

# *Help Protect Beluga Whales*

## **REWARD**

Up to **\$2500**

*For information leading to the conviction of person(s) who violate the Marine Mammal Protection Act*

**It is illegal to hunt or harass Cook Inlet beluga whales.**

Help us prevent unlawful harassment, chasing, hunting, capturing or killing of these whales to aid recovery of this declining population. This will ensure their presence in Cook Inlet for *future generations*.

Please report suspicious activities by calling:

NOAA Office for Law Enforcement at **(907) 271-3021**

NOAA Fisheries **Hotline** at **(1- 800) 853-1964**

*(all callers can remain anonymous)*

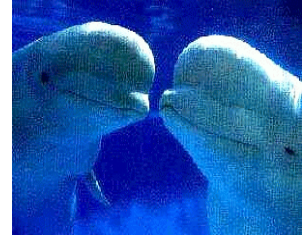


We need and appreciate ***Your*** help!



## About beluga whales

**General description:** At birth, beluga whales are dark blue-gray in color, measure 3-5 feet long, and weigh 90-130 lbs. The color gradually lightens, usually turning white by age 5 or 6. Beluga whales grow to an average length of 15 ft. and can weigh more than 3,000 lbs. Generally, males are larger in size than females. Belugas are robust-bodied and have a blubber layer which can be as much as 5 inches thick. They are muscular creatures with a small rounded head, a short beak, and are quite mobile in comparison to other whales. The belugas have a narrow ridge that runs down the rear of the back, which allows them to swim freely under floating ice. Also the beluga is the only whale that can bend its neck. This helps them to maneuver easily and catch prey, using their 34 to 40 teeth, not for chewing, but for grabbing and tearing their prey, which is then swallowed whole.



Belugas have been nicknamed “sea canaries” because they use sound to find their prey. They also use sound to communicate and navigate by producing a variety of clicks, chirps and whistles.

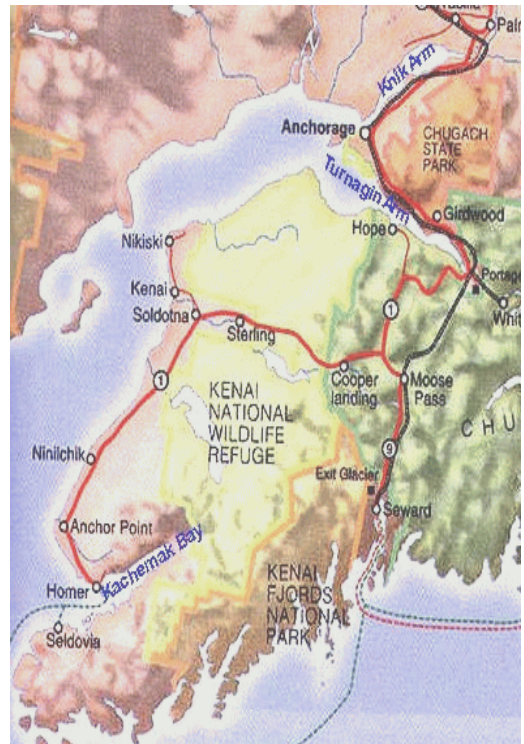
**Food habits:** In summer the belugas feed principally on herring, capelin, smelt, arctic and saffron cods, flatfishes and sculpin and occasionally on squid, crab, clams, shrimp and small salmon. Most feeding is done over the continental shelf and in nearby estuaries and river mouths. In the shallow waters of Alaska, most feeding dives are at depths of 20 to 100 feet.



**Reproduction:** After a gestation period of about 15 months, a beluga calf is born close to the surface in warm and shallow waters. The single calf usually emerges tail first and within 10 seconds after birth is guided to the surface by its mother. Beluga calves are born in May-July and most adult females will produce one calf every three years.

**Additional Facts:** Cook Inlet beluga whales have been identified as a unique and separate stock of beluga whales from all others in Alaska. Historically, the belugas in Cook Inlet have been hunted by Native Alaskans for subsistence purposes with average annual take of 37 animals. The Cook Inlet beluga whale population has declined by greater than 50% since 1994, to about 350 animals. At current declining rates, it is possible the stock could go *extinct* in 10 years. Belugas are taken for human consumption, using the meat and “muktuk”, which consists of skin and the outer layer of blubber. The oil is used for cooking and for fuel.

**Hunting Areas:** The major hunting areas are in the northern Cook Inlet and into Knik Arm. Other hunting has occurred in the Turnagain Arm and Kachemak Bay areas. These 3 areas are highlighted in *blue* on the map to the right. Generally belugas migrate into Cook Inlet beginning in late April and will remain active in these areas through mid October.



For more information or questions, please call:  
NOAA Fisheries Protected Resources Division (907) 271-5006  
or visit their Web-site ([www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources](http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources))