

Kawerak, Inc.

ESKIMO WALRUS COMMISSION



Beringia Workshop, Nome 2010-Eskimo Walrus Commission

FINAL REPORT TO
National Park Service
Shared Beringian Program
for
COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT #H9807070009
and
Modification 0001 and Modification 0002

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Introduction

The Pacific walrus is represented by a single stock of animals that inhabits the continental shelf waters of the Bering and Chukchi seas. The population ranges across international boundaries of the United States and Russia, and both nations share common interests with respect to the conservation and management of the species. The Pacific walrus population is valuable to coastal Natives in Alaska and Chukotka. For thousands of years, walrus hunting has been an important component of cultural identity because it is a crucial source of food and raw materials for traditional equipment and handicrafts. The conservation of this important stock of animals is of common interest to resource co-managers and the Native communities of the Bering and Chukchi seas.

The need to develop bilateral monitoring programs that annually assess the size and impact of the subsistence harvest on the Pacific walrus population is a recognized priority of wildlife managers and Native leaders in both countries. While the contemporary subsistence harvest in Alaska is well documented, the economic crisis in Russia during the early 1990s led to the deterioration of harvest monitoring programs. The National Park Service's Shared Beringia program provided significant support for a renewed Chukotkan harvest monitoring program in eight villages between 1999 and 2004. During that time, subsistence harvests of walrus and local environmental conditions were monitored with a network of local Native harvest monitors. Unfortunately, funding and complicated logistics precluded the maintenance of that project since 2004, leaving great uncertainty as to the total harvest of walrus from the Pacific population. During the first year, a bilateral workshop was held which allowed participants from both sides to learn experiences from past project work. The workshop also provided an opportunity to establish an implementation plan for a new bilateral harvest-monitoring plan for years 2 and 3 of the project. Additionally, workshop participants shared information about other events such as the biomonitoring workshops held in Nome and received feedback from the Chukotkan representatives on local observations and their research priorities or interests. The workshop further allowed the implementation of bilateral research and walrus management programs that were prioritized and aimed at more fully understanding the dynamics of the walrus conservation, education, and the continued relationship between walrus and communities within the Beringia region.

Goals

Overall, the intent of the Bilateral Walrus Monitoring project was to continue developing bilateral relations with Chukotka that fostered mutual understanding and cooperation about Pacific walrus. The project is premised on a desire for continued subsistence use of walrus and reestablished cultural connections between Chukotka and Alaska. The project focuses primarily on the development of community-based harvest monitoring, gathering of representatives of both cultures to discuss the difficulties of monitoring, specifically, self-regulation and management issues which can have enormous potential impact. The project is expected to have benefited walrus conservation, education, and the continued relationship between walrus dependent communities in Alaska and Chukotka.

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Project Objectives

1. To assess prior monitoring programs in Chukotka and develop an implementation plan for a new program in 2008 and 2009.
2. To share information from the two walrus Biomonitoring workshops that were hosted by the EWC in 2003 and 2005.
3. Provide the opportunity to bilaterally share information on the Pacific walrus with respect to a changing environment.

Outcomes of the Bilateral Monitoring Project

Program Goal 1:

Convene a workshop in Nome (Year 1) attended by Chukotkan and Alaska researchers, managers, and walrus hunters to develop and implement a revitalized walrus-monitoring program in Chukotka. This project would support the travel of four Chukotkan representatives from several key organizations: the Association of Traditional Marine Mammal Hunters of Chukotka (ATMMHC), Naukan Native Cooperative, the Yupik Society of Eskimos of Chukotka, and a biologist from ChukotTINRO.

Results:

Objectives completed. A workshop was held at Kawerak in Nome on June 2-3, 2008 with representatives from ATMMHC and ChukotTINRO. Representatives from Naukan Native Cooperative and the Yupik Society of Eskimos of Chukotka were unable to travel to Nome to attend the workshop due to weather in Provideniya. The workshop was similar to the one held in 2003, but the main purposes were based on the following key issues:

1. An update of where walrus harvest monitoring program is in Chukotka.
2. A review on how well previous walrus harvest monitoring programs work in Chukotka and decide which worked and did not work.
3. A review of who to fund walrus harvest monitoring program at an adequate level in Chukotka and what other relevant information to collect.
4. Collect information on how walrus are harvested and distributed in Chukotka's coastal communities.

A Russian translator from Anchorage was contracted to provide translation services during the workshop. At the workshop, the Executive Secretary was provided information on project objectives and methodologies and training on basic walrus harvest monitoring program. A "Bilateral Walrus Monitoring Project" 2008-09 business plan and Kawerak "Contract for Services" were developed and translated to Russian. The Executive Secretary brought the documents back to Chukotka where they were further reviewed and eventually signed.

During the workshop, copies of EWC's "2003 Bio-Monitoring Workshop Report and Pacific Walrus Research and Biomonitoring Plan Report 2004-2014" were presented to all participants.

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Program Goal 2

Report to Chukotkan researchers and communities, the results of the two Eskimo Walrus Commission Biomonitoring workshops. In addition, a map in Russian will be provided of known terrestrial haulouts and migration routes covering the entire Pacific walrus range as well as location of walrus hunting communities. This will be the first comprehensive documentation of the entire range of critical walrus habitat for communities. Collaboration with the NPS Beringia project led by Martin Robards – “Sharing Perspectives about Climate, Sea Ice, and Subsistence Walrus Hunting” will provide the opportunity to document the affects of specific ice condition at 12 community locations in the Bering and Chukchi with respect to a community’s ability to safely access, harvest, and transport walrus back to their communities.

Results:

Objective completed. Poster of known terrestrial haulouts was completed. We will be working on updating the poster/map with new information from the last few years. This project was a joint work with EWC, University of Alaska Fairbanks, ChukoTINRO, and Wildlife Conservation Society.

Objective completed. The project was a collaboration among several entities, but only 3 communities (Gambell, Savoonga, and Little Diomed) participated as important data was only available from them. The manuscript for this is currently ‘in press’ and is included in this report.

Program Goal 3:

1. Locally document seasonality and extent of walrus harvests in 8 Chukotkan communities over two years (Year 2 and 3) in a manner directly comparable with the monitoring programs in Alaska communities.

Results:

Objective completed. A technical report “Walrus Harvest Monitoring in Chukotka: 2009” was prepared in Russian. A Russian translator in Anchorage was contracted to translate the report to English which was completed in April 2010. EWC researched for professional printing offices in Anchorage, offered contract to Northern Printing office and made arrangements for final printing of 100 copies of report in Russian and 100 in English. A copy of the report is included in this final report.

2. Locally document environmental conditions and their association with walrus distribution, abundance, and availability to hunters at communities in Chukotka (Year 2 and 3).

Results:

Objective completed. The “Walrus Harvest Monitoring in Chukotka: 2009” technical report was completed in Russian and translated to English by contracting with a Russian translator in Anchorage.

3. Document the importance of traditional and historical use, the relationship between people and walrus, and the utilization of walrus in Chukotkan communities (Year 2).

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Results:

Objective completed. A “Traditional Knowledge of the Native People of Chukotka about Walrus” was prepared for EWC in Russian. A Russian translator in Anchorage was contracted to translate the report to English which was completed in April 2010. EWC researched for professional printing offices in Anchorage, offered contract to Northern Printing office and made arrangements for final printing of 100 copies of report in Russian and 100 in English. A copy of the report is included in this final report. EWC also contracted with an independent contractor to provide additional comments on this report regarding “subsistence knowledge of Chukotka hunters about Pacific walrus” and is included with this final report.

4. Document concerns of Chukotkan walrus researchers and community hunters in a manner that can provide bilateral opportunities to respond to conservation needs of the Pacific walrus and its environment (Years 1, 2, 3).

Results:

EWC meets with Chukotka representatives at least once annually during Beringia Days or other venues to share information on the health and status of Pacific walrus and research ways to continue maintaining bilateral relations and cultural connections between Alaska & Chukotka. Information on how to continue monitoring the health of Pacific walrus are included, e.g., improving current walrus bio-sample collections and how to provide research results efficiently to member communities in Alaska and participating coastal villages in Chukotka. For example, EWC sponsored a Chukotkan representative to attend the Alaska Nanuuq Commission’s Bilateral Scientific Working group meeting in Anchorage in 2010 and a hunter from Lorino to attend the NPS Beringia Days 2011 in Fairbanks. EWC also sponsored a subsistence hunter from St. Lawrence Island to participate in and present at the “Workshop on Assessing Pacific Walrus Population Attributes from Coastal Haul-outs” at National Park Service headquarters in Anchorage on March 19-22, 2012. In these venues and meetings, some discussions centered on how Natives of Alaska and Chukotka can better agree on defined conservation and research priorities regarding Pacific walrus, how to improve and continue consultations with other organizations, i.e., Nanuuq Commission, who have developed joint bilateral polar bear agreement with Chukotka and USFWS, and ultimately to address, discuss, and develop short/long term effective conservation & monitoring guidelines concerning subsistence walrus hunting practices in both countries. On-going discussions are also focused on initiating Native-to-Native agreement between U.S. and Russian governments with EWC, US Fish and Wildlife Service and Chukotkan Native groups for the sound conservation, use, and management of the Pacific walrus.

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Challenges and Conclusion

The National Park Service Shared Beringian Program allowed EWC and its partners, especially colleagues in Chukotka the opportunity to increase international cooperation and coordination between Alaska and Chukotka in co-management of a shared resource, the Pacific walrus. However, there were difficulties in areas such as adequate communication with EWC and colleagues in Chukotka who were responsible to ensure that project objectives were met. Intermittent emails and discussing project plans at meetings in Nome, Anchorage or Anadyr were helpful to ensure that all responsible parties understood the intent of the project. Another issue that was encountered was finding a safer and quicker way to transfer funds to ATMMHC pay their monitors in-region. A recommendation is for ATMMHC to have an account in Alaska so that funds can be deposited safely and quickly once an objective is met.

The Chukotkan representatives shared their difficulties when working with their local and federal governments for their lack of respect and recognition. For example, although Chukotka is the only region in Russian involved in marine mammal hunting, continued attempts to take autonomy away from ATMMHC continues through restrictive regulations regarding indigenous organizations. The recent experience of RAIPON is emblematic of this issue at a broader scale. Another challenge encountered throughout the agreement process was the uncertainties of in-region travel in Chukotka due to irregular air travel system to Chukotskiy and Providenskiy districts. The Executive Secretary of ATMMHC stated that at times, it was difficult to travel from Anadyr to one of the participating locations due to in-frequent or long delays or the requirements to make advance reservations (year).

Despite these challenges, EWC, ATMMHC, ChukoTINRO, Yupik Eskimo Society, CSSG and other organizations continually sought ways to improve communications, discuss administrative issues (signing contracts) and further discussed ways to continue the program. The Chukotkan colleagues stated that they continue to look forward to Alaska co-managements organizations such as EWC and the Alaska Nanuuq Commission for support and look for ways to improve their work in managing their natural resources.

The NPS Shared Beringian Program provided critical impetus to improve cultural exchanges between Chukotka and Alaska, but most important, continued to strengthen cooperation in research and information exchange of shared natural and cultural resource. Certainly, Chukotka and Alaska have continued the momentum toward developing more community-based monitoring of walrus, to discuss the difficulties of monitoring, specifically, and self-regulation and management, which have enormous potential. This specific project has benefitted and resulted in seeking improved ways for walrus conservation, education, and the continued relationship between walrus and communities in the shared Beringia region.