PHOCAS – Physiology and Health of Cooperating Arctic Seals

Update from Dr. Colleen Reichmuth, Alaska SeaLife Center and University of California Santa Cruz: With approval from the Ice Seal Committee and funding from NOAA's Alaska Pinnipeds Program, this project has worked with a small group of non-releasable ice seals since 2014 to fill knowledge gaps for Alaskan seals that cannot be addressed with studies of wild or harvested individuals. Seals participate in behavioral studies and routine measurements of energy intake, growth, body condition, metabolism, and other indicators of health. The project has produced many useful studies that have been shared with the ISC and posted to the ISC website. Research is collaborative and involves federal, state, and native Alaskan partners as described in the Ice Seal Plan. Care for the seals includes consideration of traditional knowledge of species biology. Meaningful education programs are tied to research activities.

Present request to Chairman Billy Adams and the ISC: NOAA ended funding for the Alaska Pinnipeds Program in 2022. The PHOCAS program must find new funding to continue essential research and animal care activities. I respectfully request a letter of support from the ISC to include with funding proposals for the North Pacific Research Board and other potential granting agencies. These proposals will emphasize the unique physiology of Alaskan ice seals and highlight their cultural and subsistence importance.

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