



# ICE SEAL COMMITTEE – BOARD MEETING

## FINAL AGENDA

**March 11-12, 2026**

**9:00 am – 5:00 pm**

**Embassy Suites Hotel**

600 East Benson Blvd, Anchorage, AK 99503

1. **Call to Order (9:00 am)**.....Billy Adams – ISC Chair
2. **Invocation**
3. **Roll Call**.....Quorum<sup>1</sup> for ISC Board Meeting = majority (6 members)

Ice Seal Committee		Present	Absent
Bristol Bay Native Association	Jorjana Dray		
	Sam Gosuk		
Association of Village Council Presidents	Jennifer Hooper		
	Isaac Rivers		
Kawerak, Inc.	Charles Menadelook		
	Albert Oquilluk <sup>5</sup>		
Maniilaq Association	Timothy Smith		
	Cyrus Harris		
North Slope Borough	Billy Adams		
	Joe Mello Leavitt		
<b>Total</b>			

4. **Introductions & Meeting Logistics**
  - Meeting will be recorded, so please speak clearly & loudly, and always identify yourself before speaking.
  - Breaks at 10-ish and at 3-ish. Lunch on your own at noon till 1:30 pm.
5. **Welcome remarks**.....Billy Adams & Anne Marie Eich
6. **Approve agenda**.....Ice Seal Committee
7. **Approve Minutes**.....Ice Seal Committee
  - A. Spring 2025 – ISC Board Meeting
  - B. Fall 2025 – ISC Virtual Meeting

<sup>1</sup> **ISC By-Laws – Article IV, Section 4.5:** A majority of the members of this Working Group, when present at any meeting, shall constitute a quorum, and in case there is less than this number, the presiding officer may adjourn from time to time until a quorum is present.

**8. Old Business**

- A. NOAA..... Jenna Malek & Caroline Cummings
- 1) Ringed & Bearded Seal recovery planning
  - 2) Stranding update
- B. ISC / NMFS monthly meetings..... Jenna Malek & Andy Von Duyke
- C. Legal matters..... Tyson Kade

**9. New Business**

- A. ISC Reports
- 1) ISC Chair..... Billy Adams
  - 2) ISC Manager..... Andy Von Duyke
- B. Reports – Regional
- 1) Bristol Bay Native Association..... Jorjana Dray & Sam Gosuk
  - 2) Association of Village Council Presidents..... Jennifer Hooper & Isaac Rivers
  - 3) Kawerak, Inc..... Charles Menadelook & Albert Oquilluk
  - 4) Maniilaq Association..... Timothy Smith & Cyrus Harris
  - 5) North Slope Borough..... Billy Adams & Joe Mello Leavitt
- C. Updates – Research
- 1) UAF
    - a) [AAOKH update](#)..... Donna Hauser & Roberta Glenn-Borade
    - b) [Spotted Seal research](#)..... Maeghan Connor & Donna Hauser
  - 2) [Seal Nations Proposal](#)..... Nicholas Parlato & Vera Solovyeva
  - 3) [UNH – Bearded seal acoustics](#)..... Michelle Fournet & Rachel Lewis
  - 4) [AOOS](#)..... Sheyna Wisdom
  - 5) [ADF&G – Arctic Marine Mammal Program](#)..... Justin Olnes
  - 6) NOAA
    - a) [Office of Coast Survey](#)..... Caroline Wilkinson
    - b) [2025 Aerial survey for ice-associated seals](#)..... Erin Moreland
    - c) [Habitat suitability ribbon & spotted seals](#)..... Josh London
  - 7) [NSB Wildlife](#)..... Raphaela Stimmelmayer & Andy Von Duyke
  - 8) Others
    - a) [Narwhal Exploration](#) / Boreal Services..... Shawn Gelsinger & Julie Lina
    - b) [Hilcorp](#)..... Jen Dushane

**10. Next Meeting Dates**

- A. 2026 Fall Meeting (virtual)<sup>2</sup>..... *Late September worked well in 2025.*
- B. 2027 Spring Meeting..... *Late-Jan to early-Feb strongly preferred*

***Executive Session (as needed)..... ISC members only***

<sup>2</sup> Short meeting (2-4 hrs) covers updates and timely topics that cannot wait until the 2027 in-person meeting.

## **11. Action Items**

## **12. Final Comments**

## **13. Adjourn**

**Title: Elevating Indigenous Knowledge and observations to understand ice seal health, ecology, and co-management**

“I have learned a lot in the past, working with federal agencies [trying to] work better. It is something that is in our sights, but we still have a long way to go. It will [be better] when we have more people at the table...Many decision-makers don’t know our lifestyle, don’t know what it is like to live in communities, to be Iñupiat. We have a lot to learn from each other. It would be beneficial to have local experts to share about our traditional & cultural foods and issues, using our observations...”

- Billy Adams, (Utqiaġvik AAOXH Iñupiaq observer & Ice Seal Committee Chairman)

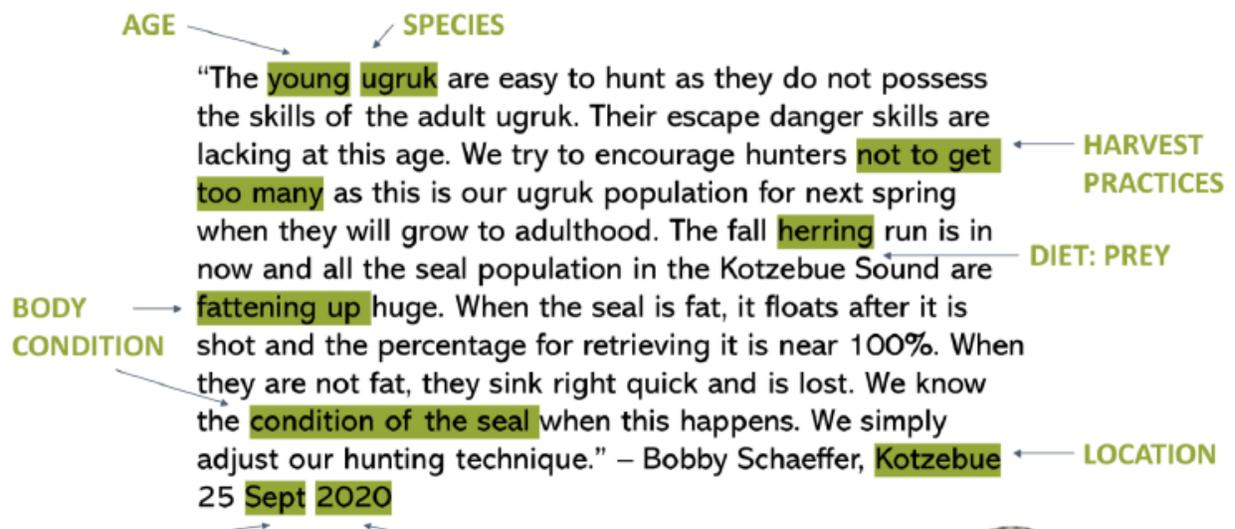
**Researchers:** Donna Hauser (UAF), Roberta Tuurraq Glenn (UAF), Alaska Arctic Observatory & Knowledge Hub (AAOKH)

**Collaborators:** Ice Seal Committee, per approval at January 2025 meeting

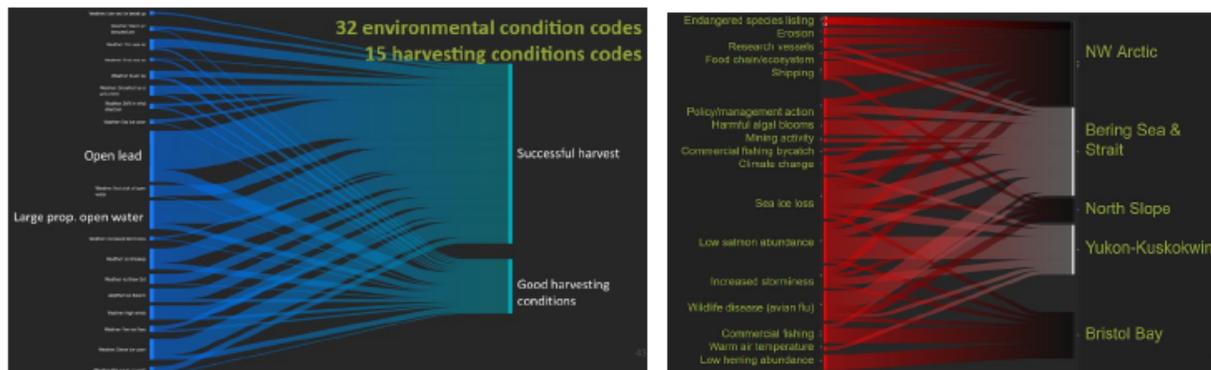
**Funding status and timeline:** NOAA Fisheries Indigenous Engagement Grant - March 2025 start date. No funds have been received, and the grant is apparently terminated. However, AAOXH has been toward project goals based on funding from the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. To proceed with all project objectives, additional funding will be needed.

**Summary:** Our goal is to support the knowledge and observations of ice seal hunters. We will work with the ISC and AAOXH to summarize Indigenous observations of ice seals. By using existing ISC and AAOXH reports, we aim to support Indigenous-led understanding of ice seal health and ecology, with opportunities to include Indigenous observations in recovery planning and co-management decisions.

**Project update and preliminary results:** AAOXH currently supports community-led Indigenous environmental observations by seven Iñupiat knowledge-holders across six Chukchi and Beaufort Sea coastal communities. Over nearly twenty years, AAOXH observers have contributed over 12,000 holistic environmental and wildlife observations, of which >850 observations refer to ice seals that are critical nutritional, cultural, and spiritual components of the way of life for Indigenous Alaskans. Our project uses a textual analysis (or “coding”) of the AAOXH marine mammal observations (example below), specifically focusing on ice seal observations as a case study, to identify Indigenous metrics of ice seal health and ecology.



We are conducting an in-depth text analysis of all AAOKH observations related to ice seals as well as regional hunter reports made during ISC meetings since 2018. Our research so far has focused on text analysis using AtlasTi coding software of ~600 of the 878 AAOKH observations that mention ice seals as well as all of the ISC hunter reports from 2018-2025. These analyses have helped us identify key observing themes and explore relationships between changing environmental conditions and harvest success, as well as key policy concerns among ISC board members. By synthesizing AAOKH ice seal observations (e.g., changing harvest access and availability, relative abundance, phenology, diet, and body condition), we are identifying examples of how Indigenous observations provide rich holistic descriptions of ice seals that span regions, seasons and years, habitats, environmental conditions, and changes in harvesting. These include new insights not previously documented by scientists.



*Left:* Preliminary results from the text analysis of AAOKH ice seal observations of environmental conditions that affect successful harvests or good harvesting conditions. *Right:* Preliminary results from the text analysis of ISC hunter reports reveal regional concerns.

On December 5th, 2025, we hosted a knowledge exchange in Anchorage, Alaska to explore opportunities for AAOKH observations to be applied in co-management contexts, and how to overcome barriers to the uptake of Indigenous Knowledge and observations in co-management of fish and wildlife. We brought together AAOKH observers, members of the AAOKH steering group, UAF graduate students, members of the ISC board, as well as scientists, ice seal recovery planners, and managers from NOAA Fisheries. AAOKH staff presented preliminary findings from our text analysis. ISC and NOAA guests shared an overview of their work as well as current barriers and opportunities for Indigenous observations to inform management. Key barriers for meaningful co-management identified by the ISC included conflicts around intellectual property, concerns over the potential extractive nature of Indigenous Knowledge research, limited capacity, and funding constraints. NOAA Fisheries emphasized the value of hearing reports from hunters and observers, especially those around unusual occurrences that are embedded with deep knowledge of the local environment and wildlife.

**AAOKH data use agreement and access:** <https://aaokh-data.org/>. See Coastal observers of Arctic Alaska. 2022. Local Observations from the Seasonal Ice Zone Observing Network (SIZONet) and Alaska Arctic Observatory and Knowledge Hub (AAOKH), Version 2. Edited by the AAOKH Team. Boulder, CO: National Snow & Ice Data Center.

## Advancing Spotted Seal Research Through Improved Monitoring Methods

**Researchers:** Maeghan Connor (UAF Graduate Student, [mrconnor@alaska.edu](mailto:mrconnor@alaska.edu)); Donna Hauser (UAF); Andrew Von Duyke (NSB-DWM); Todd Brinkman (UAF)

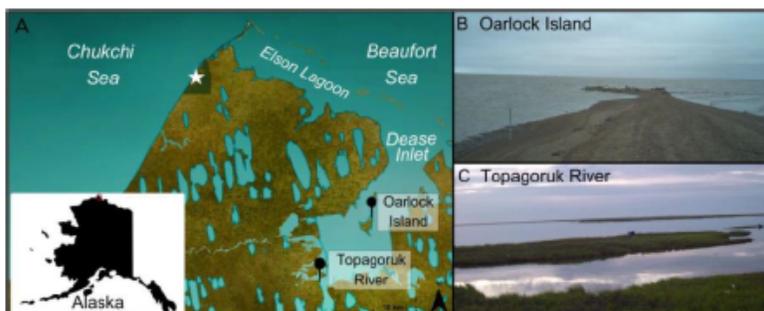
**Project Partners:** North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management (NSB-DWM), Ice Seal Committee (ISC), and the Alaska Arctic Observatory and Knowledge Hub (AAOKH)

**Funding Status and Timeline:** This ongoing project is funded by the Alaska Sea Grant (2024 – 2026), with additional funding proposals currently under review. This project also relies on substantial funding and support from existing projects: the Ice Seal Research Program at the NSB-DWM, AAOKH, and the UAF International Arctic Research Center.

**Summary:** The goal of this project is to improve our understanding of spotted seal (*Phoca largha*) ecology, biology, and behavior during the summer-fall open water period by employing two non-invasive technologies; time-lapse cameras (commonly known as ‘game cameras’) and small Uncrewed Aircraft Systems (sUAS, or commonly known as ‘drones’). Completed objectives include: (1) using time-lapse cameras and weather data to quantify the effects of environmental conditions on spotted seal summer-fall haul out behavior and (2) improving understanding of haul out behavior by weaving results with local environmental observations from Indigenous Knowledge holders. Results have been shared through the AAOKH newsletter and are currently being prepared for publication in *Arctic Science*. Ongoing objectives include: (1) quantifying disturbance effects of small drones on hauled out seals; (2) developing disturbance-minimizing flight protocols by refining drone flight plans based on evaluation of explanatory variables that affect spotted seal responses to drones; (3) determining feasibility of using drone imagery to detect, count, and estimate seal lengths and widths; and (4) establishing baseline datasets on the relative abundance, body condition, age structure, and terrestrial habitat use of spotted seals at surveyed haul outs along Alaska Beaufort Sea coastlines from 2024 – 2026.

### Project Updates:

#### 1. Completed: Weaving Timelapse Cameras & AAOKH Observations to Understand Spotted Seal Coastal Haul Out Behavior in Arctic Alaska



Above: Haul out sites in (A) Dease Inlet, near Utqiagvik, AK, including (B) Oarlock Island and (C) Topagoruk River. Photo credit: Andy Von Duyke & Donna Hauser.

Spotted seal counts were best explained by temperature, day-of-year, year, wind speed, and wind direction, with wind strongly influencing haul-out availability. At both sites, seals were more abundant in relatively cooler temperatures (30–40°F). At Oarlock Island, counts were highest under moderate N–NE winds (0–15 knots) and increased toward the end of the open-water season, peaking in late August/early September. At Topagoruk River, seals were most abundant under moderate E winds (5–15 knots), with numbers peaking in mid-August.

#### Weaving Results with Utqiagvik AAOKH Observations by Billy Adams and Joe Leavitt

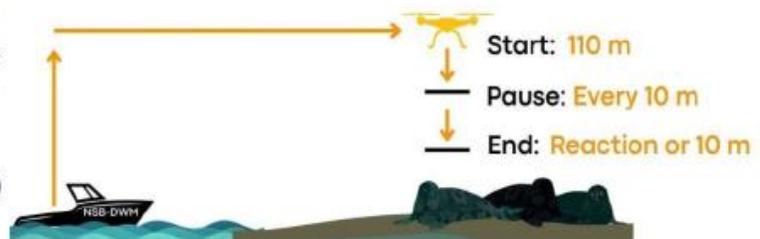
AAOKH observations help explain yearly differences in seal counts. Many more seals were seen in 2020 compared to 2021 and 2022. In 2021 and 2022, AAOKH observations noted warmer temperatures, stronger westerly winds, more storms and flooding, prolonged nearshore sea ice, and earlier ice formation in lagoons. These conditions likely reduced haul out area availability and affected seal behavior and migration. In contrast, 2020 had fewer storms and earlier sea-ice breakup, consistent with higher seal numbers. See *alignment of AAOKH observations with seal counts on next page*.



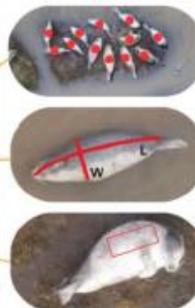
**2. Ongoing: Spotted Seal Behavioral Response to Small Drones & Future Research**

During July-September of 2024 & 2025, we surveyed haul out sites using a small quadcopter drone deployed from a NSB-DWM research vessel. We conducted a total of 61 flights over spotted seal haul outs in Dease Inlet, with seal counts ranging from 1 – 191 seals.

The drone was launched from an NSB-DWM boat, ascended to ~360 ft (110m) in altitude, and flown horizontally to the haul out. Once directly over seals, the drone descended vertically by 33 ft (10m) increments until a behavioral reaction was noted or 98 ft (30m) was reached (whichever came first).



Right: Drone flight pattern



Counts:  
Abundance

Photogrammetry:  
Body condition,  
age structure

Photo ID:  
Site fidelity

Initial results indicate that the likelihood of disturbing spotted seals declines significantly when drones are operated above 98 ft (30 m), suggesting potential future opportunities to non-invasively collect data on body condition, relative abundance, age distribution, and behavior. Left: Drone imagery can be analyzed to derive metrics on abundance, body condition, demographic composition, and site fidelity.

**Next Steps:**

- Plan 2026 field season in Utqiagvik, which will focus on testing different drone flight approaches
- Finalize data analyses and publish findings for seal behavioral response to drones
- Analyze collected drone imagery for age structure and body condition

**Requests of Ice Seal Committee:** We are currently exploring opportunities to conduct ice seal drone surveys in collaboration with more communities. If you are interested, please reach out to Maeghan or Donna. We would also love to hear any comments, suggestions, or questions you may have regarding this research. Thank you!

## Seal Nations Proposal

Nicholas J. Parlato and Vera Solovyeva

### Introduction

The polar research community has begun preparations for the Fifth International Polar Year, which is intended to advance knowledge towards actionable outcomes, grounded in community needs for adaptation and well-being. However, conventional social and natural sciences continue to dominate research agendas while Indigenous-led and transdisciplinary research remain methodologically and theoretically underdeveloped. The program proposed herein aspires to build a community of practice spanning both polar regions to document, theorize, and narrativize transforming relationships among people, ice, and seals.

For Indigenous and Western scientific communities in both the Arctic and Antarctic, seals are a cultural and ecological keystone species. Though most populations of ice-dependent seal are considered healthy, a range of climate- and human-driven threats are emerging that demand a thorough evaluation of past, present, and future relational changes. Identified knowledge gaps in the ecological and biological sciences include understandings of energetic thresholds, population interconnectivity, disease dynamics, and adaptation to climate change and sea ice loss. Of additional note, however, is the absence of comprehensive sociocultural and political economic research on ice seals, including questions of oral history, material culture, governance, and more-than-human kinship. In available studies, seals are frequently addressed as part of wider marine mammal complexes, but rarely centered in their own right as bearers of history, culture, and politics. This program, Seal Nations, aims to fill these gaps.

Seal Nations is understood as a long-term program under which multiple interdependent projects will be funded from multiple sources. We are currently developing a 2-year project proposal for the NSF's Arctic Social Sciences program in collaboration with Tribal leaders and hunters from the YK Delta and Norton Sound. As written, the proposal retains a broad and open remit, to be honed through more extended meetings with community members and leaders. It is structured through three frameworks to address these interdisciplinary and multi-epistemic knowledge gaps: seals as relatives, seals as sentinels, and seals as nations. Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge run through each of these frameworks, not simply as information to be documented but as a systematic orientation towards scientific understanding. In other words, knowledge products arising from this research will not conform exclusively to Western academic standards of argument and evidence, but additionally and preferentially to the standards of Indigenous community partners, elders, and knowledge holders.

### Seals as Relatives

Alaska Native Peoples have cultivated millennia-old relationships with ice seals, who have provided them with food, oil, skin, knowledge, and more. As with Indigenous Peoples elsewhere, hunting nonhuman animals is not considered wanton violence but an expression of mutual interdependence, grounded in an axiology of reciprocity. Contemporary research through Indigenous methodologies (rather than exclusively as documentation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge) regarding seals and the cryosphere is underdeveloped in Alaska. Coastal communities cultivate respectful relationalities with seals and other

marine mammals through many means that exceed the standards and output of natural science. This framework thus concerns three distinctly qualitative modes of relationality: story, material culture, and food sovereignty.

### Seals as Sentinels

In the Arctic observing space, networks like SAON have advanced “shared Arctic variables” as an approach to unifying observing systems. This framework recognizes the importance of seals as “companion species” whose nonhuman knowledge of and adaptation to changing environments is vital for wider human approaches to knowledge production and climate adaptation. It aims to advance conventional Western ecological methods with a heightened emphasis on learning *from* rather than *about* seals. This framework forms the basis for holistic investigations of extended, more-than-human biogeoclimatic communities with the goal of establishing sustained relations of observation and adaptation among project participants.

### Seals as Nations

In both poles, ice seals are the subjects of multiple legal regimes relating to conservation, harvest, fisheries, and commerce. These legal modes, however, were conceived with many Western constructs including rights and state territoriality. This framework establishes the basis for an examination of existing, nascent, and visionary legal regimes with an emphasis on Indigenous jurisprudence, rights of nature, and nonhuman normativity. It further aspires to theorize novel relations between localized, international, and planetary regimes in alignment with IPY’s two-pole scope. What systems of accountability, enforcement, and political organization will prove just, equitable, and adaptable for multiple species under conditions of climate change?

### Concluding Thoughts

At this stage, Seal Nations has engaged with Indigenous and Western researchers and museum specialists in Alaska. We also presented the project to the WCRP’s CliC community in Wellington, New Zealand last month. As two early career scholars, Vera and I are seeking partnerships, feedback, and support at this meeting of the Ice Seal Committee. We wish to expand our team and capacity to complete a competitive grant proposal for a July 15 submission to NSF. We recognize the current political difficulties in exploring transformative, community-centered research that both advances and challenges dominant knowledge systems and the political economies they emerge from. Yet we are undeterred as the stakes of inaction and political compliance are too high. Similar to Greenlandic researcher Naja Graugaard (2020, 13), we are interested in seals as a “prism to examine (some of) the complex processes that are involved in the unfolding of Greenland as an Indigenous homeland, colonized territory, and self-governing nation” while simultaneously holding space open for future-oriented inquiries into collaborations among multiple knowledge systems.

**Nicholas J. Parlato, PhD**  
UiT Center for Sami Studies  
The Arctic University of Norway  
[njparlato@alaska.edu](mailto:njparlato@alaska.edu)

**Vera Solovyeva, PhD**  
American Museum of Natural History  
[vsolovye@gmu.edu](mailto:vsolovye@gmu.edu)

**Listening for bearded seals (*urgruk/maklak*) near Togiak and Utqiagvik, Alaska**  
*for the annual meeting of the Ice Seal Committee (ISC), March 10-12, 2026*

Michelle Fournet, PhD & Rachel Lewis, MS Student, University of New Hampshire (UNH)  
-in collaboration with-  
Andrew VonDuyke, North Slope Borough (NSB)  
Sam Gosuk, Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA)

**TAKE HOME MESSAGES:**

**Utqiagvik:** Acoustic data from 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2024 have been analyzed for bearded seal chorusing. Chorus onset dates were April 29 (2010), April 27 (2011), and May 11 (2012), and March 20 (2024). Initial modeling indicates a consistent 5-day lag between ice breakup in spring and an increase in bearded seal calling. It is possible that the chorus is starting earlier with sea ice breakup. Data from 1985, 1993, and possibly 2026 have yet to be analyzed.

**Togiak:** Acoustic deployments are ongoing and have expanded from two listening sites to four with support from instruments provided by the North Slope Borough. Acoustic data from hydrophones deployed near Hagemeister and Summit Island in spring 2025 indicates a lack of bearded seal chorusing. In ongoing analysis, phocid roars are present at Hagemeister in late June and July. The acoustic characteristics and seasonality of these vocalizations indicate possible harbor seal breeding. No roars have been heard yet at Summit due to vessel noise. Walrus calls have been found at the Summit site in April so far.

**OVERVIEW:** Bearded seals (*ugruk, maklak; Erignathus barbatus*) are a vital subsistence species in the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas. As an ice dependent species, the effects of decreasing and variable sea ice conditions during the spring breeding season have been identified as a research priority to support ongoing subsistence activities. Starting at the 2019 annual ISC meeting, hunter representatives from the communities of Togiak in sub-Arctic Bristol Bay and Utqiagvik in the Arctic expressed interest in using acoustics to study residency, timing, and breeding behavior of ice seals, and specifically of bearded seals.

Historical ice conditions supported breeding in both the sub-Arctic and Arctic range of bearded seals, but contemporary ice conditions now differ between these regions. In the sub-Arctic near Togiak, spring sea ice is increasingly variable. Hunters have reported noticing a decline in bearded seals since the 1970s, and are unsure if seals are present and undetected, or not using the area as breeding habitat in spring. Note that young-of-year bearded seals are still seen in the fall (Sam Gosuk, pers. comm.). In the Arctic off the coast of Utqiagvik, the breeding bearded seal population is still consistently present, but may be displaying shifting breeding behaviors in response to earlier sea ice breakup.

This research is using historic acoustic data in the Arctic and contemporary acoustic data in both regions to assess 1) if and when bearded seals are breeding (via chorusing) and 2) how the timing of breeding behavior may be changing in response to sea ice loss. This project was developed in

collaboration with the Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA) and the North Slope Borough (NSB) based on feedback expressed during ISC meetings.

**DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS UPDATE:** In the Arctic, acoustic data collected from Jan. – June in 2010, 2011, and 2012 has been shared by JASCO Applied Sciences. Data from Jan. – Mar. 2024 was collected using a five-element hydrophone array by the NSB and UNH (see Fig. 1). Data for the 2026 breeding season collected for the bowhead whale census may be opportunistically analyzed in the future. Chorus onset dates have been identified as April 29 (2010), April 27 (2011), and May 11 (2012), and March 20 (2024). Data is only available through March for 2024, but chorus onset was still captured based on the ice breakup conditions. Initial modeling indicates a consistent 5-day lag between ice breakup in spring and an increase in bearded seal calling. Consistency in this pattern between years indicates that bearded seals are continuing to breed in their preferred sea ice habitat (pack ice). Combined with the shift earlier in chorus onset, this may indicate that bearded seals are breeding earlier under a climate change ice regime. However, data from 1985 and 1993 have not yet been analyzed and will help to assess this possible trend.

Recordings from Bristol Bay have been collected in collaboration with Sam Gosuk and Togiak School students from Nov. 2024 – Aug. 2025, and are currently recording Jan. 2026 – present. Retrieval of these instruments will happen this spring (see Fig. 2). Analysis of the acoustic data from spring 2025 shows a lack of bearded seal chorusing. The absence of vocal advertisement suggests that there were not breeding bearded seals present in Togiak Bay during this year. Exploration of this data is ongoing, and no phocid vocalizations have been heard in spring so far. However, roars consistent with known harbor seal breeding behavior (Matthews et. al, 2017) have been heard in June and July 2025 at the Hagemeister site. No harbor roars have been heard at Summit yet due to vessel noise. Walrus calls have been heard at Summit in April so far. Analysis is ongoing.

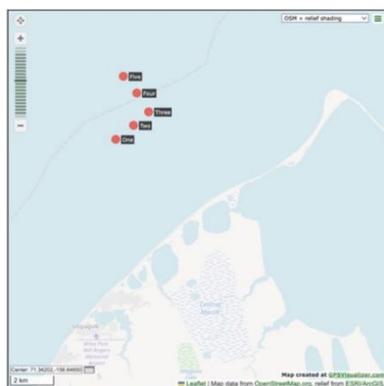


Figure 1: Hydrophones deployed overwinter 2024, Utqiagvik, AK

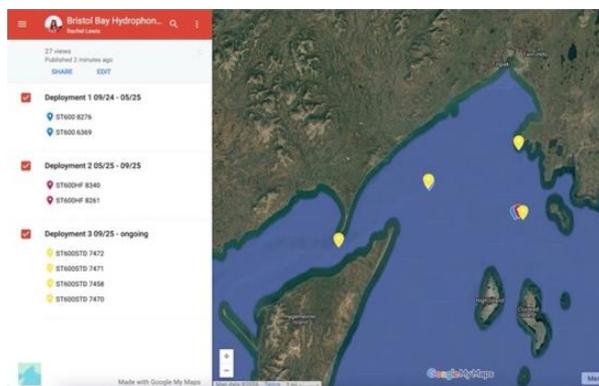


Figure 2: Hydrophones currently deployed near Togiak, Bristol Bay, AK

## Literature Cited:

Matthews, L. P., Parks, S. E., Fournet, M. E., Gabriele, C. M., Womble, J. N., & Klinck, H. (2017). Source levels and call parameters of harbor seal breeding vocalizations near a terrestrial haulout site in Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 141(3), EL274-EL280.



**Sheyna Wisdom**  
**Executive Director**  
[wisdom@aaos.org](mailto:wisdom@aaos.org), 907-748-5864

## Who is AOOS and how can we best serve co-management groups?

---

### Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS)

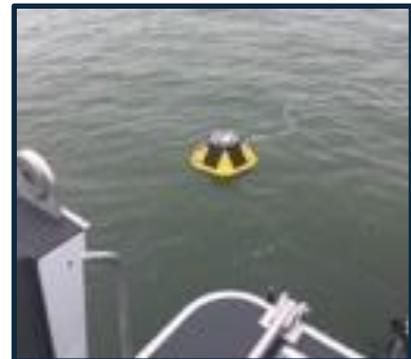
- NOAA funded program under National Ocean Service (NOS), operating since 2003
- 1 of 11 Regional Associations across U.S.

### AOOS organizational setup

- Mission to increase observing & forecasting in all regions of Alaska
- Board of federal and state agencies, academic institutions, research facilities, industry, non-profits, & Alaska Native Organizations (Mike Miller is co-management seat)
- Non-profit organization with 9 staff members

### Providing Services and Products to Support our Partners

- Partners are **essential** for successful ocean observing
- Key partner needs: Improve safety of marine operations, coastal hazards, track climate & ecosystem trends, and monitor water quality



### AOOS Approach:

- Sustained observations/assets
- Fund/test new, innovative technologies
- Collaborations and partnerships to find solutions
- Collect, use, and house information in a meaningful way

### Learn more about our Collaboration Networks

- Alaska Harmful Algal Bloom Network - <https://ahab.aaos.org/>
- Alaska Water Level Watch - <https://awlw.aaos.org/>
- Alaska Ocean Acidification Network - <https://aoan.aaos.org/>
- Alaska Marine Policy Forum - <https://aaos.org/alaska-issues/alaska-marine-policy-forum/>
- Sea Ice for Walrus Outlook - <https://aaos.org/networks/sea-ice-for-walrus-outlook/>

## Data Accessibility and Resources

- Ocean Data Explorer (<https://portal.aaos.org/>)
- Backyard Buoys Wave Buoy App - <https://software.apl.uw.edu/proto/BackyardBuoys/app.php>
- Mariner’s Dashboard - <https://aaos.org/portal-highlights-2/real-time-information-for-current-maritime-conditions>



## Examples of Alaska Native Partnerships

- **Backyard Buoys** (<https://backyardbuoys.org>) partnering with AEWC for wave buoys in villages
  - App for wave information across the state – even those not funded by AOOS
- **Sea Ice for Walrus Outlook** (<https://aaos.org/networks/sea-ice-for-walrus-outlook/>) took over for ARCUS when they lost funding
- **Arctic Watch Program** (<https://arcticwatch.org/>) partnering with Marine Exchange of Alaska and Kawerak for real-time vessel management system in Bering Strait
- **Skipper Science** (<https://www.skipperscience.org/>) partnering with Aleut Community of St. Paul Island/Alaska Conservation Foundation for oceanographic information by fisherman & observers
- **Alaskan Arctic Observatory & Knowledge Hub** (<https://arctic-aok.org/>) partnering with UAF and Alaskan Arctic coastal community residents
- **Nalaquq LLC in Kuskokwim Bay**
  - Salmon counts using drones: <https://nalaquq.com/portfolio/salmon-fish-count/>
  - Buoys/drifters: <https://nalaquq.com/portfolio/sofar-buoy-project/>
- **Community sampling** and analysis with Sitka, Kodiak, and Alutiiq Pride Marine Institute
  - Ocean acidification (OA): <https://aoan.aaos.org/monitoring/community-sampling/>
  - Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs): <https://ahab.aaos.org/how-we-monitor/>
- **Bering Science publication:** <https://aaos.org/project/bering-sea-ocean-data-sharing-initiative/>
- **Workforce development** using Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds
- **Education:** Synthesizing scientific data with Indigenous Knowledge
- **Travel Support:** Support for community members to attend meetings/workshops/conferences

**ADF&G Report to ISC March 2026**

ADF&amp;G Arctic Marine Mammal Program

Lori Quakenbush [lori.quakenbush@alaska.gov](mailto:lori.quakenbush@alaska.gov), 907-459-7214Anna Bryan, [anna.bryan@alaska.gov](mailto:anna.bryan@alaska.gov); Justin Crawford, [justin.crawford@alaska.gov](mailto:justin.crawford@alaska.gov)Justin Olnes, [justin.olnes@alaska.gov](mailto:justin.olnes@alaska.gov); Alex Sletten, [alexandria.sletten@alaska.gov](mailto:alexandria.sletten@alaska.gov)

**BIOMONITORING** - Seal samples collected from your subsistence harvest allows us to monitor health-related measures such as diet, body condition, productivity, age at maturity, survival past weaning, and diseases. We regularly receive tissues from Utqiagvik, Point Hope, Shishmaref, and Gambell, but would welcome samples from other communities.

**Diet.** We are working with NMFS to determine the amount of fish biomass spotted seals eat as a population. Using diet data from stomachs of harvested spotted seals, we determined the species and size of fish (length and weight) consumed in the Bering and Chukchi seas. These data were modeled with information about the number of spotted seals (more than 250,000) and their energy requirements to get a preliminary estimate that spotted seals consume ~400,000 metric tons (= 440,000 tons) of prey per year, of which 86% are fish and 14% are invertebrates.

We are comparing two methods to examine ringed and bearded seal diets. After identifying fish prey from hard parts (otoliths) in stomach contents, we analyze DNA from the digested parts to see if we can identify more species of fish. For ringed seals, preliminary results are very similar between methods. For bearded seals, however, the DNA method identified many more fish species, probably because they eat fish that have small otoliths that digest quickly.

**Body condition, productivity, age at maturity, pup survival past weaning.** These are good indicators of population health, and they are currently positive for ringed, bearded, and spotted seals. We have created a flyer, 'The Health and Status of Ice Seals of Alaska', to share these results with Alaskan Native communities that harvest ice seals. Copies were sent to ISC members and Tribal Councils and are available on the ISC website.

**Disease.** We collect nasal and lung swabs to screen for influenza A (includes H5N1 avian influenza), phocine distemper, and COVID. Samples collected in 2024 and 2025 tested negative.

**Harmful algae bloom (HAB) toxins.** We continue to monitor for the dangerous HAB toxins: domoic acid (DA) and saxitoxin (STX). In 2024, we tested colon samples from 20 bearded seals. Two had detectable DA and 17 had detectable STX, however, levels were below the level of concern for safe consumption of seafood by humans.

**Contaminants.** Last year we reported on OCs (e.g., PCBs, DDT), which we found to be low compared to other regions and have decreased over time. We also reported on trace elements, including metals of concern (e.g., mercury, cadmium, lead, arsenic), which were found to be low compared to other regions. These publications are on the ISC website (Olnes et al. 2025). In addition, we tested for PFASs in ringed and bearded seals and for PBDEs in all ice seal species harvested during 2013–2016 and compared results to seals harvested during 2003–2006. PFAS concentrations in the more recent samples were three times lower than previous samples. Most PBDEs were not detected or present only in low concentrations. We are creating a flyer to share

all contaminants results with hunters and communities. **Please review the flyer and provide suggestions to me.**

**RINGED SEAL POPULATION MODEL** - Ringed seals were listed as Threatened under the ESA in 2012 based on assumptions that the population of at least one million would have declined so much as to be threatened to become extinct by 2100. The State of Alaska, NSB, and others did not think this listing was warranted and petitioned NMFS to delist in 2019. This petition was rejected. The State and NSB developed a population model using the most recent and reasonable data and assumptions for ringed seals in the Chukchi Sea to project changes in abundance into the future. The results of this model estimated that the ringed seal population would decline 7% by 2058, and 71% by 2100. Results of this model are being reviewed by the State of Alaska to determine if they will submit another petition to delist. This model is published and available on the ISC website as Regehr et al. 2025.

**BEARDED SEAL ABUNDANCE ESTIMATE FROM GENETICS** - We used close-kin mark-recapture (CKMR) methods to estimate the abundance of bearded seals in the population harvested by Alaska Native subsistence hunters. Genetics from tissues collected from harvested bearded seals are used to identify individual seals and any relatives that were also sampled. A tooth provides the age of the seal sampled to further define kinships (e.g., parent or grandparent). A total of 1,484 samples were analyzed and examined for kin relationships like parent-offspring, half siblings, and full siblings. This can tell us about population size. If many of the sampled seals are related, the population is smaller than if you only find a few related seals.

Our initial estimate of abundance is ~409,000. We found that there were no full sibling pairs meaning that females rarely mate with the same male. In 2025, we added samples from an additional 536 harvested bearded seals for a more refined population estimate and to evaluate population trend, survival, and productivity. We will continue to collect bearded seal jaws in as many locations as possible to continue to refine and update bearded seal abundance and trend estimates. This abundance estimate is published and available on the ISC website as Taras et al. 2024.

**HARVEST MONITORING** - We plan to visit Hooper Bay and Shishmaref in 2026 to work with the communities on completing updated harvest surveys.

**WINTER RINGED SEAL DENSITY** - The purpose of this study is to determine the density of ringed seals within areas of oil and gas development near Prudhoe Bay. Seal breathing holes and lairs are usually under the snow and not visible, therefore we use dogs trained to find them. We compared the density of seal structures and snow depth in 2022, 2023, and 2025 to a previous study conducted during 1982–1983. We found that the number of ringed seal structures (breathing holes and lairs) in our study area ranged from 58 to 71 and that structure density was not statistically different among years including 1983. Snow depth is important for ringed seals to build lairs and predicted declines in snow on ice was a factor in their ESA listing. The minimum snow depth thought to be required for lairs is 40 cm. We found snow depth at lairs ranged from 39–150 cm during our study and ranged from 44–130 cm in the 1983 study. Therefore, to date, snow depth has not declined below the 40 cm threshold in the mid-Beaufort Sea area.

## 2025 Survey Season Recap & 2026 Survey Season Plans

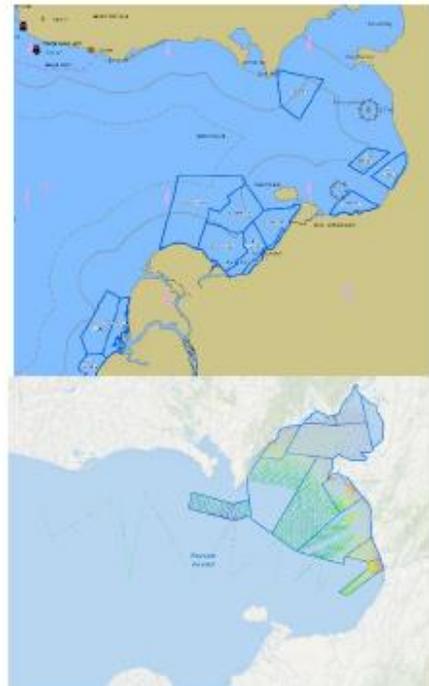
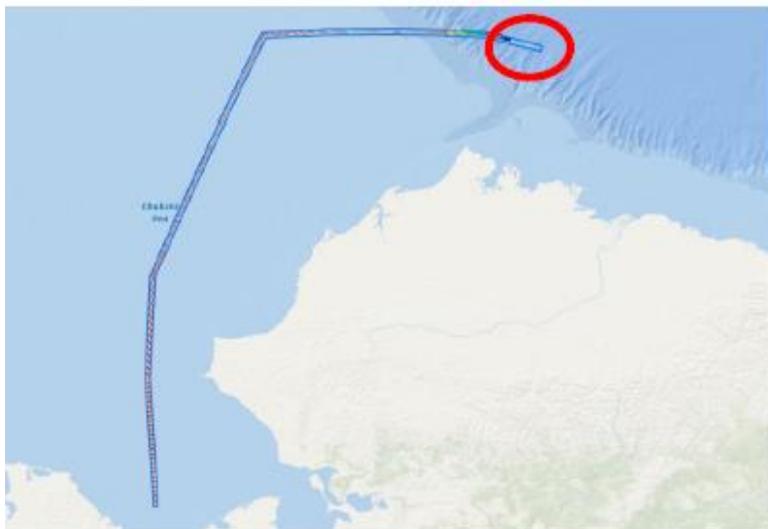
### NOAA Office of Coast Survey

222 West 7th Ave  
Box 43 / Room 552  
Anchorage, AK 99513

NOAA's Office of Coast Survey is responsible for mapping the ocean floor to create nautical charts. These maps are one tool used by mariners to ensure they are navigating safely. Ocean floor mapping data, or bathymetry, can also be used to model storm surge and flood inundation in coastal and riverine communities. In 2025, the NOAA Ship *Fairweather* mapped the Coast Guard proposed Arctic Port Access Route. This voluntary shipping routing mechanism would be used to control commercial ship traffic into the Arctic, keeping risk away from communities, vulnerable ecological areas, and subsistence activities. In 2026, the NOAA Ship *Fairweather* intends to finalize this survey by completing the portion designated by the red circle.

NOAA is using a private company, Terrasond, to survey the ocean floor in Norton Sound. This area is poorly charted and much of it has never been surveyed, or was last surveyed in the 1830s. Data collected here in 2025 and 2026 will be used to update the nautical charts to make it easier for goods and fuel to be delivered to communities. Additionally, it will be used to improve modeling products that support coastal resiliency. All surveys are completed using multibeam sonar that emit sound outside of the hearing range of marine mammals. More information can be found here:

<https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/about/environmental-compliance/final-surveying-mapping-PEIS-sections.html>



Left-The USCG Proposed Arctic Port Access Route

Right- Plans for survey in 2026 (Top). Survey area completed in 2025 (Bottom).

LCDR Caroline Wilkinson  
Alaska Navigation Manager

[Alaska.NavManager@noaa.gov](mailto:Alaska.NavManager@noaa.gov)  
Work Cell: (907) 231-7112



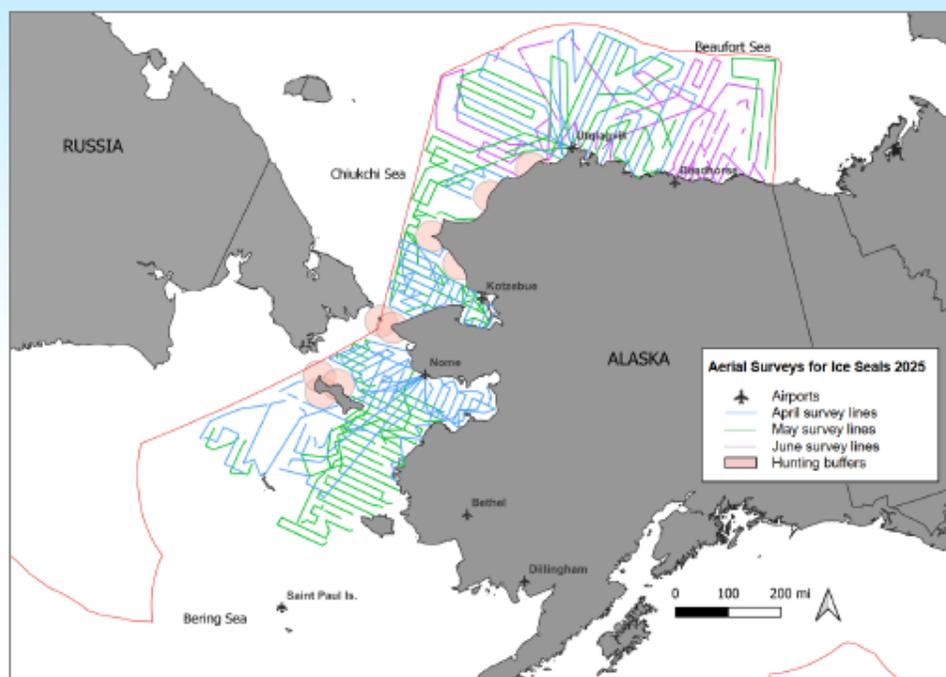
**NOAA**  
**FISHERIES**

National Marine Fisheries Service  
Alaska Fisheries Science Center

# Research Brief

## 2025 Aerial Survey of Ice Seals in the Bering, Chukchi, & Beaufort Seas

April 4 – June 10 2025



### Survey Summary

Between April 4 and June 10, scientists from NOAA Fisheries' Alaska Fisheries Science Center and the University of Washington's Cooperative Institute for Climate, Ocean, and Ecosystem Studies completed a comprehensive aerial survey to determine the abundance and distribution of spotted seals, ribbon seals, bearded seals, and ringed seals, throughout their range in U.S. waters of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort seas.

Working from Nome, Bethel, Kotzebue, Barrow, and Deadhorse, Alaska, the survey team completed 58 survey flights totaling 39,663 km (24,645 miles) of "effort", as seen in the map above.

This project is included in the annual Alaska Ice Seal Research Plan which describes research priorities for ice-associated seals in Alaska, and was developed by the Alaska Native Ice Seal Committee's Co-management Working Group.

### Data Collection

Two NOAA aircraft flew at a target altitude of 1,000 feet and used cameras to collect color and thermal images of the sea ice habitat below. One plane also carried experimental ultraviolet cameras. Cameras collected imagery covering a swath 400-500 meters wide below the planes. A machine learning algorithm processed thermal imagery in flight to help find animals and determine which images to save.

Flight lines were planned each night using current satellite imagery of sea ice. The team worked to spread the survey effort over space and time, to ensure the data captures how animals use the changing sea ice habitat. Daily flight plans were sent to interested parties via email prior to each flight.

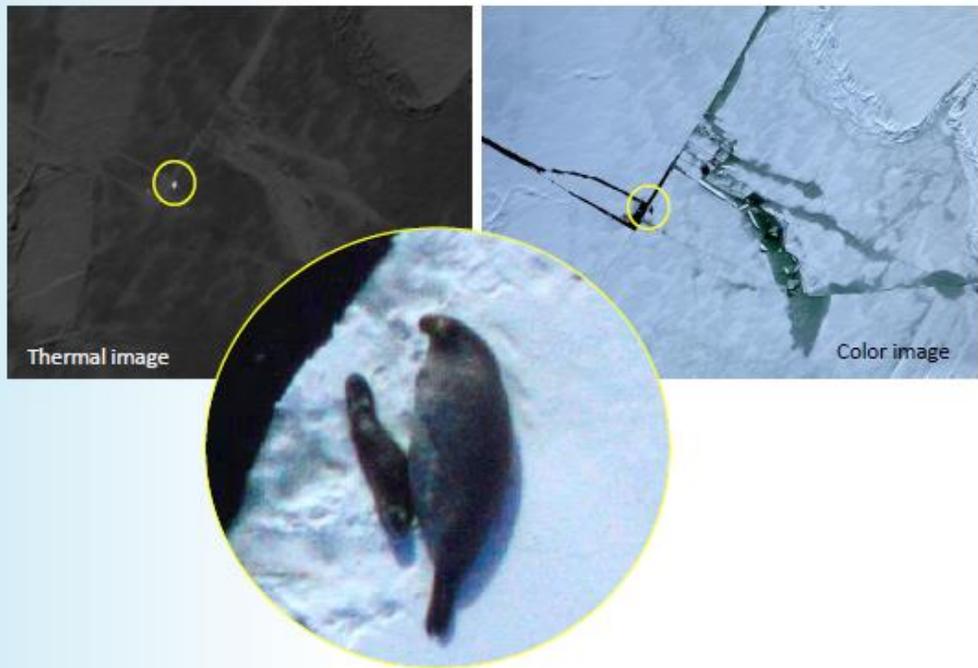
### Analysis

Experienced ice seal biologists will review thermal detections to identify animals on the sea ice and determine species. Following a number of quality control steps, data will be analyzed to estimate abundance and distribution for each species. Progress will be shared through community meetings and reports as the team works to process terabytes of data.



Above: NOAA Twin Otter aircraft and survey team with King Air survey plane in the background. From left to right: Ben Hou, LCDR Max Anderson, Stacie Koslovsky, Jessica Lindsay, Adam Romlein, and LT Elias Shiheiber. Photo taken in Nome, Alaska.

Below: Example imagery collected during the 2025 ice seal survey effort. A recently born bearded seal pup and mom seen (circled in yellow) in the thermal imagery (left), color imagery (right), and cropped color insert. (Images collected under NMFS Permit No. 23858)



Howard Lutnick  
Secretary of Commerce

Laura Grimm  
NOAA Chief of Staff, performing the duties of Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator

Eugenio Piñeiro Soler  
Assistant Administrator for National Marine Fisheries Service

July 2025

[www.fisheries.noaa.gov](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov)

Alaska Fisheries  
Science Center  
7600 Sand Point Way NE  
Seattle, WA 98115



Michael Cameron, Program Leader  
Erin Moreland, Project Leader  
Polar Ecosystems Program  
Marine Mammal Laboratory Division  
Alaska Fisheries Science Center  
7600 Sand Point Way, NE  
Seattle, WA 98115  
Email: [Michael.Cameron@noaa.gov](mailto:Michael.Cameron@noaa.gov)  
[Erin.Moreland@noaa.gov](mailto:Erin.Moreland@noaa.gov)

## Habitat suitability of ribbon and spotted seals in the Bering and Chukchi Seas

Elizabeth McHuron<sup>1,2</sup>, Josh London<sup>2</sup>, Kelly Kearney<sup>3</sup>, Wei Cheng<sup>1,4</sup>, Peter Boveng<sup>5</sup> and Michael Cameron<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Cooperative Institute for Climate, Ocean, and Ecosystem Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, WA

<sup>2</sup>Marine Mammal Laboratory, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Seattle, WA

<sup>3</sup>Alaska Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Seattle, WA

<sup>4</sup>Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Seattle, WA

<sup>5</sup>Marine Mammal Laboratory, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Seattle, WA (Retired)

### Abstract

Ice-associated seals are integral top predators in Alaska's marine ecosystems and important subsistence resources for coastal Alaska Native communities. Long-term declines in sea ice extent and thickness are of particular concern for these species given their reliance on ice as a resting and reproductive platform. In this study, we investigated habitat suitability for ribbon (*Histiophoca fasciata*) and spotted (*Phoca largha*) seals—two of the four ice seal species in Alaskan waters—using biologging data collected during the past two decades, and a newly developed regional ocean model for the Northeast Pacific (MOM6-NEP). We used random forest classification to identify associations with static and dynamic variables in three seasons (spring, winter, and summer-fall). Habitat model and MOM6-NEP outputs were used to generate retrospective/hindcast habitat suitability maps across the years in each model as well as during the recent warm period (2014–2019) that had several years of record-low sea ice extent in the Bering Sea. Habitat models revealed the importance of environmental features in driving the distribution of both species, particularly variables related to sea ice concentration. Model performance and the importance of covariates varied among seasons and species, with winter models having the best performance of all the seasons. Winter habitat suitability hindcasts during 2014–2019 suggest northwesterly shifts and reductions in the total area of suitable habitat occurred compared with earlier and cooler years (2006–2012). Reductions in the total area of suitable habitat tended to be of a greater magnitude for ribbon compared with spotted seals, with up to 38% less area in 2014–2019 than 2006–2012. As these warm years were largely missing from the analyzed dataset, future biologging efforts are needed during low sea-ice years to verify and refine model predictions. Modeled habitat associations and distributions were broadly consistent with previous descriptions, highlighting the utility of the MOM6-NEP output for modeling and predicting distributions of ice seals in Alaskan waters. This study provides the first quantitative assessment of ribbon seal habitat, moving beyond qualitative descriptions and offering a valuable framework for incorporating environmental change into resource management strategies for these wide-ranging species and the remote ecosystems they inhabit.

**2026 Update Ice seal Health Studies - North Slope Borough, Department of Wildlife management, Ice seal Committee Meeting, March 10-12, Anchorage, Alaska**  
 R.Stimmelmayer, Lucy Leavitt, Josiah Olemaun, Rita Frantz, Jared Nayakik, Quincy Adams, Billy Adams  
 North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management  
 email: [raphaela.stimmelmayer@north-slope.org](mailto:raphaela.stimmelmayer@north-slope.org)

**Background:** There is little information available about natural causes of morbidity and mortality of ice seals. The North Slope (NSB DWM) Marine mammal health program works with hunters and communities to continually monitor the health of animals so we can detect diseases and contaminants early on that are of concern to people, provide veterinary medicine - science based information to hunters regarding “healthy” and “hunter concern” catches, and address individual and “big picture” concerns about native food health, food safety, and food security. A brief summary of ongoing and completed ice seal research is provided below.

Fig.1a. Multiyear pinniped stranding data, Utqiagvik, North Slope, Alaska

### Ice Seal Research & Collaboration

*Ice Seal Strandings* 2025 stranding data for Utqiagvik was similar to previous years with few dead seals detected (18 ringed seals, 1 bearded) over the open water beach survey period.

*Harmful algal toxin & Marine Mammals:* As the Arctic seas continue to warm, harmful algae blooms become more frequent and possibly more toxic. To stay informed and monitor risks we are continuing our research partnership with Dr. Lefebvre (NOAA-WARRN-West, NWFSC) through the ECOHAB program on marine mammal biotoxin monitoring research in Alaska.

*Microplastics:* Plastic pollution is a global and an emerging arctic issue. To better understand the fate of MPS in the arctic food web we are in collaboration with Dr. Horstmann (UAF) monitoring MPS and associated contaminants (Phthalate- commonly used plasticizers) in key marine mammals to better understand the potential chronic effects of microplastic exposure on marine mammals and people’s health.

*Infectious Zoonotic Diseases & Parasites:* The primary focus in 2025 as in the previous year has been on monitoring for *avian influenza virus (aka bird flu) infection in marine mammals*. For 2026 we will again work with North Slope communities to collect samples from harvested ice seals and collect samples from found dead seals through our stranding program.

- Polar bears: Detection of avian influenza infection in a found dead polar bear (2025). This is the 3rd case on the North Slope.
- Ice seals (Harvest & found dead): Findings from both avian influenza surveillance projects using a) swabs for detection of genetic material of the virus by

polymerase chain reaction (PCR) indicating active infection and b) serum for antibody detection (serology) indicating previous exposure in ice seals have not been finalized.

- Pacific Walrus: Swabs were collected during a haul out mortality investigation near Point Lay from 24 animals. All samples tested with PCR were negative.

Toxoplasma : We screened by PCR, skeletal muscle tissue (n=81) and brain tissue (n=48) for the presence of *Toxoplasma gondii* in ringed (n=38), bearded (n=38), and spotted seals (n=5). All samples tested negative. These are encouraging results suggesting that the risk of human transmission through consumption and harvesting of ice seals is negligible. *Toxoplasma gondii*, single-celled protozoan parasite are not visible to the naked eye. *T. gondii* is a very common foodborne zoonotic parasite in humans and animals worldwide and is considered an emerging infectious agent in the Arctic being brought up via ocean currents and wildlife.

#### Contaminants & Petroleum Products

Recent studies confirm that contaminants (POPS, trace minerals, PBDE, PFAS) are generally low in Alaskan ice seals harvested for subsistence. There are few studies however that have quantified polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, a major component of oil (petroleum), in Alaskan marine mammals. Oil discharges to the marine environment, from oil and gas industries, and maritime transport are of concern as a marine exposure to PAHs can have widespread adverse health effects on individuals/population. To update PAH baseline data for key marine mammals including ice seals we are in collaboration with NOAA, NWFSC center analyzing blubber and bile collected (2021) from ringed (n=13), bearded (n=10), and spotted seals (n=2).

**Questions:** if you have further questions don't hesitate to contact NSB DWM Dr. Raphaela Stimmelmayer DVM MS PhD, Wildlife Veterinarian/ Research Biologist, North Slope Borough, Department of Wildlife Management, Utqiagvik, Alaska [raphaela.stimmelmayer@north-slope.org](mailto:raphaela.stimmelmayer@north-slope.org). Phone: 907-852-0350.





**Ice Seal Committee  
March 2026**

Narwhal Exploration, LLC is an Alaska corporation holding a lease position in the near-shore waters of Harrison Bay to the west of the Colville River. Narwhal is led by an experienced oil and gas executive team who brings combined decades of North Slope Alaska experience. The lease position has been built by Narwhal since 2016, with last lease acquisition from the State of Alaska in 2024. The lease position is shown in Figure 1 below.

Narwhal is currently engaging in detailed planning and permitting activities for an upcoming winter 2026/2026 exploration program. This program will occur on ice, with the vast majority of the operation area to be grounded sea ice. Narwhal expects to drill 2-4 wells from Ice pads in the near-shore waters of Harrison Bay. The ice pads are expected to be connected with ice roads, and the entire operating area connected back to Oliktok Point via a sea-ice trail designed for ATV travel. Due to the shallow water depth of the near-shore waters, stable grounded sea ice is prevalent from late November through freezeup.

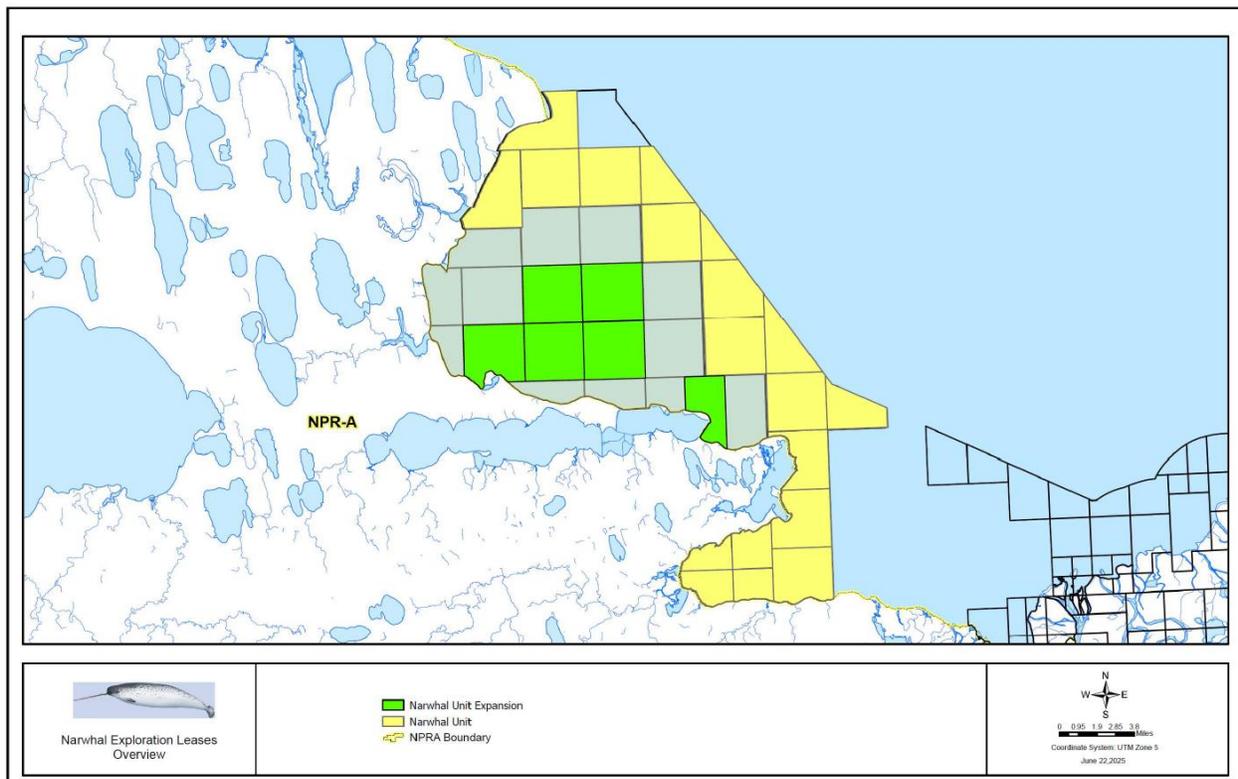


Figure 1: Narwhal Exploration, LLC Lease position

Narwhal is focused on execution of safe and environmentally responsible Exploration Operations in West Harrison Bay. Potential impact to the area and species of the area is considered in Federal, State, and local permitting which must be in place prior to commencement of operations.

Specifically regarding seals, the authorization obtained from National Marine Fisheries Services dictates the required observations for seals through various seasons, the required standoff distances for observed seals or lairs, as well as required monitoring and reporting. Seals and other species are also noted in authorizations from the Bureau of Land Management and North Slope Borough Wildlife Department as well as in internal Wildlife interaction plans.

Exploration drilling on ice is executed nearly every year on the North Slope, and has been executed on sea ice since the 1960s. The technology and tactics for operations are established and expertise sits with contractors currently active on the North Slope. Narwhal intends to use the same technology, tactics, and contractors who have previously supported winter on-ice exploration as well as inject best practices from other regions to realize safer and more efficient operations.

During the session, Narwhal intends to walk through a brief company background, discuss winter exploration operations and subsistence conflict mitigation, and discuss upcoming operations planned for summer 2026 and winter 2026/2027.

Narwhal Exploration, LLC  
310 K Street, Suite 400  
Anchorage, AK 99501

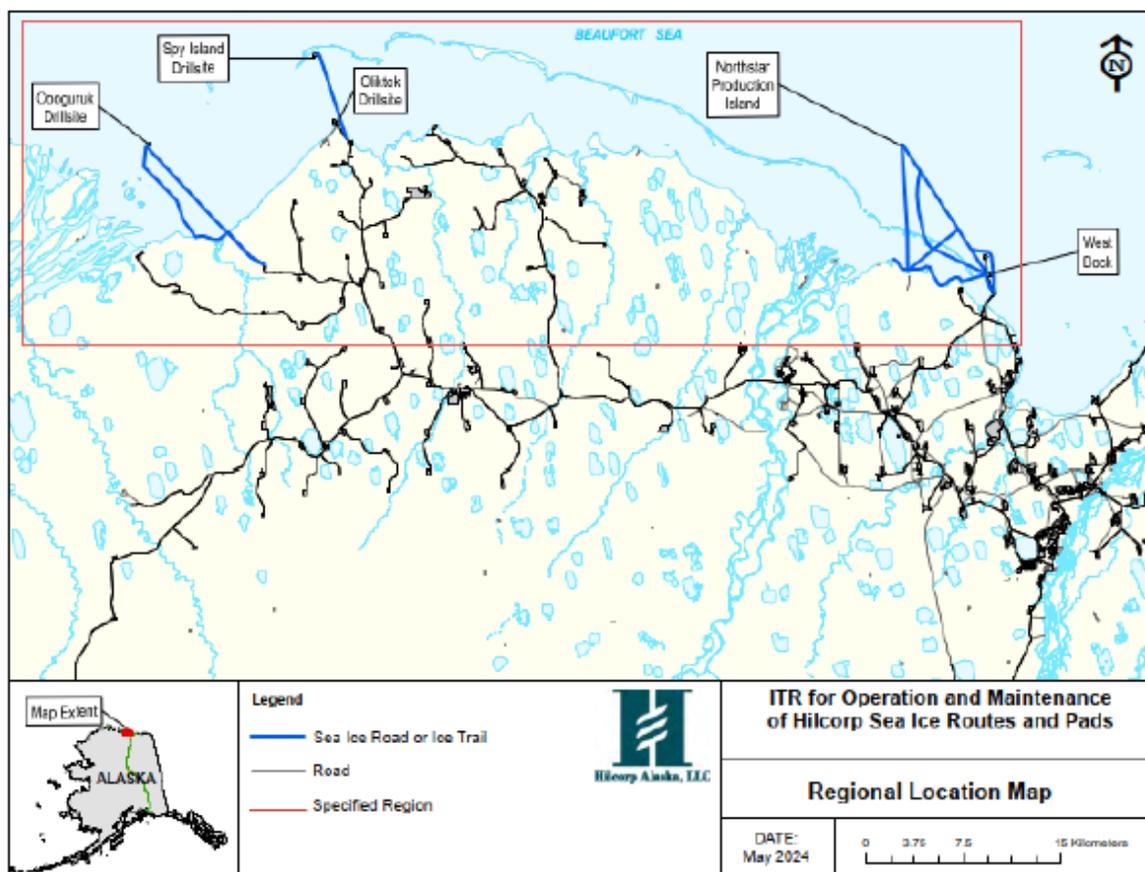
[Info@NarwhalExploration.com](mailto:Info@NarwhalExploration.com)  
NarwhalExploration.com

**Hilcorp Summary  
Ice Seal Committee Meeting  
March 2026**

Hilcorp appreciates the opportunity to meet with the Ice Seal Committee (ISC) to discuss our North Slope ice road/trail operations, ringed seal observations, and Incidental Take Regulations from National Marine Fisheries Service regarding ringed seals. The following is a summary of Hilcorp’s presentation and request for ISC guidance.

During the ice-covered season, Hilcorp annually constructs sea ice roads, trails, and pads to connect and allow access between West Dock and Northstar as well as between the Oliktok Production Pad (OPP) and Spy Island Drillsite and an annual ice road from shore to the ODS (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Operation and Maintenance of Hilcorp Sea Ice Routes and Pads



Though ringed seals are present in the proposed project areas during winter, their numbers are generally expected to be low during ice trail activities. Ice trail construction is a short-term activity likely to cause only minor habitat disruptions. The construction and maintenance of ice

trails is not expected to cause significant impacts on habitat used by ringed seals or on their food sources.

Over the preceding five years of construction, maintenance and use of ice roads/trails to these facilities, ringed seal surveys were conducted after March 1<sup>st</sup> with the express intent of understanding how seals respond to industry activity along the trails. Ringed seals are generally observed starting in April, with observations continuing until the second or third week in May at which time the ice trail/road is no longer used due to deteriorating conditions. Between 2 and 29 seals have been observed per season, with most observations occurring more than 150 ft off of the ice road/trail. No Level B or Level A harassment has been observed. All Hilcorp employees and contractors traveling on ice roads/trails are given a training on how to avoid disrupting ringed seals and the reporting requirements for any observation of ringed seals.

Although the likelihood of harassment is very low, on September 12, 2024, Hilcorp Alaska, LLC (Hilcorp) petitioned the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to issue regulations pursuant to Section 101(a)(5)(A) of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), 16 U.S.C. § 1371(a)(5)(A), for the non-lethal, unintentional taking of small numbers of ringed seals from sea ice road and trail activities for a 5-year period beginning December 1, 2025, and extending through November 30, 2030. On February 2, 2026, NMFS published a proposed rule in response to Hilcorp's Petition (91 FR 4468).

Hilcorp appreciates the opportunity to meet with the ISC to discuss the information presented above for the dual purpose of updating the ISC on Hilcorp's activities in ice seal habitat as well as to solicit the ISC's guidance on recommendations to minimize any potential adverse effects on the availability of ringed seals for subsistence uses from Hilcorp activities.