



Outreach and Education Update

Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Recovery Implementation Taskforce Meeting

Maggie Mooney-Seus, Outreach Co-Chair/Communications Program Manager,
Alaska Fisheries Science Center

January 27, 2023

Outreach Committee

- Co-Chairs
 - Sue Goodglick – Alaska Department of Fish and Game (stepped down in summer FY22)
 - Marjorie “Maggie” Mooney-Seus - NOAA Fisheries
- Committee Members
 - Forrest Bowers - Alaska Department of Fish and Game
 - Ragen Davey – Defenders of Wildlife
 - John Plaskett – Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility
 - Kim Shelden – NOAA Fisheries
 - Suzanne Steinert – Beluga Whale Alliance
 - Tamara McGuire – The Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Photo-ID Project



Educational Panels

New Installations

- Bird Point
- Campbell Lake Outlet
- MP 95.3, Seward Highway
- Carrs-Gottstein Park
- Ship Creek Small Boat Launch
- Campbell Creek Estuary Natural Area

Brings total to 6.

Sue Goodglick, ADF&G
 Joe Meehan, ADF&G
 John Plaskett, AWWU
 Defenders of Wildlife
 Paul Irvin, NOAA Fisheries

Special Thanks

Port of Alaska
 Steve Ribuffo
 Jim Jager
 Ronnie Poole
 Ted Frey
 Jason Shea
 Tim Simpson

Cook Inlet Belugas

RECOVERY

Recovery Threats
 disease, habitat loss, cumulative impacts, vessel strikes, predation, pollution, natural disasters, climate change, spills, entanglement, noise, prey, harassment

Fishers and Foragers
 Humans and beluga whales gather to catch fish near shorelines and in rivers during seasonal runs. We use rods and nets while they use echolocation. Healthy fish populations and ecosystems benefit both humans and belugas.

Traditional Importance
 Known as *quyushi* (one that swims up) in the upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina dialect, the beluga is a traditional subsistence food source which holds cultural significance. Alaska Native hunters suspended harvesting this population to help conserve them.

Indicator Species
 Cultural and ecological icons, belugas reflect the health of the entire ecosystem.

Did You Know?
 Cook Inlet belugas can be observed near our communities and highways. They are geographically isolated and genetically unique from other beluga populations, and they live in Cook Inlet year-round.

Decline
 Despite focused research and recovery efforts, scientists do not know why this population is declining. What does the future hold?

Designated Critical Habitat Beluga Range

YOU CAN HELP!



Report all live and dead beluga sightings to:
fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/help-belugas



Partner Activities

- Partners supported 2022 Belugas Count! event.
- CIBW Photo-ID Project contributed photos and sighting histories of select individual for use in the Belugas Count! 2022 outreach materials and website.

NOAA asks Alaskans for help Saturday in annual Cook Inlet beluga count

By Yereh Rosen, Alaska Beacon - September 16, 2022



BELUGAS COUNT!

Is Back For **2022**

Cook Inlet **BELUGAS COUNT!**

After a 2-year pause, **NOAA Fisheries** and our partners are excited to announce the return of the Annual **Belugas Count!** event — **Saturday, September 17**, in the greater Cook Inlet area.

BELUGAS COUNT! IS **FREE** AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
NO REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED

ABOUT COOK INLET BELUGAS

ONLY ABOUT 300 LEFT IN COOK INLET **ENDANGERED** NOAA SPECIES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

beluga **Shedd** **GEORGIA** **The Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Photo-ID Project** **NOAA FISHERIES**
WHALE ALLIANCE AQUARIUM AQUARIUM SEEN BELUGAS?

ALASKA WILDLIFE ALLIANCE **ALASKA** **NAVY** **BOEM**
Wildlife Alaska Wildlife Alaska Navy Alaska BOEM
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

UAS **KPC** **Hilcorp** **GLACIER OIL & GAS**

This Citizen Science Celebration will be held at designated viewing stations around Cook Inlet on Saturday, September 17 between 9 am – 5 pm. See event website for specific station times.

VIEWING STATIONS MAY OR MAY NOT BE STAFFED DEPENDING ON NEEDED COVID PRECAUTIONS. PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN BINOCULARS AND CAMERAS.

COVID-19 SAFETY: This is an outdoor event and will comply with all federal, state, and local COVID-19 safety requirements and guidelines. Participants and the public are encouraged to practice social distancing and wear a mask if others near you are wearing one. Event safety guidelines are subject to change to reflect new and updated government COVID requirements.

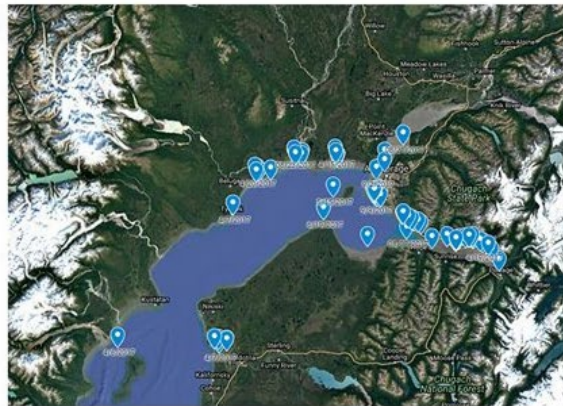
Partner Activities



Home CIBW Sightings Photo-ID: What Have We Learned? Beluga Facts Meet the Whales More

Welcome to the CIBW Sightings Page. Here you will find links to sightings maps from 2017-2020. Just click on the button below of the year you want to see the map for. Below you will also find beluga viewing tips and the beluga reporting form, and photo-upload options. We look forward to hearing from you.

- Report your sightings
- Upload your photos
- 2017 Sightings
- 2018 Sightings
- 2019 Sightings
- 2020 Sightings
- 2021 Sightings
- 2022 Sightings
- 2023 Sightings



TIPS FOR WHEN AND WHERE TO SEE CIBWS

We created the beluga [sightings map](#) as a quick reference for people to see where others are seeing belugas and we recommend taking a look there for current beluga viewing locations.

<https://www.cookinletbelugas.com/>

CIBW Photo-ID Project

- Website for sharing sightings and photos. (public & partners contribute)
- Weekly updates to beluga sightings mapper.
- Beluga sighting cards. (NOAA stranding info)
- AMSS presentations.



ABOUT PAST SYMPOSIA



EVENT LOGIN

Celebrating 30 years!

2023 Alaska Marine Symposium

January 23-27, 2023
Anchorage, AK, Dena'ina Center

Partner Activities



- Defenders made inroads with Tebughna school to get students out to Knik Arm to see whales.
- Beluga Whale Alliance and Defenders outreach initiative -- Twentymile balancing boater-beluga coexistence.
- Beluga Whale Alliance made key connections with boaters in Girdwood to help form working group to develop outreach products.

Partner Activities

- Signage as part of Twentymile public education effort to support beluga-boater coexistence.

Endangered Beluga Whales

In Cook Inlet Rivers and Streams

These waters are designated critical habitat for Cook Inlet beluga whales, which travel to this site to feed on fish runs between late spring and early fall.

Belugas are susceptible to boat strikes. They also use sound to find fish and communicate; nearby boat noise can disrupt these activities.

By following these guidelines, you can promote beluga recovery and prevent their displacement from this critical habitat:

- Scan for belugas and assume they may be present, even if they're not visible
- Reduce boat speed to 5 knots or less in the river's mouth and lower reaches

If You Encounter Beluga Whales:

- Delay launching your boat until they leave the area
- Keep at least 300 feet away at all times
- Steer clear of their path and go into neutral as safety allows
- Allow them to pass by your vessel before you proceed to navigate the river

***Report suspicious activity to the
NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Hotline 1-800-853-1964***

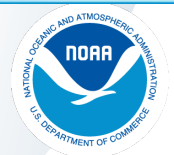
***Report marine mammal strandings to the
NOAA Fisheries Stranding Hotline 1-877-925-7773***

**For more information visit
www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/beluga-whale**

**Share photos and details of your beluga sightings at
www.cookinletbelugas.com**



**NOAA
FISHERIES**



**NOAA
FISHERIES**

2023 Plans

- Get students from the Tebughna school out to Turnagain and Knik Arms.
- Develop Task Force video products.
- Install additional Panels near Twentymile River, Kenai this summer, Alaska State Parks Kiosk in Turnagain Arm
- 5th Annual Belugas Count and 50th Anniversary of Endangered Species Act Expanded Celebration -- Sept 23, 2023.
- Explore avenues for providing public updates on research, mgt, etc.
- Develop capacity to serve as a resource for the public.



Resources

Task Force Home Page

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/endangered-species-conservation/cook-inlet-beluga-whale-recovery-implementation-task-force>

Five-Year Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Status Report

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/5-year-review-cook-inlet-beluga-whale-delphinapterus-leucas-distinct-population-segment-dps>

