

Pribilof Islands Collaborative Northern Fur Seal Workgroup
July 22, 2004 3:00PM (Alaska time) teleconference
Agenda and meeting summary

Agenda:

1. Review who is doing what re: fur seal policy, conservation and research.
Develop written summary for distribution at August meeting;
2. Develop an action plan for PIC fur seal workgroup based on draft conservation plan for the northern fur seal;
3. Develop agenda for fur seal workgroup section of August PIC meeting (e.g., report from experts, recommendations from workgroup to PIC, etc.)

NEXT WORKGROUP MEETING WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 4 AT 2:00PM (ALASKA TIME), 3:00PM (PACIFIC TIME)

Present: Larry Cotter, Greg McGlashan, Andy Malavansky, Evie Witten, Debbie Lestenkof, Phil Zavidil, Heather McCarty, Max Malavansky, Jr., Claire LeClair (notetaker).

Action items highlighted in yellow

Summary:

1. Review who is doing what:
 - Need to understand what the Fur Seal Committee (the NPFMC appointed group) is responsible for vs. what this workgroup is planning to accomplish;
 - this group must understand that the co-management agreement is a formal relationship between tribe and NMFS while PIC is not a formal entity;
 - two processes occurring right now: 1) the development of the Fur Seal Conservation Plan (NMFS and tribal entities via the co-management agreement) and 2) the NPFMC Fur Seal Committee, which is a collaborative process. These two processes are different in scope and responsibility but can be complimentary.
 - a “landscape of fur seal management and research” was suggested and would cover:
 1. activities and responsibilities of the NPFMC Fur Seal Committee;
 2. copy of the co-management agreement between tribes and NMFS and;
 3. summary of current research activities (check with NMML, Andrew Trites, Alaska Sealife Center, University of Alaska and PCCRC).
 - Evie will compile and develop the above documents with assistance from Debbie and Phil and have a draft ready for review by 7/30;
 - next step after identifying what research is going on would be to identify what research we think should be done;
 - Heather reported the NPFMC fur seal committee will most likely wait until NMFS has released the final draft of the Fur Seal Conservation Plan before becoming more active;
 - Fur Seal Conservation Plan deals with a lot more than fur seals, for e.g., it goes into fish stock assessment.
2. Develop an action plan for Fur Seal Workgroup

- Breeding males are down by about 5% and the idle male population is down by 30% this summer and younger fur seals not returning;
- Phil suggested an ESA listing could occur if pup production is down as much as bull count this year;
- speculation about the lower numbers: no disease (based on Spraker's work), could be some contaminant issues, warmer temperatures in Bering Sea and/or mortality in foraging areas outside of greater Pribilof Islands;
- Phil suggested one straightforward action would be to reduce entanglement. MARPOL not working, ask for funding from NPFMC and approach the marine debris issue internationally through the Fur Seal treaty;
- Ron Clarke (MCA), with \$500,000 federal funding, working full-time on marine debris issues, including identifying source and age of marine debris;
- Suggestion that PIC could help get Sen. Stevens energized on the issue (and interested in providing research funding) of fur seal decline by providing time-lapsed photos of one place where fur seals congregate, starting 10 or so years ago;
- less was known about Stellar Sea Lion than fur seals, who have been studied since 1911; actions can occur based on knowledge gained from all this research;
- Suggestion that the workgroup could prioritize the Fur Seal Conservation Plan's Action Plan and then seeking funding for the highest priority items;
- action plan is good but need more time to discuss details; would like to know what the differences are between the new draft conservation plan and the current 1993 conservation plan;
- Questions about when the revised Fur Seal Conservation Plan will be complete; speculation that it could take as long as a year;
- folks on the islands frustrated with the process, fur seal numbers going down, what will happen with the draft conservation plan if the fur seals are listed?
- understand the urgency of the situation but need a critical mass of people to make change happen, PIC meant to do that, but cannot skip the process;
- at April meeting it was clear that participants did not want our review of the draft conservation plan to slow the process of completing the plan at all;
- management actions could be taken now, for e.g., fishery closure when seals foraging (July-September);
- there are many things effecting fur seals but fishing activities are one of the few things we can control;
- don't need to close fishing in entire foraging area, pick critical areas with assistance of researchers who would know the most productive areas for the fur seals;
- bring in funding to monitor closure to see if it has any effect;
- industry unlikely to go that far without getting answers to questions; for e.g., is starvation a generally agreed upon theory for what is causing declines in population?

3. Develop agenda for fur seal workgroup section of August PIC meeting

- Suggestion to have full PIC group review the following proposals: 1) That the PIC request funding for fur seal research and marine debris removal and 2) proposal to establish seasonal fishery closure in foraging area;

- Response: we need education first before fishing industry stakeholders consider proposals that close fishing grounds;
- start education process by convening panel of experts to identify areas important to fur seals;
- but when you take time to convene panel of experts much better to ask more than just one question;
- Suggestion that workgroup propose to full group that we convene panel of fur seal experts to advise the PIC and that the November meeting focus entirely on fur seal issues.

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