



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File #: REP 17-007, **Version:** 1

Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:
Protected Species Report

STAFF CONTACT: Steve MacLean

ACTION REQUIRED:
Review Protected Species Report, action as necessary

BACKGROUND:

Cook Inlet Beluga whales

On December 27 2017, the National Marine Fisheries Service published a Recovery Plan for the Cook Inlet Beluga Whale (*Delphinapterus leucas*). There are currently an estimated 340 beluga whales in Cook Inlet. The population was estimated to be approximately 1300 in 1979, and NMFS considers 1300 whales to be carrying capacity for management purposes. NMFS declared the population as depleted under the Marine Mammal Protection Act in 2000, and endangered under the U.S. ESA in 2008. The population has been in consistent decline of 1.3% per year since at least 1999. Substantial, unregulated subsistence hunting is believed to be responsible for initial declines in the mid-1990s. Since then, cooperative efforts between NMFS and Alaska Native subsistence users have dramatically reduced subsistence hunts, which should have allowed the population to recover if subsistence harvest was the only factor limiting population growth.

The Recovery Plan identifies ten potential threat types to Cook Inlet beluga whales, prioritized as high, medium, and low relative concern. The Recovery Plan identifies recovery actions to focus on threats identified as high or medium relative concern. The Plan also identifies recovery criteria that will allow for downlisting the stock from Endangered to Threatened, and delisting (reclassified as recovered). To be considered for downlisting, the population must:

- Number at least 520 individuals, with at least a 95% probability that most recent 25-year population abundance trend is positive

AND

- The 10 downlisting threats-based criteria are satisfied

To be considered for reclassification, the population must:

- Number at least 780 individuals, with at least a 95% probability that the most recent 25-year population abundance trend is positive

AND

- The 10 downlisting and 9 delisting threats-based criteria are satisfied.

Copies of the Recovery Plan are available at the NMFS Alaska Region website at

<https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/cib_recovery_plan_final.pdf>

Northern fur seal Pribilof Island pup production

In November 2016, the AFSC Marine Mammal Laboratory (formerly National Marine Mammal Laboratory) released a memo to the record summarizing northern fur seal pup production and adult male counts on the Pribilof Islands Alaska, in 2016. The MML estimates that 80,641 pups were born on St. Paul Island, and 20,490 pups were born on St. George Island. The 2016 estimate for St. Paul Island pup production is 12.1% lower than for the estimate in 2014, and the 2016 estimate for St. George Island is 8.6% lower than for 2014. Since 1998, pup production on the Pribilof Islands has declined 49.7%, at an annual rate of -3.5%. This is the lowest pup production on the Pribilof Islands since 1915, when the population was recovering from pelagic sealing.