

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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INTERIOR TO RETURN MANAGEMENT OF PACIFIC WALRUS TO STATE OF ALASKA

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has taken another cautious step toward allowing the State of Alaska to set up a sport hunting season for Pacific walrus on a limited basis. Officials estimated, however, that only about 100 animals a year would be affected.

The new action came in a Federal Register notice published December 24, announcing the agency's decision to waive a provision of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 which normally prohibits sport hunting of the species--but provides for a waiver of the moratorium based on the best scientific evidence available.

This opens the way for development of a Federal-State management program for the Pacific walrus, according to Lynn A. Greenwalt, Fish and Wildlife Service Director. Greenwalt said the decision was made in response to a State request, after careful study of the possible impact on the walrus population.

In addition to waiving the moratorium, the decision returns management responsibility for the 140,000-200,000 walrus herd to the State. However, before the waiver action becomes effective the Act requires that a management plan submitted by the State must be approved by the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Implementation of the waiver will be monitored continuously by the Service to assure compliance with the Act.

Greenwalt said the waiver of the moratorium on harvesting is expected to have minimal effect on the total walrus population.

Current annual harvest of Pacific walrus is estimated to be about 1,700 animals which traditionally have been used for Native subsistence purposes.

Greenwalt estimated that once the waiver is implemented, approximately 100 additional walrus would be added to the total annual harvest figure.

Prior to the Director's decision, an environmental assessment was completed by the Fish and Wildlife Service, and administrative hearings were conducted in Alaska and Washington, D.C., by an administrative law judge. Testimony was received from proponents and opponents of the waiver and the Marine Mammal Commission. On July 10, 1975, Administrative Law Judge Joseph B. Kennedy of the Office of Hearings and Appeals, Department of the Interior, recommended that the waiver be approved.