

**The Subsistence Harvest of Northern Fur Seals
on
St. Paul Island in 2002**

Final Draft Report

September 2002

by
Aquilina D. Lestenkof and Phillip A. Zavadil, Co-Directors
Aleut Community of St. Paul Island
Tribal Government
Ecosystem Conservation Office
PO Box 86
St. Paul Island, Alaska 99660
907-546-2641/2642 (voice)
907-546-2655 (fax)

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Introduction

Laqux, northern fur seal (*Callorhinus ursinus*) is an important customary traditional food for Unangan of St. Paul Island, Alaska. This is the first Northern Fur Seal Subsistence Harvest Season Report prepared by the Tribal Government of the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island. Over the last decade, there have been various situations and activities that have led the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service and the Tribal Government of St. Paul to work together in efforts to safeguard the existence of the Northern Fur Seal. Hopefully this report will serve as an instrument in these endeavors.

Methods

The 2002 subsistence fur seal harvest was conducted in accordance with the Northern Fur Seal Subsistence Harvest Management Plan and 50 CFR §216 Subpart F.

An ECO staff member conducted the harvest monitoring for the 2002 subsistence fur seal harvest in accordance with the Agreement between the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island and National Marine Fisheries Service and under contract with NOAA Fisheries. The 2002 subsistence fur seal harvest was monitored for: number of seals harvested, by-products and waste, adult male and females seals killed or injured during the harvest operation, number of seal deaths due to overheating, number of seals entangled in marine debris and disentangled, oil contaminated seal pelts, other mortality, weather conditions at the time of the harvest, and any other unusual conditions.

Results

Fur Seals Harvested

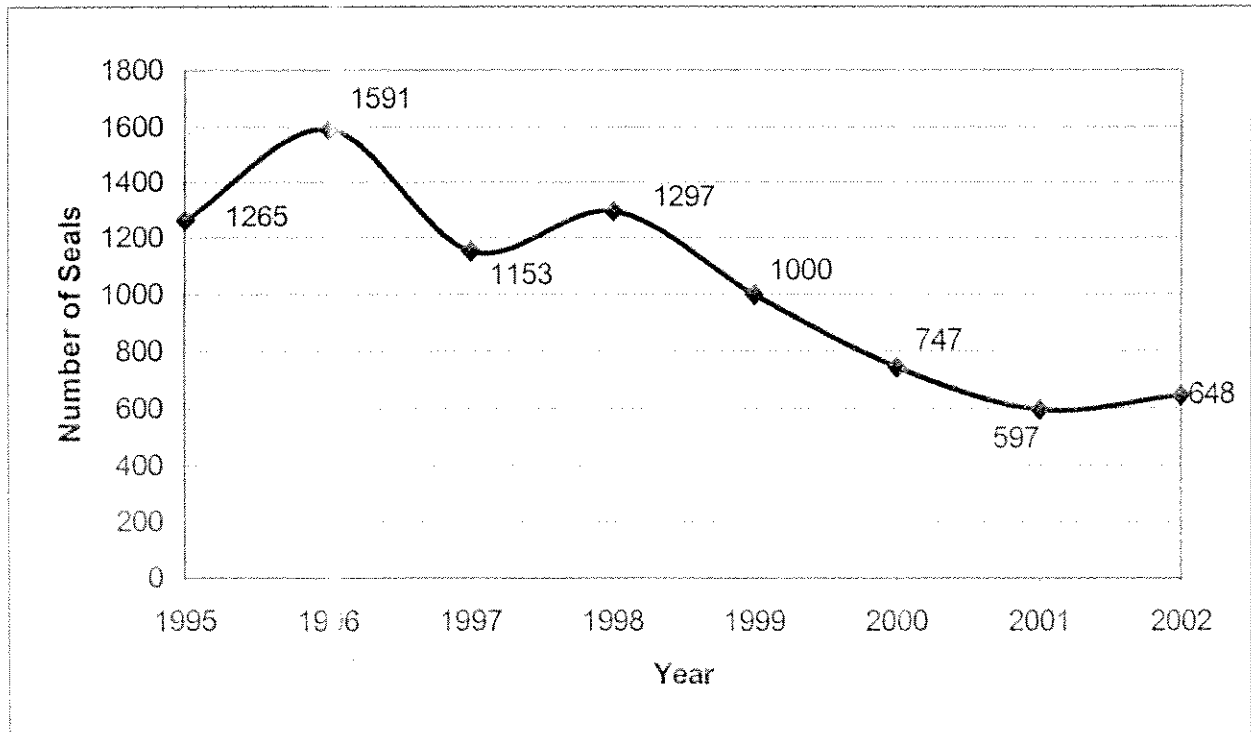
The 2002 subsistence fur seal harvest was conducted in 14 harvests starting on July 3, 2002. With an approved extension beyond the usual August 8th closing date, the last harvest took place on August 10, 2001. A total of 648 fur seals were taken this season on St. Paul Island over those 14 days at 7 different haulouts (Table 1).

Table 1: Locations, number of harvests and seals harvested at the locations for the 2002 Subsistence Fur Seal Harvest on St. Paul Island, Alaska (Tanaliġ Amġignaġ Program 2002).

LOCATION	NUMBER OF HARVESTS	NUMBER OF SEALS HARVESTED
Big Zapadni	4	169
Gorbatch	1	41
Ketovi	1	48
Lukanin	2	48
Polovina	4	210
Zapadni Reef	1	58
Zoltoi Sands	1	74
Total	14	648

The number of fur seals taken by our community increased slightly from 2001 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Numbers of fur seals harvested, Subsistence Fur Seal Harvest 1995 – 2002, St. Paul Island, Alaska (Cormany 1997, 1996, 1995; Zavadil 1999, 1998; Tanaliġ Amġignaġ Program 2002, 2001, 2000).



By Products and Waste

An undocumented number of fur seal pelts, throats, teeth, and whiskers were taken for arts and crafts purposes during the 2002 subsistence fur seal harvest.

No waste occurred under 50 CFR §216 Subpart F. However, some documented and confirmed waste occurred after fur seals were harvested in accordance with 50 CFR §216 Subpart F. The waste that occurred off the harvest field for the 2002 subsistence fur seal harvest included: 16 whole cut-up fur seal carcasses disposed of at the Ridgewall Blubber Dump; four partial fur seal carcasses disposed of at the Ridgewall Blubber Dump; and

Adult Male and Female Seals Killed or Struck

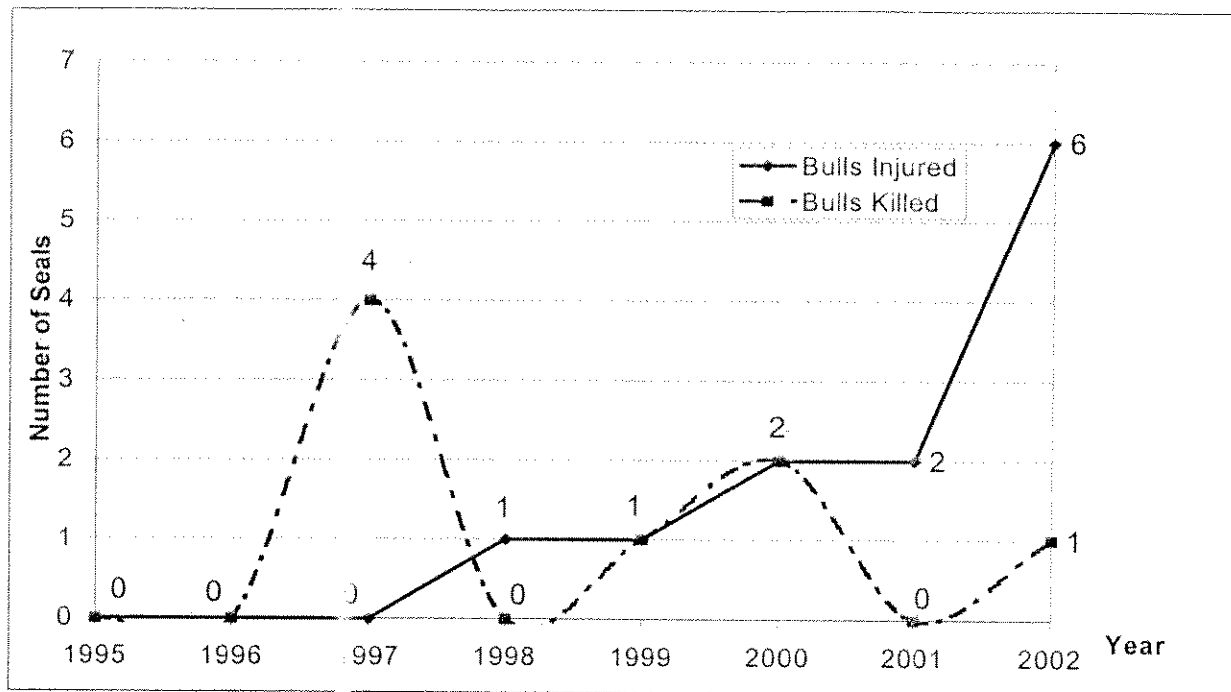
Although precautions were taken to avoid the killing of adult males and females accidents did happen. During the 2002 subsistence fur seal harvest two adult female fur seals were struck and killed (Figure 2)

Figure 2: Number of adult female fur seals killed, Subsistence Fur Seal Harvest 1995 – 2002, St. Paul Island Alaska (Cormany 1997, 1996, 1995; Zavadil 1999, 1998; Tanaliŕ Amŕignaŕ Program 2002,2001, 2000).



Six adult male fur seals were struck and injured, and one out of those six struck was killed during the 2002 subsistence fur seal harvest (Figure 3)

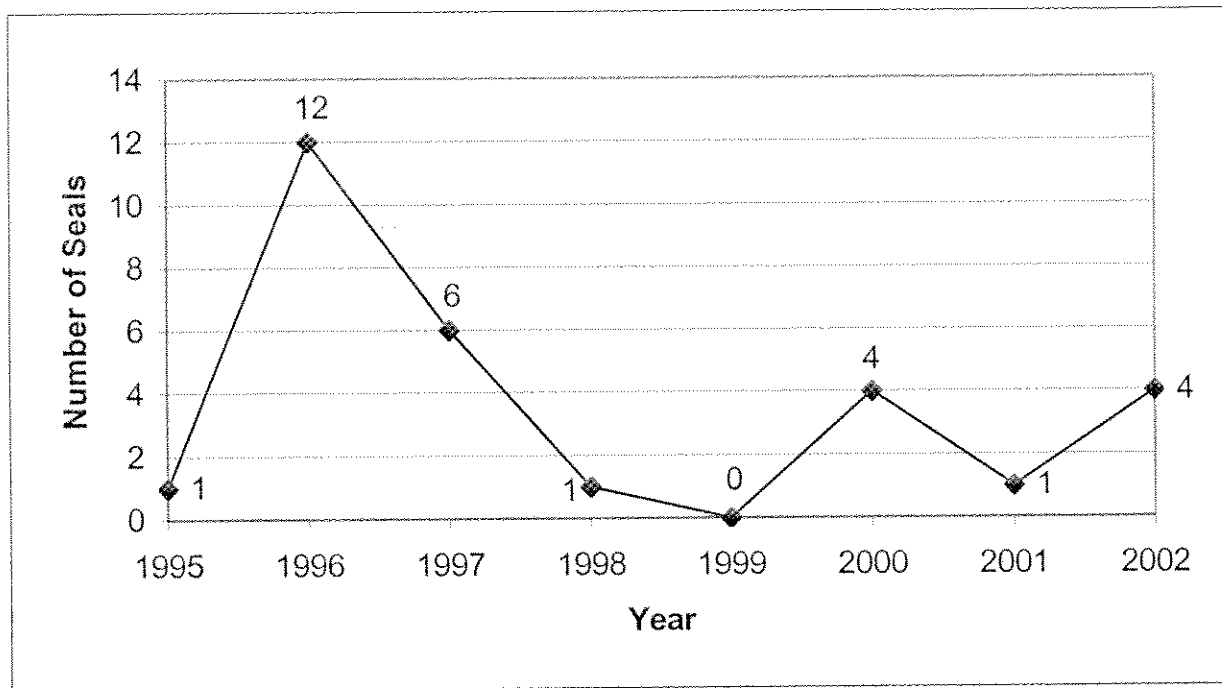
Figure 3: Number of adult male fur seals injured and killed, Subsistence Fur Seal Harvest 1995 – 2002, St. Paul Island Alaska (Cormany 1997, 1996, 1995; Zavadil 1999, 1998; Tanaliñ Amñignañ Program 2002, 2001, 2000).



Heat Strokes

Four fur seal deaths occurred due to heat stroke (over heating) during or as a part of the 2002 subsistence fur seal harvest (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Number of heat strokes, Subsistence Fur Seal Harvest 1995 – 2002, St. Paul Island Alaska (Cormany 1997, 1996, 1995; Zavadil 1999, 1998; Tanaliġ Amġignaġ Program 2002, 2001, 2000).



Entanglement Monitoring

A sample of male fur seals was counted during the 2002 subsistence fur seal harvest to determine the rate of entanglement, following established protocol. This year the results produced an estimated entanglement rate of 0.37% based on a total sample size of 3,737 and 14 entangled seals. The August 10, 2002 harvest was not included in this sample. Fifteen entangled fur seals and seven scarred fur seals were sighted in various harvest round ups and harvest pods during the 2002 subsistence fur seal harvest. Marine debris was removed from 14 of the 15 entangled seals sighted. A separate report on the St. Paul Island Northern Fur Seal Entanglement Monitoring Program for 2002 will be available.

Oil Contamination

No pelts of harvested animals during the 2002 subsistence fur seal harvest were reported with oil on them.

Other Mortality

No other fur seal mortality occurred during the 2002 subsistence fur seal harvest.

Other Anomalies

A seal with a missing left front flipper was observed and harvested on the July 25, 2002 harvest at Lukanin. Dr. Terry Spraker investigated the cause of the missing flipper and determined that either the flipper was bitten off or resulted from an infection or both. The wound was healed over.

On the July 26, 2002 harvest at Big Zapadni Sands a two year old male Steller sea lion was rounded up with the seals and harvested.

On the August 9, 2002 harvest at Polovina a juvenile male fur seal was observed with a light brown color fur. A capture was attempted when this seal was released from the pod, using methods to capture entangled seals, but was not successful...the seal was already too close to the water. This seal quite possibly had no guard hair or was an albino. Dark brown patches of fur were observed among the light brown fur and there was no signs of blindness. Most, likely the seal had no guard hair.

More fur seal pups were observed on Big Zapadni Sands during the 2002 fur seal harvest roundups than in previous years.

Discussion

Changes are occurring in our environment both locally and globally, in our community's needs, and in our customary traditional activities such as subsistence practices. We need to work with, accommodate, and make decisions regarding these changes based on our people's generational values.

Traditionally, seals were hunted at sea and use of the whole animal was practiced out of necessity and therefore, respect. Harvesting seals was introduced in reaction to pressure from the consumer culture whose values support killing animals, fur seal in this case, exclusively to make money. This process was foreign to our people's traditional value system. Our people's conservative-based subsistence concepts provided respectful harvest methods, such as no taking of females. Becoming harvesters of seals leads to a need for respectful control factors because the "one with one" rules of hunting have been crossed. The evolving history of harvesting fur seals on the Pribilofs has come to a place of transition calling for a process of improving control factors and changing to accommodate the needs of today's members of the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island.

Presently, the fur seals are harvested for the subsistence needs of the members of the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island. The Tribal Government of St. Paul, who must consider and respect all aspects of the community it represents-present and future, governs the process. Community members must respect the fact that fellow community members are the harvest crew, performing harvest duties on behalf of all and that all animals harvested reflect the subsistence activity of the community as a whole. Community members must conduct themselves accordingly. In turn, the seal harvest crew must respect the process as representational of their fellow community members as a whole and conduct themselves accordingly.

The following are recommendations from the Tribal Government of St. Paul's Ecosystem Conservation Office Co-Directors:

1. Community members pick up their seal meat from the harvest field or make their own arrangements for someone (family or friend) to provide transport for their seal(s) from the harvest field to place of delivery.
2. Community members must provide salt, buckets, bags or barter and trade with one another to handle this. The Tribal Government of St. Paul should not provide these items. The same for the equipment used on the field. The Sealers are a community group, not Tribal Government of St. Paul employees.
3. Put forth ideas to avoid wastage, such as trading parts with one another, an individual compensating another individual for labor such as cutting meat if they're unable to.
4. Tribal Government employees may participate in the harvest as community members on their personal time, except for specific paid positions such as researchers, research assistants, and the Island Sentinel or Harvest Monitor. If "government" is involved it becomes a dependent situation where the organization is expected to do it all.
5. Evening harvests for community members who work during the day.
6. Review Harvest Plan prior to the next harvest season.

In regard to the "waste" found off the harvest field, it may be assumed that some of the carcasses reported as waste were intentionally wasted and requested just for the flippers, but it can equally be assumed that disposal resulted from unintentional waste. For example, someone for whatever reason did not get to finish butchering a seal before it spoiled; flippers are typically slightly fermented prior to salting for storage so if the meat has spoiled the flippers typically can still be utilized. What we need to work on is dispelling people's belief that they need to hide what they feel is their wrong-doing out of fear of what the federal government might do to them or the whole community.

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