

NEWS RELEASE

June 15, 2012

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NOAA Fisheries seeks public input on arctic bowhead whale subsistence harvest catch limits



Alaska Natives use a towline to haul a bowhead whale carcass onto ice following a subsistence whale hunt near Barrow, Alaska. Photo: Adrienne Boland

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service has released a draft Environmental Impact Statement to support the setting of annual catch limits for bowhead whale subsistence harvest by Alaska Natives for 2013 through 2017/2018.

Publication of the [Notice of Availability](#) in the Federal Register opens a 60-day public comment period.

For over 2,000 years, Eskimos have hunted bowhead whales as they migrate along the coastline of Alaska in the spring and fall. Native subsistence hunters from 11 northern Alaskan communities take less than one-percent of the stock of bowhead whales per year.

Under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) approves overall five-year or six-year subsistence catch limits for the Western Arctic stock of bowhead whales based upon the needs of Native hunters in Alaskan villages and in Russian villages along the Chukotka Peninsula.

The IWC will conduct its next meeting on July 2-6, 2012 in Panama City, Panama, and based on the management advice of the IWC Scientific Committee, is likely to adopt a catch limit at the same annual levels as the previous five-year period.

Under the authority of the Whaling Convention Act, NOAA Fisheries proposes to grant a catch limit of bowhead whale for subsistence hunts to the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, based on analysis in the Final EIS. The AEWC would then directly manage the subsistence hunts.

NOAA's goal is to accommodate federal trust responsibilities by recognizing cultural and subsistence needs of Alaska Natives to the fullest extent possible, while ensuring that any subsistence hunt of whales does not adversely affect the conservation of the whale stock.

The agency's preferred alternative in the draft EIS (Alternative 3B) would authorize a maximum harvest of 82 bowheads in a single year, if the authorized carry-over of 15 unused strikes were to occur. The overall effects of human activities associated with subsistence whaling under Alternative 3B results in a minor impact on the Western Arctic bowhead whale stock.

The subsistence harvest is also subject to an overall limit of no more than 306 bowhead whales over the six-year period 2013 through 2018. This level is considered negligible in light of current abundance and growth trends.

Public comments on the DEIS must be submitted by August 15, 2012. Please identify comments by: NOAA-NMFS-2011-0225. Submit comments to:

Douglas P. DeMaster Attn: Steven K. Davis NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service

By one of the following methods:

- Mail: 709 W. 9th Street, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668
- Hand delivery: Juneau Federal Building, 709 W. 9th Street, Room 420A
- Fax: 907-586-7557
- Web: <http://www.regulations.gov>

NOAA expects to release a Final EIS in December 2012.

An electronic copy of the DEIS, as well as other information about bowhead whales, is available at: <http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/protectedresources/whales/bowhead/>.

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