Partnerships with the ISC and Alaska Native communities

- 2007 USCGC Healy & NOAA Ship Oscar Dyson – Ice seal sampling and tagging - Bering Sea

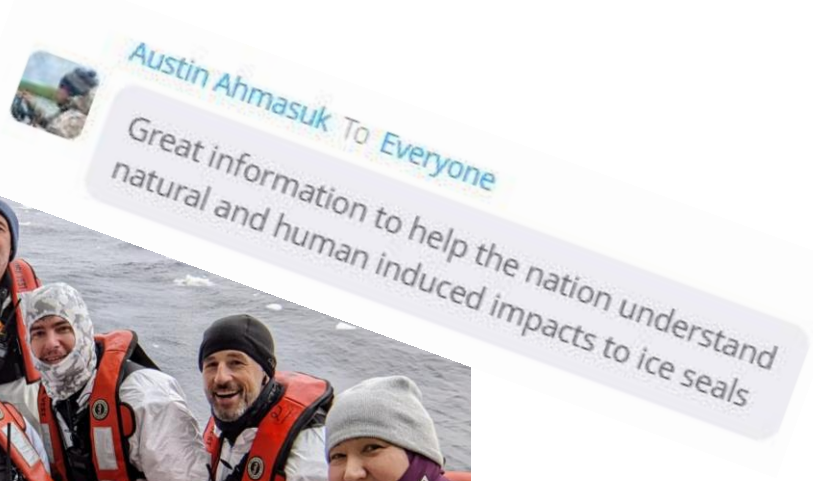
- 2008 USCGC Polar Sea – Helicopter-based abundance surveys for ice seals – Bering Sea

Partnerships with the ISC and Alaska Native communities

- 2004-2006: young bearded seal captures for sampling and tagging – Kotzebue Sound,
- 2009-2011: sub-adult and adult bearded seal captures – Kotzebue, Barrow, and Wainwright

Partnership with the ISC and Bering Sea communities

- At the ISC co-management meeting in **2018**, members proposed including an Alaska Native seal hunter on future expeditions aboard the Oscar Dyson.
- In **2019**, the ISC agreed that NOAA should work with Kawerak, Inc. to identify the first participant.
- The **2020** expedition was cancelled due to COVID, but in **2022**, Kawerak selected Austin Ahmasuk to partner on the expedition



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

ALASKA FISHERIES SCIENCE CENTER
MARINE MAMMAL LABORATORY
7600 Sand Point Way NE, Bin C15700
Seattle, Washington, 98115-0070

TEL: +1 (206) 526-6396
E-MAIL: Michael.Cameron@noaa.gov

18 December, 2023

Mr. Billy Adams
Chairman, Ice Seal Committee
North Slope Borough, Dept. of Wildlife Management
P.O. Box 69, Utqiaġvik, AK 99723

Dear Billy,

We are excited to again partner with the Ice Seal Committee on two research projects planned for 2024.

1) A charter-vessel expedition to the southern edge of the Bering Sea sea ice in April and May to monitor, sample and tag ice seals. - One berth is available for both of the three-week legs.
2) An aerial survey of the U.S. Bering Sea to estimate the abundances and distributions of ice seals in April. – Multiple participants for up to three aerial survey flights each.

These monitoring activities are feasible only during the spring when the seals haul out in relatively high numbers on the seasonal sea ice surrounding Alaska. Because this period overlaps with the seasonal availability of seals and other marine mammals for subsistence hunting by Alaska Native communities, scientists from the Marine Mammal Lab (MML) are committed to conducting the work in a manner that avoids impacts on hunting success.

The MMPA requires that marine mammals be managed to ensure that they retain their function in the ecosystem, and that species harvested for subsistence by Alaska Natives be managed to ensure a sustainable harvest. The goals espoused by these statutes were established in recognition of the importance of ice seals to the integrity of a vast ecosystem and to the sustainability of human cultures that evolved as part of that ecosystem. These goals transcend the relatively simple economic values that are the basis for management of many other natural resources, and so NOAA Fisheries co-manages these species with the Ice Seal Committee (ISC) representing subsistence hunters of ice seals in Alaska. Both of these important projects are identified in the Annual Ice Seal Research Plan developed by the ISC's Working Group. Subsistence hunters have extensive knowledge of ice-associated seals and have, through a co-production of knowledge, contributed to scientific research and management through interviews, contributions of biological samples, and participation in scientific field projects like these. We would like to continue that partnership in 2024.

We ask that you please relay the details of this opportunity to the members of the ISC, and encourage them to forward it to all tribal offices in their Regions. Given the timing, we may need to identify participants before our next in-person meeting. If you or anyone have questions about this opportunity please have them contact me.

With thanks for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Michael F. Cameron
Leader, Polar Ecosystems Program

Two opportunities for Bering Sea coastal communities to participate in NOAA ice seal research in 2024

NOAA Fisheries', Marine Mammal Laboratory (MML) requires the highly specialized expertise of marine mammal subsistence hunters and residents of coastal communities throughout the Bering Sea, to participate in two research projects planned for Spring, 2024. The MML will provide travel, lodging, food, per-diem, specialized clothing and any necessary training for the participants. Participants may be required to provide fingerprints or undergo a background check. Please contact your Ice Seal Committee representative if you are interested in participating, or Michael Cameron (MML, Program Leader michael.cameron@noaa.gov), if you have any questions about the fieldwork.

1) **A charter-vessel expedition to the southern edge of the Bering Sea sea ice in April and May to monitor, sample and tag ice seals.** - Approximate dates (Leg-1: April 12-May 5; Leg-2: May-5-27, 2024)

The purpose of the expedition is to study ice-associated seals at the southern edge of the marginal ice zone in the Alaskan waters of the Bering Sea. The research team will be composed of eight MML scientists, a veterinarian, and an experienced marine mammal subsistence hunter from a Bering Sea community. The research will focus on the seasonal movements and habitat use, health and body condition of ice-associated seals (primarily ribbon and spotted seals). The research will require live-capturing seals, collecting blood and tissue samples, conducting gross morphology exams and measurements, attaching satellite-linked dive recorders to the seals and photographing seals and their habitat using an Uncrewed Aerial System (UAS). The exact dates and ports of embarkation, crew transfer and disembarkation are not yet known.

One berth is available for each leg. Our preference is for the same person to participate in both legs, but it is acceptable for different people to participate in each leg. Participants who wish to operate a small boat must have valid certifications for First Aid, CPR and AED.

The participant must:

- Possess experience as a subsistence hunter of marine mammals in Alaska.
- Make a firm commitment to participate in the expedition, last-minute substitutions are not feasible.
- Recognize that the travel dates are approximate, and may shift by as much as a week.
- Be willing to work as a full member of the research team. This will involve but is not limited to: living in close quarters with a team of scientists and crew on a research vessel, conducting visual surveys of marine mammals while the ship is underway, navigating among pack ice in inflatable rafts, jumping onto ice floes to capture seals, heavy lifting and other duties as assigned (e.g., manual labor, cleaning or repairing equipment, data entry, and the preparation of laboratory samples).
- Understand that we will work 7 days-a-week. 8-10 hour work days are likely, but work days as long as 12-hours are also possible on occasion.
- Agree to follow all protocols required of them, including protocols related to travel, COVID-precautions, ship safety, animal handling, field clothing, and small boat operations.
- Be capable of climbing rope ladders in excess of 20 feet.
- Be willing to be tested for SARS-COV2 (positive tests and/or symptoms may preclude participation).

Though not required, the following are preferred:

- Possess significant experience as a subsistence hunter of ice-associated seals in the Bering Sea.
- Possess the ability to operate an inflatable raft with an outboard engine (tiller).
- Current certification in First Aid CPR and AED (without these certifications, participant can only be a passenger, not a crewmember of a small boat). The MML can reimburse for training if necessary.
- Fully vaccinated against COVID.

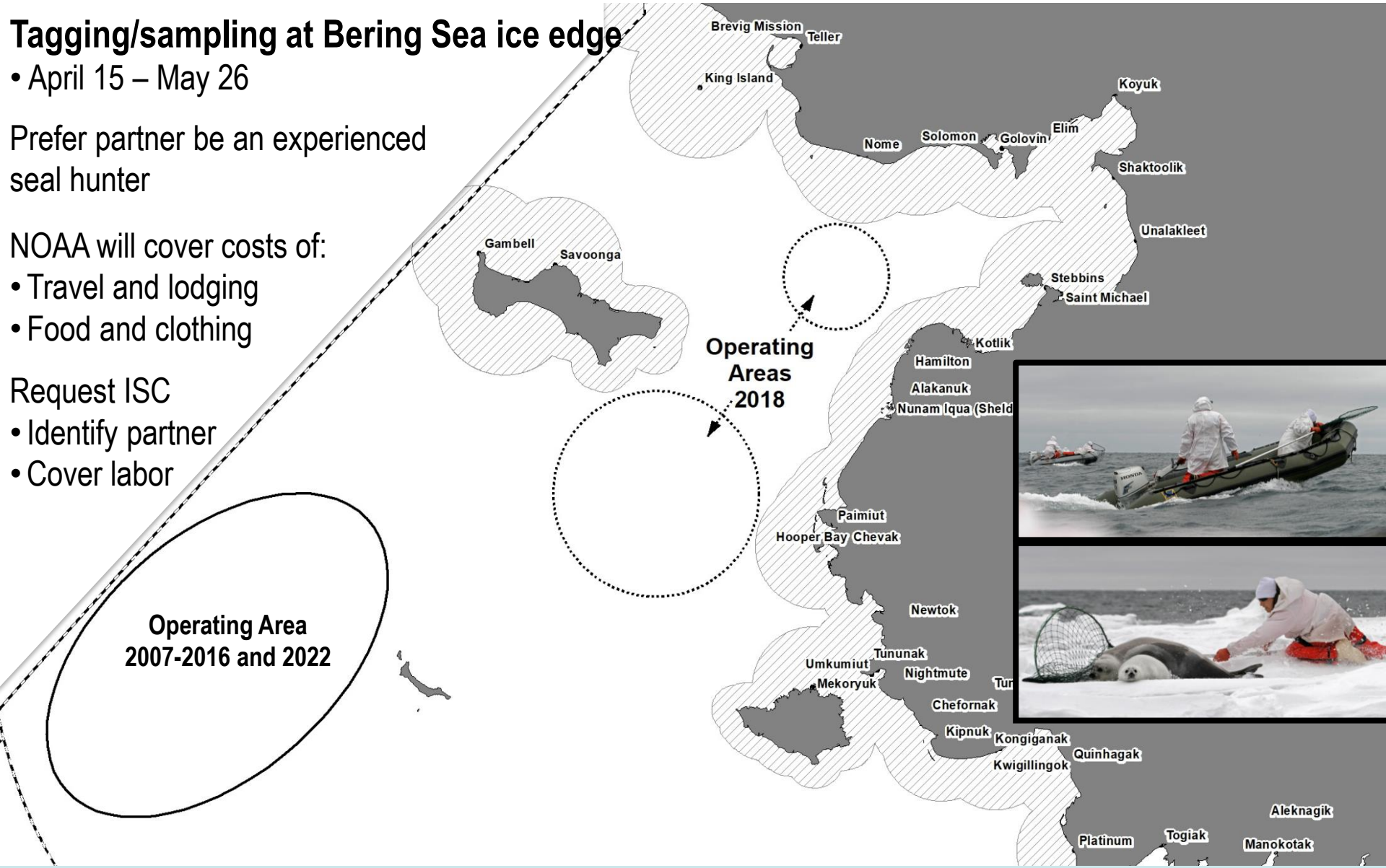
Partnership with the ISC and Bering Sea communities

Tagging/sampling at Bering Sea ice edge
- April 15 – May 26

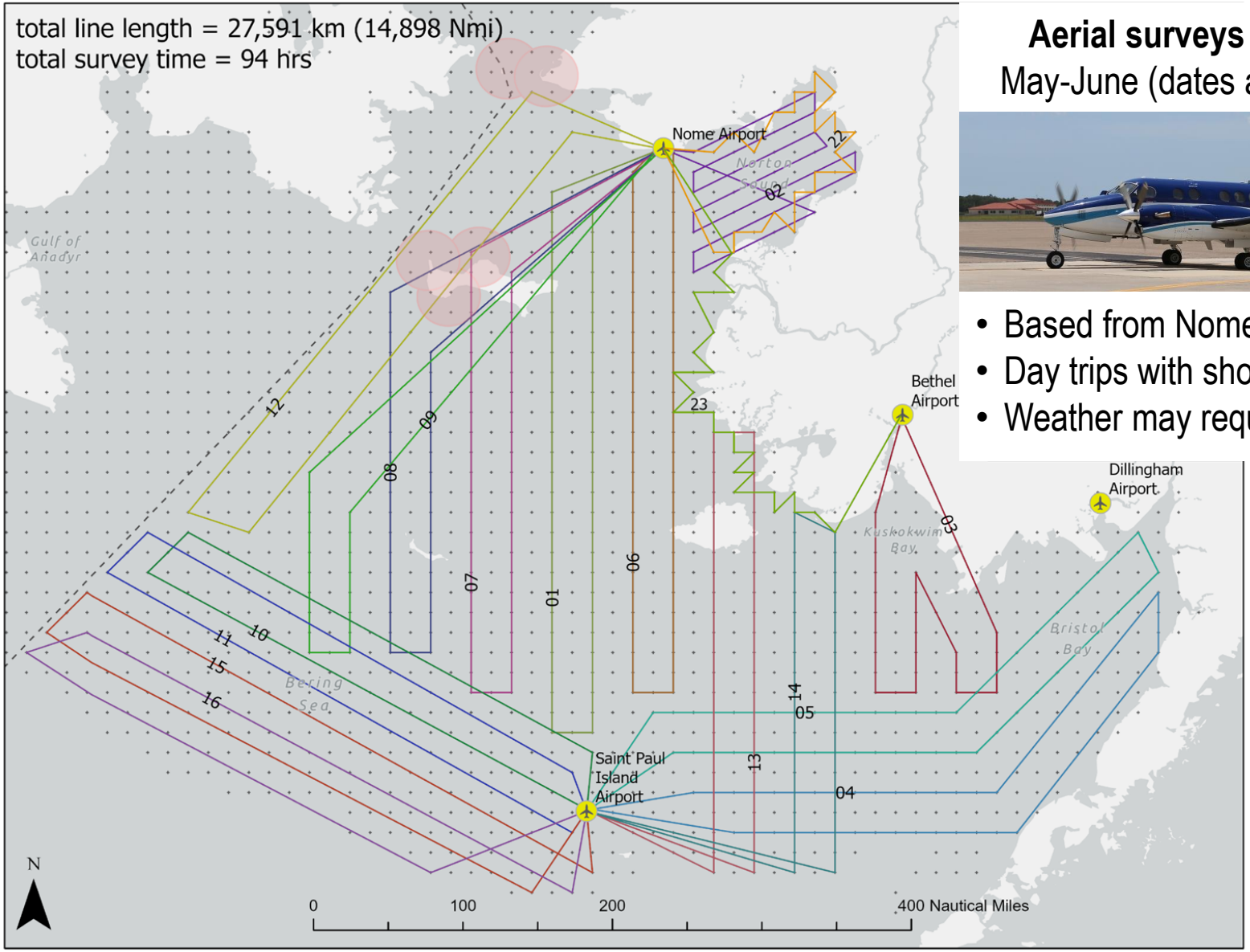
Prefer partner be an experienced seal hunter

NOAA will cover costs of:
- Travel and lodging
- Food and clothing

Request ISC
- Identify partner
- Cover labor



Partnership with the ISC and Bering Sea communities



Aerial surveys in the Bering Sea

May-June (dates and schedule unk.)

- Based from Nome and St. Paul
- Day trips with short notice
- Weather may require alt. landing

- No training req.
- Request ISC or local rep. identify partners
- NOAA to provide clothing and (if necessary) food and lodging
- No labor/stipend

- 2025 opportunity