

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

For Release March 31, 1978

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## FINAL EIS ON MARINE MAMMALS IN ALASKA

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service have published the final environmental impact statement on the proposal to waive the moratorium on the taking of nine species of marine mammals and return management responsibility to the State of Alaska. The Department of the Interior, through the Fish and Wildlife Service, is responsible for three of the species--polar bears, sea otters, and walruses. The statement was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency on March 27, 1978.

The statement concludes that some environmental impact would result if the moratorium were waived and Alaska allowed to resume management which was assumed by the Federal Government pursuant to the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Up to 250 polar bears, 3,000 sea otters, and 3,000 walruses could be taken annually within the limitations of the proposed waiver. Most polar bears and walruses would be taken for subsistence purposes. Sea otters would be taken only by the State under a rigid federally approved management program. All animals would be taken from well established groups in areas where their numbers generally exceed or equal the carrying capacity of the environment so as not to affect the populations adversely. In fact, the actual annual harvest probably would not exceed 150 polar bears, 1,025 sea otters, and 2,300 walruses--small numbers relative to the total estimated Alaskan populations of 9,500 polar bears, 100,000 to 125,000 sea otters, and about 170,000 walruses.

According to the final EIS, no significant adverse environmental effects are anticipated if the waiver is granted. The harvesting of marine mammals at about the same levels apparently did not produce any long-term adverse effects on the animal populations prior to the passage of the 1972 Marine Mammal Protection Act.

For each of the nine species, five alternatives were considered in the statement. Administrative hearings on the draft environmental impact statement and the proposal were held in 1976 in Alaska and Washington, D.C., and comments were solicited from all interested conservation groups and the public.

The proposal to waive the moratorium on the species was requested by the State of Alaska as provided for under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

This final environmental impact statement is required by law before decisions on whether or not to waive the moratorium and return management responsibility to the State can be made by the Departments of the Interior and Commerce for the animals under their respective jurisdictions. These decisions will be made shortly.