

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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McGarvey 202/343-5634

SPORT HUNTING OF PACIFIC WALRUS PROPOSED

A proposal to waive the moratorium and implement regulations on the taking of Pacific walrus in the State of Alaska has been published in the Federal Register by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Under the provisions of the proposed waiver and regulations, management of walrus would be returned to the State of Alaska.

The principal effect of the proposal would be to allow once more the regulated sport hunting of walrus by all citizens, not just Alaska Natives. This activity is expected to add fewer than 50 animals a year to the current average annual harvest of about 1,650 walrus, all now taken by Alaska Natives for subsistence and their cottage industries. No return to commercial hunting will be allowed.

The primary biological factor behind this decision is the fact that the Pacific walrus population in and near Alaska is approaching its optimum sustainable level, to maintain a balance with its environment.

The public is invited to participate in this decisionmaking process in an unusual way. Instead of soliciting public comments the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 requires an administrative hearing be held before an Administrative Law Judge.

A prehearing conference will be held on March 3, 1975, at 9:30 a.m. at the following location: Hearing Room C, 12th Floor, 4015 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, Virginia 22203.

The presiding officer is Administrative Law Judge Joseph B. Kennedy at the above address in Arlington, Virginia. His telephone is (703) 557-9200.

All communications and correspondence relating to this matter must be addressed to Judge Kennedy and be entitled as follows:

In Re Waiver	X	MMPA
Of Moratorium	X	Docket No.
On Walrus	X	Wash. 75-1

(over)

All persons interested in participating in this proceeding are urged to notify the presiding officer by February 26, 1975, of their intention to participate, their request for hearing, and must submit what issues of fact and law they deem necessary to be determined. Such notification must be by certified mail.

A hearing by Judge Kennedy will take place on March 19-22, 1975, in Anchorage, Alaska, at a time and place to be announced at the prehearing conference. A second phase of this hearing will be held in Washington, D.C., if deemed appropriate and necessary by the presiding officer.

Before enactment of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 management of all resident wildlife in Alaska was managed by the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Passage of the Act preempted the State's authority by indicating only Native subsistence hunting of marine mammals would be allowed unless other conditions are met. The Governor of Alaska has petitioned the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of the Interior for return of the management of certain of these animals to the jurisdiction of the State. The Act provides the means for allowing States to adopt and enforce laws and regulations relating to the protection and taking of marine mammals within their jurisdictions. This requires the promulgation of Federal regulations and a waiver of the moratorium of the Act, followed by a determination by the Secretary of the Interior that the State laws and regulations concerning walrus are consistent with the Act and Federal regulations.

Before large-scale exploitation by whalers of European descent which began in about 1868 the Pacific walrus was estimated to number about 200,000 animals. The population may have fallen to a low of 40,000 to 50,000 in the 1950 to 1956 period according to the best data available. Beginning in 1960, aerial surveys of walruses were taken and the total population was estimated to range from 73,000 to 117,000 that year. The 1972 surveys provided a median estimate of 135,000 walruses, and a range of 93,000 to 178,000. More recent studies indicate that the population is still increasing and is approaching its optimum sustainable level.

The State of Alaska has proposed a conservation program for the Pacific walrus. The Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that a waiver of the moratorium is appropriate under the Act, and has made a preliminary determination that Alaska's laws, regulations, and management plan meet the standards for approval under such a waiver.

Director Lynn A. Greenwalt, in making this decision, said he was confident that this action would provide a more reasonable management program for the Pacific walrus. It is a plan based upon sound principles of natural resource management which will maintain the health and stability of the ecosystem and allow the walrus population to maintain itself in harmony with its habitat, he said.

The Alaska laws and regulations, and a statement regarding the biology and ecology of the Pacific walrus, as required by the Act, are available for inspection at the Fish and Wildlife Services' offices at 1717 H Street, N.W. (Matomic Building), Room 536, Washington, D.C. Copies may be obtained by writing the Director (MNB), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240.