



ISC Co-Management Committee Meeting
 March 23, 2022 (9am to 5 pm) – [Dimond Center Hotel](#), Anchorage, AK

DRAFT

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**ISC Co-Management
 Committee Meeting
 March 23rd (9am – 5pm)**

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ISC Co-Management Committee Meeting

March 23, 2022 (9am to 5 pm) – [Dimond Center Hotel](#), Anchorage, AK

DRAFT

1. **Call to Order (9 am)**.....2021 Co-management Committee Chair (NOAA)

[Billy Adams](#) – Provided a few opening statements and called the meeting to order at 9:16 am.

2. **Invocation**

[Joseph Leavitt](#) – Gave the invocation.

3. **Roll Call**.....[Quorum](#) for Co-Management Committee meeting = 6 members¹

Ice Seal Committee		Virtual	Present	Absent
Bristol Bay Native Association	Heidi Kritz	X		
Association of Village Council Presidents	Jennifer Hooper		X	
Kawerak, Inc.	Brandon Ahmasuk	X		
Maniilaq Association	Percy Ballot Robbie Kirk ²	X		
North Slope Borough	Billy Adams		X	

NOAA – NMFS - MML		Virtual	Present	Absent
Assistant Regional Administrator, Alaska Region	Jon Kurland	X		
Program Manager, Polar Ecosystems Program	Michael Cameron	X		
Biologist, Alaska Region	Barb Mahoney	X		
Total			8	

Note that, in 2022, the ISC will chair the Co-Management Meeting and is therefore also responsible for generating the minutes. NOAA will take over these duties in 2023.

¹ [Ice Seal Committee Co-Management Agreement \(VI.A.1-2\)](#):

*The Co-Management Committee shall be comprised of the five management regional Representatives of ISC and three members from NMFS upon the signing of this Agreement.
A quorum of six members is required for a meeting to be held.*

² Robbie Kirk is the Maniilaq representative. Percy was at a Maniilaq board meeting and Cyrus Harris was at the ANCC meeting which overlapped with the ISC meeting.

4. **Introductions & Meeting Logistics**³

Participants and visitors at the meeting:

- Andy Von Duyke ISC Executive Manager (North Slope Borough)
- JakyLou Olemaun ISC “Next Gen” (NSB)
- Robbie Kirk ISC Hunter Representative (Maniilaq)
- Billy Adams ISC Chairman (NSB)
- Jennifer Hooper ISC Vice Chair (AVCP)
- Barbara Mahoney NOAA
- Joseph Leavitt ISC Hunter Representative (NSB)
- Wybon Rivers ISC “Next Gen” (AVCP)
- Kimberly Pikok ISC “Next Gen” (UAF)
- Michelle Frantz NSB
- Brower Frantz NSB
- Margaret Rudolph ISC “Next Gen” (NSB-UAF)
- Danielle Dickson NPRB
- Jared Nayakik ISC “Next Gen” (NSB)
- Brandon Ahmasuk Kawerik
- Peter Boveng NOAA Fisheries-MML
- Jon Kurland NMFS
- Kristen Cieciel NOAA Grants
- Tammy Olson NOAA
- Anna Bryan ADFG-AMMP
- Rowenna Gryba U of British Columbia
- Lori Quakenbush ADFG-AMMP
- Irina Trukhanova USFWS-MMM
- Craig Chythlook ISC “Next Gen” (UAF)
- Michael Cameron NOAA Fisheries-MML
- Heidi Kritz BBNA
- Juliana Kim Vancouver Aquarium (formerly of the Alaska SeaLife Center)

5. **Drop “Robert’s Rules of Order”** We agree to proceed by consensus⁴

ISC Co-Management Committee – Agreed to run the meeting in this manner.

6. **Select Chair** from the Ice Seal Committee

Jennifer Hooper – Nominated Billy Adams. There were no other nominees.

³ [Ice Seal Committee Co-Management Agreement](#) (VI.A.1-2):
Meetings of the Co-management Committee shall be open to the public.

⁴ [Ice Seal Committee Co-Management Agreement](#) (VI.A.1-2):
Decisions of the Committee shall be through consensus, based on mutual respect.

Billy Adams – Accepted the role as chair of the ISC Co-Management Committee.

7. Adopt Agenda.....Ice Seal Co-Management Committee

Andy Von Duyke – Noted that there was an omission from agenda; specifically a failure to include a discussion of the Action Plan. [Action Plan is posted on the ISC Website](#). Recommended this item be inserted during the portion of meeting when Barbara Mahoney presents (#12 B).

ISC Co-Management Committee – Adopted the agenda as revised.

8. Approve February 4, 2021 meeting minutes.....NMFS

NMFS – Provided 2021 ISC Co-Management Committee meeting minutes as hard copies, in email format, and [available on the ISC website](#)⁵.

Jennifer Hooper – Noticed a typo on page 1 → The year should be changed from 2020 to 2021.

Barbara Mahoney – Found a typo on page 3 → garbled and could not understand.

No other corrections were noted.

ISC Co-Management Committee – Approved 2021 Co-Management meeting minutes as corrected.

9. National Marine Fisheries Service, Alaska Region

a. Update on grants process.....Kristin Cieciel (NOAA)

Kristin Cieciel – Summarized the status of this year’s section 119 grant application process. All applications and reviews were completed. Office awaiting notification of program funding. Once award letters are sent out, to authorized representatives. Applicants will have about 3 weeks to respond if need be. Encouraged responses from applicants, especially if it is felt that objectives cannot be met with level of cuts received. Awards will be expected by July or August.

Andy Von Duyke – Asked about the delayed timing of notification, etc. Was this because of the new 3-year grant funding cycle that has begun?

Kristin Cieciel – Not due to anything other than not having received money yet. Budgets have just been approved at higher level, and so waiting for funds to “trickle down” ... this could be 2 weeks or 30 days.

Jon Kurland – Reiterated what Kristen had to say, and also noted that the federal government’s omnibus spending bill recently passed. So, it is just a matter of time.

⁵ The minutes on the ISC website are FINAL as of June 1, 2022.

Andy Von Duyke – Requested a brief description of the 3-year funding cycle.

Kristen Ciciel – This is a grant procedure that is meant to make it easier for ANOs by eliminating the need to request no-cost extensions and to write proposals annually. It was pointed out that multi-year processes are better than no-cost extensions as a tool to fund projects that require more than one year. This provides freedom to run program over time with fewer administrative issues.

Andy Von Duyke – Explained why a 3-year multi year grant was not approved. Specifically, it was to avoid having the Executive Manager make a unilateral decision on behalf of the board regarding the direction that the ISC would pursue over a 3-year period. Indicated to the ISC Board that a 1-year proposal had been submitted this time, but if the board can provide a longer-term “vision” or strategic plan, then this will provide the guidance that the Executive Manager needs to generate a competitive 3-year (or multi-year) grant proposal. Also noted that he and Kristen had discussed the pros-cons of whether to request multi-year funding at this point in time. When the plans are set, then multi-year funds will be a good thing.

Kristen Ciciel – Multi-year funding is not a one-time offer. No penalty for doing it or not doing it.

Billy Adams – Agreed that planning in advance will be useful for guidance on what to pursue regarding grants and the time interval.

b. Update on critical habitat designations..... Jon Kurland & Tammy Olson

Jon Kurland – Reminded ISC about the revisions that had been made to the critical habitat plan based on comments from ISC and ISC communities. Normally an advance preview of policy is not offered, but this is being done in light of the special relationship between NMFS and the ISC. Changes can still happen until publication in the Federal Register. Publication in the federal register will occur pretty soon. As a review, critical habitat is required when a species is listed under the ESA. The listings were contested, vacated, and then reinstated. During this time critical habitat was put on hold. However, an outside group sued NMFS over failure to designate critical habitat. In a court settlement, critical habitat designation by a set schedule was agreed to. NMFS is on track to publish final designations in the federal register prior to the extended deadline of April 29, 2022. Jon also reminded the ISC that critical habitat has no effect on hunting or subsistence use of ice seals (no restrictions). Outreach materials regarding the ESA and critical habitat were released in 2021, and an update will be provided. Also, was hoping that the ISC would help get the word out to the communities.

Andy Von Duyke – Commented on outreach materials. In an effort to stay up to date on the website requested an outside review to ensure the most up-to-date materials are posted. Committed to updating the ISC website, but needs NMFS/NOAA’s help.

Billy Adams – Commented on critical habitat, especially with respect to commercial shipping in the Bering Straits region. This will be very important during the open-water season. There is concern about shipping in Russian waters, the northwest passage, fuel barges, etc. It will be important to inform the Alaskan coastal communities about the ESA, the Coast Guard, Critical Habitat, the processes, etc. Fact sheets are an important tool for this.

Tammy Olson – Walked the ISC through changes to critical habitat for ringed and bearded seals respectively:

- **Ringed Seal critical habitat revisions**
 1. Primary prey
 - a. Revised description to include rainbow smelt...
 - b. *“small, often schooling fishes; in particular Arctic cod, saffron cod, and rainbow smelt, and small crustaceans, in particular shrimp and amphipods.”*
 2. Sea-ice essential for birth-lairs
Sea-ice essential for basking and molting
 - a. Revised descriptions to exclude any bottom fast ice extending seaward from the coastline. And 3 meters was identified as the minimum water depth...
 3. Shoreward boundary of critical habitat
 - a. Revised description is now the 3-meter isobath
 - b. consistent with minimum water depth used for sea-ice essential features).
 4. Exclusion of an area north of the Beaufort Sea shelf
 - a. This was done in consideration of national security impacts.
 - b. This area increased in size based on input from the US Navy.
- **Bearded Seal critical habitat revisions**
 1. Acoustic related essential feature
 - a. Omitted
 - b. Concerns from other federal agencies about inclusion of this feature.
 - c. Available information is insufficient to be very specific about necessary acoustic conditions; making it difficult to assess possible impacts to the feature during Section-7 consultations
 2. Primary prey
 - a. Original description included benthic organisms, demersal fishes, and schooling pelagic fishes.
 - b. Revised description now focuses on benthic organisms.
 - c. A reevaluation of bearded seal diet data showed a high prevalence benthic organisms and demersal fishes, reflecting a reliance upon sea-floor prey communities to meet annual energy budget.

3. Shoreward boundary of critical habitat
 - a. Now is defined in terms of depth contours:
 - i. 20-meter isobath in the Beaufort and NE Chukchi Seas
 - ii. 10-meter isobath in the remainder of the Chukchi Sea
 - iii. 5-meter isobath in the Bering Sea
 - b. It was determined that the best approach to determining appropriate boundaries for critical habitat containing all essential features was to base the delineation on the boundaries for the sea ice essential features.
 - c. Seasonal cycle and extent of land-fast ice on the coast was also considered.
4. Comments recommending additional essential features and areas
 - a. Ringed and bearded seal use of nearshore waters
 - b. Ringed seal use of the southern ice edge habitat in the Bering Sea in winter & spring
 - c. There is currently a lack of data that clearly describes physical and biological features that are consistently associated with the seals' use of this habitat and to assess how these features may be "essential" to these species.
 - d. Current critical habitat description may not be complete. In the future, revisions of critical habitat may be considered.
 - e. Section-7 consultations apply both inside and outside of critical habitat.

Jon Kurland – Provided final comments on the process of critical habitat definition. Once critical habitat is finalized, the only regulatory effect is for federal agencies to consult on activities to ensure that they do not negatively impact listed species. State and private activities that do not require a federal permit are not subject to Section-7 consultation.

Joe Leavitt – Asked about who is affected by critical habitat? Shipping lanes? Oil industry? Who is affected?

Jon Kurland – Answered with a description of how Section-7 consultation works and gave some examples of activities with a federal nexus. Whichever federal agency oversees these activities (e.g., issuing permits, licenses, grants) are responsible for Section-7 consultation.

Joe Leavitt – Raised a question about buffer zones.

Jon Kurland – Clarified that critical habitat does not exclude use within an area, but rather sets up a framework for when it is necessary for federal agencies to undergo Section-7 consultation.

Brandon Ahmasuk – Asked about the exclusion of nearshore estuaries.⁶

⁶ This was a specific area that Brandon Ahmasuk requested for inclusion.

Tammy Olson – Responded with a clarification about the use of isobaths. In terms of boundaries of critical habitat would not include these inshore areas. Consultation would still be necessary with respect to the effects on the animals themselves, but not the actual habitat. Not enough data available to produce clear descriptions.

Brandon Ahmasuk – Noted that the Kawerak seal and walrus mapping project (accepted by NMFS) clearly showed habitat use including nearshore estuaries. He also mentioned that information is available (Indigenous Knowledge). This information has been conveyed at ISC meetings by ISC reps. He also expressed his disappointment in not including these areas in critical habitat, because he has mentioned this on a number of occasions. He also reiterated how and why this habitat is important. For example, seals use aquatic vegetation in river mouths/deltas as cover when they hunt. Hopeful that this information will be taken more seriously in the future.

Jon Kurland – Noted that NMFS struggled with how to utilize this type of information. In other words, it was difficult to describe the physical aspects of the habitat. He also acknowledged Sam Gosuk's statements on habitat for herring runs. Hard when this is very localized information. He said he hopes that further documentation of Indigenous Knowledge will be helpful.

Tammy Olson – Noted that the final rule attempted to discuss/include Indigenous Data. Often inclusion of this type of information in the preamble will help to synthesize this at a high level that will encourage future researchers to draw upon and add to this information.

Brandon Ahmasuk – Asked about the military exclusion in the northern Beaufort Sea.

Jon Kurland – Noted a provision in Section-4 of the ESA that critical habitat designations should consider effects on national security, economic impacts, etc. This request came from the Navy regarding training and other classified activities. Proposed exclusion was considered too small, and so in response to the Navy, this area was enlarged. Had to defer to the Navy because of a lack of security clearance.

Brandon Ahmasuk – Asked about how far this occurred from communities. Just wanted to be assured that this does not affect subsistence in the region.

Tammy Olson – Estimated that the southern edge of the Navy exclusion area was about 60 nm north of the shelf-break. The northern edge is about 120 nm north of the shelf-break. Noted that no subsistence in the area has been documented and that the Navy is really the only user of this zone.

Brandon Ahmasuk – Commented that due to climate change, subsistence hunters are beginning to travel greater distances to find resources. How/if this fits with the Navy exclusion in light of future subsistence needs (as affected by climate change) remains to be seen.

Robbie Kirk – Asked about the timeframe for critical habitat review. Is it reviewed annually?

Jon Kurland – Replied that critical habitat remains in effect until revised or rescinded.

Billy Adams – Commented that he is now finally beginning to understand critical habitat and its use.

10. Ice Seal Committee⁷

- a. Chairman.....Billy Adams

Billy Adams – Provided the following statements:

First of all, let us thank the Lord for allowing us to come together as a group in person or communicating by other means. Let us also remember our loved ones those that are not with us here that they are in a better place. I have confidence in this committee to move forward and catch up with each other.

We as a group must reignite our plans and goals for the next coming years as restrictions from covid are lessening. I hope each and every community for blessings of bountiful harvest of seals and other resources that we depend on as Alaskan Natives. Our relationship with our neighboring Regions continues to be excellent in giving updates on weather and ice conditions, health of harvested animals, and issues that we should be aware of.

Let us build up our relationships also with our State and Federal agencies along with our Circumpolar Indigenous members for we share resources such as ice seals, bowhead whales, belugas, polar bears, walruses, fish and birds. Our efforts to preserving our Native rights depends on each other to be responsible stewards and we hope to keep them in perpetuity.

My North Slope harvest update: The bearded seal hunting in the spring and summer was good overall as the pack ice was closer and stayed longer this year. The winter hunt for ringed seals for Pt. Hope was excellent, in Wainwright it was okay for the most part, but in Barrow we had no hunting on the ice from October to January due to conditions. Late February and March was a complete blessing as hunters rebounded and provided almost 50 seals for the Barrow and other villages that were shared with.

I look forward for a great meeting and a safe return for everyone.

Quyanaqpuk

⁷ The recorder was not turned on during agenda item 10. Meeting minutes were generated from notes taken by Andy Von Duyke and JakyLou Olemaun during the meeting.

b. Executive Manager.....Andy Von Duyke

Andy Von Duyke – Provided a briefing on ISC operations:

- **Current ISC funding**

1. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ISC met “virtually” for the FY20-21 Annual Meeting.
 - a. Most FY20-21 funds were budgeted for “in-person” meeting, and therefore remained unspent.
 - b. Unspent funds were carried forward as a no-cost extension into FY21-22.
2. ISC was awarded grant funding for FY21-22.
 - a. FY21-22 funds to be combined with FY20-21.
 - b. FY20-21 funds will be spent down first.
 - c. Balance of expenses thereafter will come out of budget for FY21-22.

- **Anticipated ISC funding**

1. Grant proposal for FY22-23...
 - a. Meeting costs
 - i. Annual Meetings
 - ISC Co-Management meeting (in-person)
 - ISC Board Meetings (in-person)
 - ii. Meeting #2
 - Virtual
 - Required under the ISC By Laws
 - iii. Strategic Planning Meeting (sub-committee)⁸
 - Duration: 2-day duration
 - Format: In-person, facilitated
 - Location: Anchorage
 - Dates: Yet to be determined
 - Participants:
 - ISC Executive Committee
 - Kawerak rep. and Maniilaq rep.
 - ISC Executive Manager
 - Subject-matter: “5-Year Strategic Plan” (see below)
 - b. Personnel costs
 - i. Executive Manager
 - ii. Deputy Manager (new position to help build capacity)
 - iii. Admin
 - c. Outreach (staff time, website, Zoom Pro subscription, data collection technology)
 - d. Legal-assistance (added capacity for addressing ISC compliance and for consultation)

⁸ Allowable under the By-Laws. The Executive Committee may not provide enough input because of only 3 members. It is recommended that 5 regional reps, or a person from each region (hunter or regional rep) participate.

- **New Sec. 119 grant-cycle allows for 3-year grants**
 1. ISC submitted for only one-year grant (this time).
 - a. The ISC Executive Manager was concerned about “locking in” for 3 years without adequate guidance from ISC Board.
 - b. NEED: Fix current paradigm so that direction from ISC Board is received with enough advanced notice to reflect the Board’s vision in upcoming grant proposals.
 - i. Better synchronization needed
 - ii. Need for more specific direction from the Board (see next section)
- **NEED: ISC Board should develop strategic vision (e.g., 5-Year Plan)**
 1. Task #1: ISC House-Keeping⁹
 - a. ISC Board and NMFS to take a thorough look at the ISC Co-Management Agreement and Ice Seal Management Plan to verify whether we are complying in a meaningful way.
 - b. If “room for improvement”, then address systematically
 - i. Action Plan
 - ii. Update ISC Co-Management Agreement if necessary
 - iii. Update ISC By-Laws if necessary¹⁰
 - iv. Update Ice Seal Management plan if necessary
 - v. This is why legal-assistance was included in FY22-23 proposal
 2. Task #2: ISC Board to set prioritized list of goals/objectives (based in part on Task #1)
 3. Task #3: Map out how to achieve goals/objectives set in Task #2
 4. Tasks #1-3 are intent of Strategic Planning Meeting proposed for FY22-23.
 - a. Completing these tasks will guide & serve as justification for ISC future funding requests.
 - b. This will improve the process of ice seal co-management.

Jon Kurland – Asked how much time does Andy spend towards ISC?

Andy Von Duyke – Replied to Jon that 5 weeks of time are covered for the ISC Executive Manager under the grant. At some point, when/if it makes sense, and under guidance from the ISC board, other grants may be pursued to cover ISC expenses.

Danielle Dickson – IARPC may be a good resource because they offer grants for community resilience.

⁹ From the Ice Seal Committee Co-Management Agreement (VI.A.1-2):

The Co-management Committee shall develop a Management Plan (or plans) for ice seals in Alaska... the guiding document for joint and separate management actions by the ISC and NMFS related to the conservation and management of subsistence uses of Alaskan ice seals.

...the Committee shall consider technical information, and ... non-technical information including cultural, ethical, policy and legal concerns...

*...Committee will evaluate ...success ...and will **update it annually.***

¹⁰ More ISC members? Quorum issues (i.e., missed meetings). Other meetings. Also, need to clarify Alternates.

11. Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program Barbara Mahoney

- a. Draft Programmatic EIS, published 23-May 2021 (late)
 - i. Public comment period was extended to 28-July 2021

- b. Final Programmatic EIS is due soon
Plan for completion by December 2022

12. Ice Seal UME Barbara Mahoney (presentation)

Barbara Mahoney – Gave a PowerPoint presentation that provided a brief update on the ongoing UME. General trend is that strandings have declined over the past two years. This UME is expected to close in May of 2022.

Billy Adams – Reiterated that the conditions in 2018 and 2019 were not good for seals. Stranded animals are part of the ecosystem because they serve as food for other animals. He also brought up the 2011 UME, noting that no answer to the question of its cause has been determined.

Barbara Mahoney – Grateful to the hunters who provided samples. Despite not finding a direct cause for the UME, there is still being work done on the 2011 UME samples. She strongly emphasized the importance of documentation and especially photos.

Joe Leavitt – Mentioned that his granddaughter saw a photo from Canada of ringed seal conjoined twin fetus.¹¹

Andy Von Duyke – Mentioned that the ISC Website home page has a link to the stranding network (you can scroll down to projects and look for Marine Mammal Strandings).

Brandon Ahmasuk – Asked whether seals that were tested in 2011 the worst of the worst, or rather those with less severe signs of the UME.

Barbara Mahoney – Responded that the sampled seals were fresh, but determined by the hunters to be inedible. Range of symptoms among these seals.

Action plan¹²

Barbara Mahoney – Described the Action Plan, which is to be revisited annually. Ordinarily Barbara would have a draft in hand. It fell through the cracks this year. Barbara summarized the successes of the previous year's Action Plan. She stated that the ISC website is good and very useful. The 2022 Action Plan will be sent out for review. This will be fairly similar to

¹¹ This photo has been circulating on the internet since at least 2015 (Andy Von Duyke)

¹² This item had been inadvertently omitted from the original agenda. It was added at the start of this meeting.

2021. In the future, this may become more involved when/if more funding is available and with guidance by the ISC Board.

13. ISC & NMFS monthly calls

Andy Von Duyke – Described the regularly scheduled monthly calls. This is a good start and will become more useful when the Action Plan and Strategic Plan are updated.

Barbara Mahoney – Reiterated what Andy said about the value of these calls. Please let us know ideas to be discussed. Her goal is to try to help and not add to work for Andy.

Jennifer Hooper – Is it possible for others to participate in the monthly calls?

Andy Von Duyke – Other participants are welcome. However, the calls currently are not tightly structured. This would be encouraged, especially if there is a topic that needs to be addressed quickly.

Barbara Mahoney – Call is typically the third Thursday of the month.

14. Closing comments

Wybon Rivers – Reported that he has harvested 20 ringed seals; mostly males.

Billy Adams – Explained the structure of the meetings. Also stated that he is happy with how things are going so far.

Barbara Mahoney – Glad to be in-person. Looking forward to continued monthly meetings and others are welcome to join. UME will close soon, hopefully in May. Encouraged community feedback on seal health. Encouraging people to use the ISC website.

15. Date for next meeting

Table this until after the ISC Board Meeting.

16. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned.