



NOAA FISHERIES

ALASKA REGION • ALASKA FISHERIES SCIENCE CENTER

Contact: [Julie Speegle](#)
907-586-7032 w.
907-321-7032 c.

NEWS RELEASE:
January 18, 2013

NOAA releases environmental study on arctic bowhead whale subsistence harvest catch limits

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service has determined bowhead whale catch limits adopted by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) for aboriginal subsistence whalers in Alaska and Russia over the next 6 years are sustainable.

The agency today released a final environmental impact statement and biological opinion to support the setting of the limits, with a decision scheduled for next month.

At its annual meeting in July 2012, the IWC adopted total subsistence catch limits for the Western Arctic stock of bowhead whales based upon the needs of Alaska Eskimos and Russian Natives. The IWC set a combined maximum annual strike quota of 82 bowhead whales per year for both Native groups for 2013 through 2018, taking into account an annual carry-forward of 15 unused strikes from prior years.

Once the IWC determines total catch limits, the U.S. and Russia sign a joint agreement to divide the catch limits. Under NOAA Fisheries' preferred alternative in the environmental impact statement, over the 6-year time period, no more than 306 landed whales would be landed by Alaska Eskimos and no more than 30 whales would be landed by Russian Natives. The Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission will directly manage the subsistence hunts in the U.S.

NOAA Fisheries evaluated the overall effects of human activities associated with subsistence whaling, and determined it would have a minor impact on the Western Arctic bowhead whale stock, in light of current abundance and growth trends. Native subsistence hunters from 11 northern Alaskan communities take less than one percent of the stock of bowhead whales per year.

Eskimos have hunted bowhead whales for more than 2,000 years as they migrate along the coastline of Alaska in the spring and fall.

Electronic copies of the FEIS as well as other information about bowhead whales are available at: <http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/protectedresources/whales/bowhead/>

Comments on the EIS will be reviewed and considered for their impact on issuance of a final decision. The official record of decision will be made available publicly following final agency action on or after February 18. Comments may be addressed to:

Douglas P. DeMaster, director
Alaska Fisheries Science Center
NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service
709 West 9th Street, Suite 453

PO Box 21668
Juneau, AK 99802-1668
Fax: 907-586-7249
Email: douglas.demaster@noaa.gov

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on Facebook, Twitter and our other social media channels at <http://www.noaa.gov/socialmedia>.