



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Pacific Walrus

and the Endangered Species Act

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) has been petitioned to list the Pacific walrus as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The petition is based upon projected changes in sea ice habitats associated with global warming. The petition to list walrus under the ESA has raised many questions and concerns in coastal communities in Alaska that rely on Pacific walrus as a subsistence resource. The following answers to frequently asked questions have been prepared to help inform the subsistence hunting community about the listing process and potential implications for subsistence users.

How does the ESA petition process work?

The Service must first evaluate the information presented in the petition. If the petition contains substantial information, a thorough status review will be carried out to evaluate potential threats to the Pacific walrus population and determine whether or not to list walrus under the ESA. The Service anticipates beginning this review process in 2009. For more information on the ESA petition process visit: <http://www.fws.gov/home/feature/2006/petitionprocess.pdf>

Are walrus really endangered?

The word “endangered” is defined under the ESA as a species in danger of extinction. The word “threatened” means a species that is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. We need to further investigate and better understand potential threats to the Pacific walrus population before we can determine whether this species is endangered, threatened or not a candidate for listing under the ESA.

For more information please contact:

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Marine Mammals Management Office
1011 East Tudor Road
Anchorage, AK 99503
Toll free: 800/362 5148

<http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mmm>



Pacific walrus resting on ice in the Chukchi Sea. Photo by Marc Webber, USFWS

Where can I get a copy of the petition?

You can find a copy of the petition to list Pacific walrus under the ESA at: http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/species/mammals/Pacific_walrus/pdfs/CBD-Pacific-walrus-petition.pdf

Will Alaska Natives have the opportunity to provide input on these decisions?

Yes. You can provide information on the status, distribution, biology, threats, or harvest of Pacific walrus to the Service at any time. If the Service formally initiates a status review for Pacific walrus, we will seek additional information from subsistence communities and the general public to help inform our decisions. The Eskimo Walrus Commission (EWC) will also have a formal role in reviewing our information and findings.

Or:

The Eskimo Walrus Commission
Kawerak, Inc.
P.O. Box 948
Nome, AK 99762
Toll free: 877/277 4392

<http://www.kawerak.org/servicedivisions/nrd/ewc>

Does this petition 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 petition to list walrus under the ESA 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?

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.

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