

Seal Nation:

The Complex Roles of Ugruk, Niknik, and Laaqudan in Arctic Indigenous Lifeways

Background

Seals have been one of the most important sources of nutrition and culture for peoples of the Arctic for millennia. Today, however, seals and the communities that rely on them face unprecedented threats to their well-being and survival due to climate change, sea ice loss, and ecological imbalance. This proposed project centers the seal itself as the locus of relationships and activities including listening, observing, hunting, skinning, blubbering, eating, sewing, singing, carving, storytelling, and ceremony. Co-producing knowledge with community partners will enable them to explore their lands, sea, livelihoods, food security, common history, narratives and art, and traditional worldviews more deeply, through their own languages and knowledge transfer processes.



Kananginak Pootoogook. Arctic Seals (2008). Stonecut and stencil. DORSET FINE ARTS

Principles/Values

1. Co-production of knowledge:
 - a. This project is committed to developing questions, methodologies, documentation goals, databases, and research products with our team of partners and knowledge-holders
2. Community-driven research:
 - a. This project will strive to meet all community interests and needs related to seals
3. Ecosystem-based co-management:
 - a. Research products derived from this project will be designed to provide policy-relevant directions for implementing and improving holistic wildlife and resource management
4. Justice, equity, and capacity-building:
 - a. To the extent that science, art, and relationship-building can contribute to improved social, political, and economic outcomes for local and Indigenous subsistence communities in the Arctic, this project will strive to exercise best practices in ensuring the distribution of benefits



Objectives

- To understand the many dimensions of kinship, reciprocity, and respect that infuse relationships with and around Arctic seals
- To build a collaborative team of subsistence communities, scientists, historians, museums, and artists in order to co-create innovative and interdisciplinary research products
- To gather Indigenous and local knowledge supporting the well-being of seals and the people who rely on them

Your Partnership

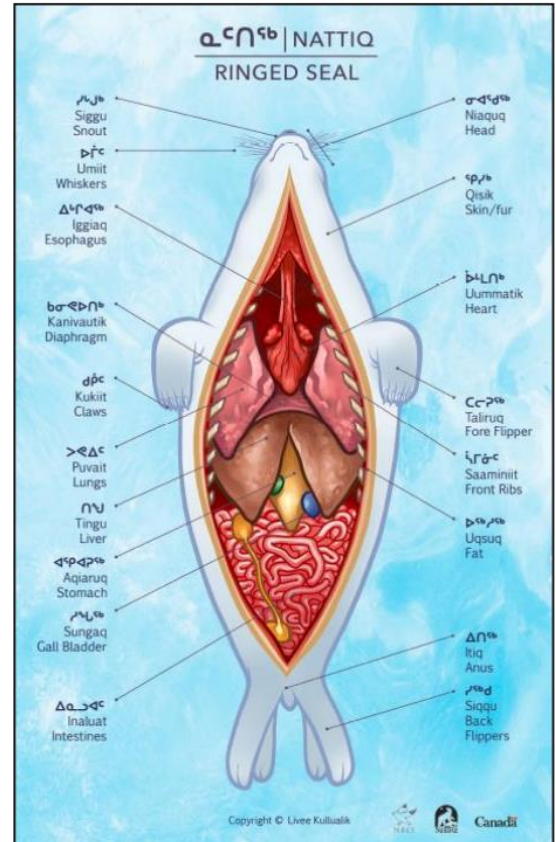
We invite you to connect with our growing project planning team to provide input, review proposals, and define your community or organization's role in the project.

Preliminary Structure

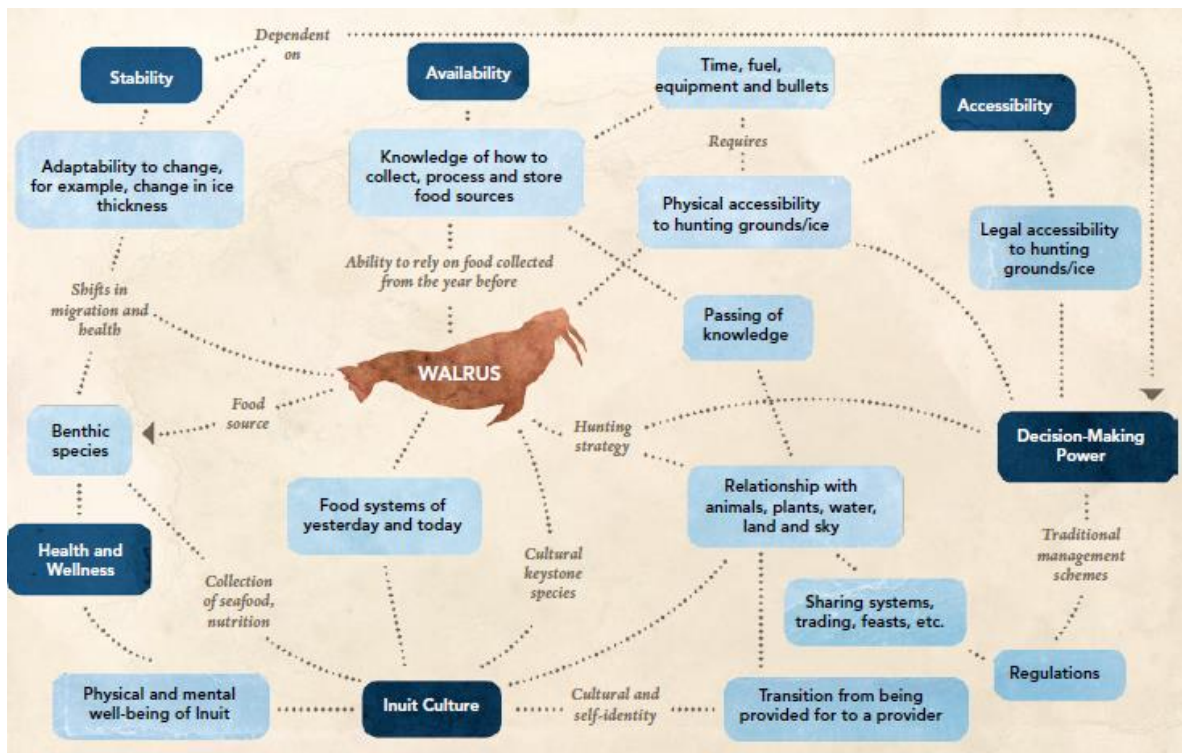
This interdisciplinary research project will be based in Alaska and constructed around three pillars: (1) Maritime food sovereignty and food security in the Bering Sea in a time of climate change and new geopolitical realities. (2) Seal-centered material culture in the Bering Sea across time. (3) Traditional spiritual worldviews and futurities of Inupiaq, Yup'ik, and Unangax peoples.

Expected Outcomes

- Community-led and owned documentation of seal-related knowledge and practices
- Multimedia products for community use as well as for exhibitions and workshops
- Art exhibitions that promote Indigenous worldviews, which place the people-nature relationship at the center of their philosophy.
- Insights and policy recommendations for enhancing food sovereignty in the Arctic
- Textual histories of human-seal relations



Learning about ringed seal health from contaminants science and Inuit knowledge, educational workshops 2016-2018



ICC Conceptual Framework for understanding drivers and connections for walrus: a model for our study of seals (source: ICC Alaskan Inuit Food Security Conceptual Framework)

Who are We?



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