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ANNUAL REPORT OF
SURVEY-INVENTORY ACTIVITIES

PART XII. WALRUS

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Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration

Project W-22-3

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CONTENTS

Game Management Unit Map.	.11
Statewide Harvest and Population Status	iii
GMU 17.	1

ARCTIC OCEAN

ALASKA

GAME MANAGEMENT UNITS



WALRUS

SURVEY-INVENTORY PROGRESS REPORT

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT: 17

GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION: Northern Bristol Bay

PERIOD COVERED: 1 July 1983-30 June 1984

Season and Bag Limit

Marine mammal management was under federal jurisdiction during this regulatory year. Federal regulations allowed unlimited harvests of walruses by Natives for subsistence or use in handicrafts.

Population Status and Trend

The trend over the past several years has been towards an increasing number of walruses utilizing haulouts in Bristol Bay. While the number of walruses utilizing Round Island has decreased from a peak of approximately 12,000 in 1981 to 7,000-8,000 in 1984, a corresponding numerical increase in haulout activity at Cape Peirce during these years was observed. Peak haulouts at Cape Peirce approached 10,000 walruses in 1984. Walruses utilized several haulouts that had received little use during the preceding 5 years. Approximately 400 walruses were reported hauled out on the larger of the Twin Islands in May 1984. Haulouts were also reported at Hagemeister and Crooked Islands, at Klukak Bay and at Cape Newenham.

Mortality

The illegal take of walruses was higher this spring than it has been since 1979. Forty carcasses were reported at Cape Peirce and 9 were observed at Round Island. Most illegal take was attributed to herring fisherman who were idle for weeks waiting for the herring fishery to begin. Only 1 case of illegal take was reported after the herring fleet departed.

Management Summary and Recommendations

In April 1984, the Board of Game extended the restricted area in the waters adjacent to Round Island from 1/2 to 2 miles. This boundary extension was enacted to further reduce human disturbance to walruses. In addition, the number of visitors allowed on the island was restricted to a maximum of 3 groups per day with no more than 15 visitors per group. These restrictions also reduced disturbances to walruses.

Historically, seaplanes were the primary mode of transportation for visitors to Round Island. This year charter boat service working out of Togiak provided access for most visitors to the island. This transportation proved much more reliable and far less disruptive than seaplanes.

The number of walruses utilizing Round Island as a haulout has not recovered to pre-1981 levels, despite the reduction in the number of disturbances. It is probable that most of the walruses utilizing Cape Peirce were formerly using Round Island exclusively. Radio telemetry has shown there is an interchange of walruses between Round Island and Cape Peirce, the extent of which has yet to be determined. Studies to determine the extent of interchange between these 2 haulouts began in 1984 and should continue in 1985.

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