



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Pacific Walrus

and the Endangered Species Act

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a 12-month finding on a petition to list the Pacific walrus under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). After review of the best scientific and commercial information available, the Service found that listing the Pacific walrus under the Endangered Species Act is warranted. Currently, however, listing the Pacific walrus is precluded by higher priority listing actions. Therefore, we added Pacific walrus to our candidate species list. We will develop a proposed rule to list the Pacific walrus as our priorities allow. In the meantime we will review the status of the Pacific walrus on an annual basis

The petition to list walrus under the ESA raised many questions and concerns in coastal communities in Alaska that rely on Pacific walrus as a subsistence resource. We developed the following answers to frequently asked questions for the subsistence hunting community about the listing process and potential implications for subsistence users.

How does the ESA petition process work?

For the 90 day finding, the Service evaluated the information presented in the petition to list and determined that it contained substantial information. We then analyzed the best scientific and commercial information, which included public input, to prepare a status review and 12 month finding.

What is a candidate species, and how is a candidate species managed?

Candidate species are plants and animals for which the Service has enough information on their status

For more information please contact:

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Pacific walrus resting on ice in the Chukchi Sea.

and the threats they face to propose them as threatened or endangered, but developing a proposed listing rule is precluded by higher priority listing actions. Candidate species do not receive protection under the ESA, although the Service works to conserve them. The annual review and identification of candidate species provides subsistence users, landowners and resource managers with notice of species in need of conservation, allowing them to address threats and work together to preclude the need to list the species.

What are the primary reasons that listing the Pacific walrus is warranted?

We have concluded that loss of sea ice, and resulting changes to walrus distribution and life history patterns will lead to a population decline and is a threat to Pacific walrus in the foreseeable future. Over time,

walrus will be forced to rely on terrestrial haulouts to a greater extent. This will expose all individuals especially calves, juveniles, and females to increased levels of stress from depletion of prey, increased energetic costs to obtain prey, trampling injuries and mortalities, and predation. In addition, we have determined that subsistence harvest may be a threat to the walrus population in the foreseeable future.

Why might subsistence harvest be a threat to the walrus population in the foreseeable future?

The Service anticipates reductions in population size in response to losses in sea ice habitats and associated impacts. There is currently no reliable population information or regulatory mechanisms in place to assure the sustainability of future subsistence

Marc Webber/USFWS

harvest of walrus. Current subsistence harvest is not a threat to walrus populations; however, if the population declines and the current level of harvest continues, subsistence harvest could become a threat in the foreseeable future.

Where can I get a copy of the 12 month finding?

You can find a copy of the 12 month finding which designates the Pacific walrus as a candidate species under the ESA at: <http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mmm/walrus/esa.htm>

Did Alaska Natives have the opportunity to provide input on this decision?

Yes. In response to our Federal Register notice of September 10, 2009, requesting information from the public, as well as our request for information on September 10, 2010, we received roughly 30,000 submissions,

including information from the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission, the State of Alaska, the Alaska North Slope Borough, the Eskimo Walrus Commission, the Humane Society of the United States, the Center for Biological Diversity, the American Petroleum Institute, and many interested citizens, which we have considered in making this finding. In addition we held community meetings with St. Lawrence Island residents, and directly solicited information from Tribal Governments and local residents through statewide radio talk shows and written requests for information.

Will Alaska Natives have the opportunity to provide input on the annual review process?

Yes. You can provide information on the status, distribution, biology, threats, or harvest of Pacific walrus to the Service at any time.

Does this decision change anything that Alaska Natives are currently doing?

The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) provides for the legal harvest of walrus by Alaska Natives for subsistence or handicraft purposes. The decision to designate walrus as an ESA candidate species does not affect any existing laws. Current harvest levels are thought to be sustainable. If this situation changes, the Service will work closely with the EWC and walrus hunting communities to determine the best approach to maintaining sustainable harvests in Alaska.

Will Alaska Natives still be able to sell ivory carvings?

Yes. The creation and domestic sale of Native handicrafts such as ivory carvings is recognized as a legitimate subsistence activity and is allowable under both the MMPA and ESA.

ESA Petition Flowchart

