in the haulout area.

\*\* This total reflects one female that was struck and killed but not harvested.

### *By-products and Waste*

An undocumented number of fur seal pelts, throats, teeth, and whiskers were taken for arts and crafts purposes during the 2009 subsistence fur seal harvest.

### ***Males 124.5 cm or More in Length and Female Seals Killed or Struck***

Based on our observations at every harvest, we estimate no male fur seals 124.5 cm or more in length were struck and killed. One female was struck and killed on the final day of the harvest. While attempting to harvest the meat, the stomach was cut and caused the milk to contaminate the meat, resulting in the animal being not harvested.

### ***Heat Strokes***

No deaths of any fur seal occurred due to heat stroke (over heating) during or as part of the 2009 subsistence fur seal harvest.

### ***Entanglement***

Throughout the course of the 2009 Subsistence Fur Seal Harvest, one seal was disentangled. The entangled animal was spotted in a pod of seals being led to the harvesting area. It was singled out and disentangled. A single white nylon line, approx. 1/8<sup>th</sup> inch thick were removed from the animal's neck. The line caused an open wound creating a 270° incision. On two separate occasions, animals were visible with scarring consistent to packing bands and/or line. The first animal was spotted on 15 July 2009 at Northeast HO. It had a 360° wound around the lower portion of its neck. Once it was noosed and immobilized, it became evident there was no material entangled. However, the wound was fairly fresh and still bled. The second animal was seen on 31 July 2009 at Zapadni HO. The animal had a 360° wound that healed.

### ***Oil Contamination***

No evidence of oil contamination on fur seals pelts of harvested animals during the subsistence fur seal harvest was observed, however not all pelts were thoroughly checked for evidence of oiling.

### ***Other Mortality***

No other fur seal mortality occurred.

### ***Anomalies***

On 8 July 2009 a young male was observed with a large scar or burn on the left fore flipper and shoulder area. The coloration of the flesh was an orangish color and seemed to be healing fine. The animal was noosed and removed from the pod. On 15 July 2009, a 4-5 year old male was noticed without its right eye. The nerves were still attached and dangling from the orbital socket. Another observation regarding eyes was noted on 31 July 2009 during roundups at Zapadni HO. A newborn pup was seen also missing its right eye. There was also some white crusting around the area near the eye socket. On 3 Aug. 2009 a 3-4 year old male was seen in a large pod with, what appeared to be, a broken lower jaw. The jaw was still intact, and hanging. Some of the teeth were also missing. The animal was let lose with a small group to not be harvested.

### ***Research***

Fifty percent of the upper canine teeth from each harvest were taken for the National Marine Mammal Laboratory (NMML) in Seattle, Washington to gather age related data from the harvested animals. Additionally, the St. George Traditional Council is permitted to collect upper canines and as a result 100% of the snouts with upper canines intact were subsequently collected. The canines not sent to NMML are archived at the St. George Traditional Council Eco Office for future research projects under NMFS Scientific Research Permit 1119-1882. Collections of canines were by Phillip A. Lekanof, with the assistance of Nathaniel Lekanof, Tracy Lekanof and Mathew Kashevarof, under Contract No. AB133F-06-CN-0184

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