

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## NEW REGULATIONS SET CONDITIONS FOR WAIVER OF MORATORIUM ON TAKING OF 10 MARINE MAMMALS IN ALASKA

Two Federal agencies have spelled out the conditions under which they will waive a moratorium on the taking of 10 types of marine mammals in Alaska.

The moratorium has been in effect on 9 of the 10 mammals since passage of the 1972 Marine Mammal Protection Act. Under newly published regulations, the waiving of the moratorium will take effect when the State revises its own laws and regulations to conform satisfactorily with the Act and the Federal rules.

Issuing the new Federal regulations were the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an agency of the Interior Department, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the Department of Commerce.

Changes in State laws and regulations will be subject to public review and comment before Interior and Commerce give final approval to lifting the present ban.

The new Federal regulations, based on scientific evidence, restrict the numbers of animals that may be taken every year. Such taking is consistent with the 1972 Act.

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Under the Act, NOAA has responsibility for management of the following affected species: northern sea lions, harbor seals, largha seals, ringed seals, ribbon seals, Pacific bearded seals, and beluga whales. The FWS is responsible for the polar bear, sea otter, and Pacific walrus. A 1976 waiver on the walrus will be modified by this action.

In 1973, Alaska requested that the Federal moratorium on taking of these animals be waived and that management authority be returned to the State. Following lengthy public hearings on the matter, the presiding administrative law judge issued in 1977 a "recommended decision" finding the State's request to be in accordance with the provisions and policies of the Act. The judge recommended the moratorium be waived, with a limit on the numbers of animals taken annually, and that management be returned to the State.

According to evidence presented at the public hearings, population estimates for the northern sea lion are now 214,000; land-breeding harbor seal, 270,000; largha seal, 200,000 to 250,000; ringed seal, 1.0 to 1.5 million; ribbon seal, 90,000 to 100,000; bearded seal, 300,000 to 400,000; beluga whales, Cook Inlet stock, 500, and Bering/Chukchi Sea stock, 9,000; polar bear, northern stock, 1,900, and western stock, 3,800; sea otter, 100,000 to 140,000; and Pacific walrus, 140,000 to 200,000.

Under the terms of the waiver, there would be an annual taking of up to 6,648 northern sea lions; 10,511 land-breeding harbor seals; 5,700 largha seals; 20,000 ringed seals; 500 ribbon seals; 9,000 bearded seals; 10 Cook Inlet stock and 350 Bering/Chukchi Sea stock beluga whales; 55 northern stock and 115 western stock polar bears; 3,000 sea otters; and 3,000 Pacific walruses.

The decision also grants Alaska the authority requested by the State to take sea lion and harbor seal pups. However, the decision requires that the State establish strict controls in connection with any pup harvest. In a letter to the Governor of Alaska, the NOAA Administrator urged that the State proceed cautiously in determining whether, and if so how, to conduct a pup harvest.

The two agencies will publish simultaneous regulations on the waiver in the January 11, 1979, Federal Register.