

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

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ANNUAL REPORT OF
SURVEY-INVENTORY ACTIVITIES

PART XII. WALRUS

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Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration

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ARCTIC OCEAN

ALASKA

GAME MANAGEMENT UNITS



WALRUS

SURVEY - INVENTORY PROGRESS REPORT

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT: 17

GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION: Northern Bristol Bay

PERIOD COVERED: 1 July 1985-30 June 1986

Season and Bag Limit

Walrus management was under federal jurisdiction during this regulatory year. Federal regulations allowed unlimited harvests of walruses by Natives for subsistence use.

Population Status and Trend

Use of Round Island as the principal haul-out in the Bristol Bay area increased during this reporting period to pre-1981 levels. As many as 12,000 walruses were simultaneously hauled out on Round Island on 11 June 1986. Use of the Cape Pierce haul-out was reported to be less this season than it has been in previous years when use of Round Island was at lower levels. Peak haul-outs in mid-July at Cape Pierce were reported to be less than 6,500 walruses. Some walruses use both Round Island and Cape Pierce as a haul-out area, and it is probable that some walruses have a seasonal fidelity to 1 location. Use of both haul-outs by individuals has been documented by radio-tag sightings at Cape Pierce in 1984 and 1985; these walruses were tagged at Round Island in 1981.

Reports of use of other haulouts increased significantly in 1986. Approximately 200 walruses were reported to have hauled out at Cape Constantine in May. Several walruses were observed in June in the Kvichak River; one was seen in the Wood River in June; approximately 50 were observed hauled out on Hagemeister Island in July; and 250-300 were reported to have used the Twin Islands (part of the Walrus Islands sanctuary) in June.

Mortality

No mortality studies were conducted during this reporting period. The number of dead walruses observed on the beach areas at Round Island and along the Nushagak Peninsula was similar to numbers in previous years.

Visitor Use and Disturbances

In the summer of 1986, Round Island was visited by 193 people in 37 groups. Of these, 32 groups arrived by boat, 4 by helicopter, and 1 by float plane. Most (56%) of the boat groups were brought by a commercial charter operator from Togiak Cannery. Several groups scheduled to arrive by charter boat during June were forced to cancel as a result of damage to the only available charter boat and no readily available alternate method of transportation being available.

Disturbances which caused walrus to stampede from haul-out areas into the water were relatively infrequent during this report period. Seven incidences of disturbance were documented between 4 May and 18 August; 4 were caused by ships or herring boats that passed within the 2-mile limit without permits, and 3 were due to arrival or departure of authorized visitors. The most severe disturbance occurred at Main Beach where 1500+ walrus were stampeded by a nonpermitted vessel. All other disturbances involved 400 animals or less. The frequency of disturbance at the Walrus Island Sanctuary has been significantly lower than in previous years.

Management Summary and Recommendations

Popularity of the Walrus Islands Sanctuary as an attraction for visitors and campers has steadily increased since it was reopened to visitor use in 1980. In 1984, the Board of Game restricted visitor use to a maximum of 3 groups of no more than 15 people each per day (45 total), primarily to keep visitors involved in the Togiak herring fishery to a manageable level. When this proposal was adopted, the Board recognized that 45 people camping on the island would exceed space limitations and could damage the island's habitat, but visitor use had, at that time, never approached these levels. However, 2 commercial guided tours brought visitors to Round Island in 1986 and are planning to increase their use of the island in 1987. If use of the island by campers begins to approach present regulatory limits, it may be necessary to reduce group size and possibly numbers to maintain minimum levels of disturbance and a quality experience for visitors.

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