



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File Number:REP 18-044

Agenda Date10/1/2018

Agenda Number:B7

Chair to be elected
David Witherell, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Protected Species Report

STAFF CONTACT: Steve MacLean (NPFMC)

ACTION REQUIRED:

Review Protected Species report, action as necessary

BACKGROUND:

Pacific Walrus

Thousands of Pacific walrus are again hauling out on the Chukchi Sea coast near Point Lay. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services reports that up to 25,000 animals were seen during aerial surveys on August 30. Walruses normally haul out on sea ice in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas during the summer ice-minimum. When ice recedes north of the shallow continental shelf the walruses begin to haul out on shore. Walruses on shore are susceptible to stampeding when startled by polar bears, aircraft, or people onshore. Young animals are often crushed during stampedes.

2018 Alaska Seabird Die-off

Beginning in May 2018, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service began receiving reports of dead and dying seabirds from the northern Bering and southern Chukchi Seas. In late June, NPS investigators found 100 carcasses over 4 km of beach. Most of the dead birds were murres. All sampled birds that have been sent to the U.S. Geological Survey National Wildlife Health Center have been determined to have died of starvation. No evidence of disease has been noted, tests are pending to determine if birds were exposed to harmful algal toxins. 2018 is the third consecutive year that massive seabird die-offs have occurred. In 2017 the die-off affected birds primarily in the Bering and Chukchi Seas off of Alaska and Russia. The most affected birds were short-tailed shearwaters and northern fulmars, and also included black-legged kittiwakes, murres, auklets, gulls, and horned puffins. In 2016 the die-off event consisted primarily of common murres, and affected birds primarily in the Gulf of Alaska, to the Pribilof Islands.