



- Name of Property:** Walrus Islands Archeological District
City, State: Dillingham Census Area, Alaska
Period of Significance: 4300 BC – 1800 AD (6,300 years ago – 200 years ago)
NHL Criteria: 6
NHL Theme: I. Peopling Places
3. migration from outside and within
5. ethnic homelands
6. encounters, conflicts, and colonization
- Previous Recognition:** N/A
National Historic Context: I. Cultural Development: Indigenous American Populations
A. The Earliest Inhabitants
5. Archaic Adaptations of the Subarctic
B. Post-Archaic and Pre-Contact Developments
2. Subarctic Hunters and Gatherers
C. Prehistoric Archeology: Topical Facets
1. Prehistoric Architecture/Shelter/Housing
2. Prehistoric Technology
4. Prehistoric Science/Intellectual Developments
5. Prehistoric Arts/Handicrafts
7. Prehistoric Diet/Health
8. Prehistoric Economics/Trade
9. Prehistoric Warfare
12. Prehistoric Settlements and Settlement Patterns
15. Prehistoric Transportation and Travel



19. Prehistoric Cultural Change
20. Submerged Prehistoric Period Archeological Remains

NHL Significance:

- Walrus Islands Archeological District is one of the few remaining places with evidence of human occupation of the Bering Sea continental shelf when sea levels were substantially lower than at present. Most of the evidence of outer coastal prehistoric life in Alaska is submerged and likely destroyed by ocean currents.
- The earliest inhabitants of Round Island, one of seven islands in the district, were marine-adapted and practiced more generalized settlement and subsistence patterns than previously recognized by Alaska researchers. At least 6,000 years ago people hunted walrus on the beaches of Round Island, leaving evidence of the earliest human-walrus relationship in the nation, which continues to today.
- Cultural remains dating between 6,300 and 200 years old in the Walrus Islands has yielded and is likely to yield information that contributes to our knowledge of the development of Arctic and Subarctic cultural traditions in the United States. The Walrus Islands Archeological District enriches our understanding of maritime adaptations and technological innovations, as well as cultural connections across the Arctic.

Integrity:

- Known archaeological sites in the district comprise a surface area of over fifty acres, with depth to around 1.9 meters below the surface. Artifacts of shell, bone, ivory, wood, and charcoal indicate good organic preservation.
- Coastal erosion and vandalism are threats to the Walrus Islands Archeological District. Relative ease of access to Summit Island makes it the most vulnerable to vandals. Commercial fishing brings the most people to the area and the greatest threat of vandalism. Excavations on Summit Island reveal that intact cultural components are still present at sites damaged by vandalism in the past.
- Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary staff reside on Round Island (and in the past, Summit Island, as well) during the summer months, monitoring wildlife, vegetation, and visitor use. The Round Island sites have exceptional integrity owing to sanctuary staff presence since 1976. Ground disturbing activities by sanctuary staff have damaged 3.5 percent of the deeply stratified Round Island site.
- As vandalism has decreased, tundra has revegetated, slowing the erosion process.
- Visitor access to the Walrus Islands is limited due to the constraints of geography, seasonal access, and the permitting restrictions that accompany state management and National Natural Landmark (NNL) status.
- Walrus Islands' NNL status already requires National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance for proposed federally funded or federally permitted activities.

Owner of Property: State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Acreage of Property: 41,489 acres

Origins of Nomination: In 2004, the National Park Service, Alaska Region and the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game began a cooperative effort to identify, protect, and interpret the cultural history of Round Island. The resulting discoveries on Round Island, in addition to the previous knowledge of significant cultural resources on several other islands in the Walrus Islands Sanctuary, led the NPS to develop an NHL nomination.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- There is high potential for a strong, positive public response to the Walrus Islands Sanctuary's dual designation of NNL and NHL as an exceptional example of natural *and* cultural history.
- Steady visitation to this very remote and difficult-to-access area demonstrates the public's long-term appreciation of the sanctuary's NNL status. Interest in the sanctuary's cultural history has increased in direct response to interpretation of the recent discoveries on Round Island and the substantial village sites reported earlier from other islands within the sanctuary.
- Tribes have maintained strong traditional ties to the Walrus Islands through active subsistence practices and vital oral history, long before the sanctuary was designated an NNL. Tribal interest in conservation of both the cultural and natural history of the Walrus Islands cannot be overstated.
- NHL designation will increase public awareness and resource appreciation. This will serve to promote protection of the vulnerable archeological resources that are unique in preserving the oldest known record of human and walrus interaction in the nation.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None is known.

Landmarks Committee Comments: Designation. Dr. Mills moved, Ms. Hopkins seconded; unanimous approval.

Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of 10/14/16):

Sam Cotton, Commissioner, The State of Alaska, Department of Fish and Game, Juneau, Alaska (owner)

Jimmy Coopchiak, President, Togiak Natives Limited, Alaska

Judith E. Bittner, State Historic Preservation Officer, Chief, Office of History and Archeology, Department of Natural Resources, Anchorage, Alaska

Advisory Board Recommendation: