

Pacific Walrus Haulout Advisory for Mariners Operating along the Chukchi Sea Coast



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seeks your support and cooperation in minimizing disturbances to walrus herds resting along the Chukchi Sea coast of Alaska.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would like to notify mariners that due to low seasonal ice conditions there are currently large groups of walrus hauled out on the barrier island near the community of Point Lay. The Point Lay haulout is currently just north of the old village site. Additional haulouts may form at Cape Lisburne just west of the U.S. Air Force Long Range Radar Station airstrip. Large concentrations of walrus can be expected to be encountered in the near shore waters in these areas. In addition, large groups of walrus may be encountered in the water as they move from Point Lay to offshore feeding areas and as they move south from Pt Lay to Cape Lisburne. To prevent disturbance at these very large haulouts the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requests that all marine vessels transiting past Cape Lisburne and Point Lay provide an extra wide buffer zone and remain a minimum of 5 miles offshore. It is anticipated that walrus will continue to use the Point Lay and Cape Lisburne haulouts through the months of August, September, and perhaps into mid-October.

Barges or other vessels servicing Point Lay or Cape Lisburne are requested to maintain a one mile buffer from walrus hauled out on shore.

Vessels traveling in a predictable manner appear to be less disturbing to walrus. If you observe walrus in the water, near your vessel, avoid excessive speed or sudden changes in speed or direction. Vessel operators should take every precaution to avoid harassment of walrus when a vessel is operating near these animals. Vessels should reduce speed and maintain a minimum 805-m (0.5-mi) separation distance from the vessel to groups of walrus encountered in the water. Vessels should not be operated in such a way as to separate members of a group of walrus from other members of the group.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act prohibits the TAKE of all marine mammal species in U.S. waters. TAKE is defined as "to harass, hunt, capture, or kill, or attempt to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal." Harassment is defined in the MMPA as "any act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance which has the potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild; or has the potential to disturb a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild by causing disruption of behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering".

Thank you for your cooperation.

To report incidences of disturbance or harassment please contact:

U.S Fish and Wildlife Service
Division of Law Enforcement:
1011 E. Tudor Road
Anchorage Alaska 99503-6199
Toll free: 1-800-858-7621

For questions about walrus please contact:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Marine Mammals Management Field Office
1011 E. Tudor Road
Anchorage Alaska 99503-6199
Toll free: 1-800-362-5148
<http://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/mmm/>