

FINAL AGENDA
**Conservation and Recovery of Cook Inlet Beluga Whales in the Context of
Continued Development**

Dates: November 3 and 4, 2014

Location: Egan Center, Anchorage, AK

ATTENDEES: The meeting will be open to the public. Invited participants include federal, state, and local government agencies, local tribes, industries involved in resource development and construction projects, and conservation groups.

PURPOSE OF MEETING: The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) works with a range of partners to promote the conservation and recovery of endangered Cook Inlet beluga whales. As part of its responsibilities, NMFS authorizes incidental and directed takes of the whales under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and consults with federal agencies on actions that may affect the whales and their critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Recognizing both the precarious state of the Cook Inlet beluga whale population and the fact that human activities in Cook Inlet are prevalent and are likely to expand, NMFS seeks to engage stakeholders in a discussion about ways to mitigate and monitor adverse effects on belugas while accommodating sustainable development.

OBJECTIVE: Discuss Cook Inlet-specific solutions which allow sustainable development to occur while supporting Cook Inlet beluga whale recovery with a goal of better defining priority monitoring and key mitigation strategies. The specific objectives for discussion at this meeting include:

1. Describe the status and ecology of Cook Inlet belugas and the standards set by the ESA and MMPA. Identify stressors that might delay the recovery of Cook Inlet beluga whales.
2. Explore measures and strategies to minimize impacts and promote recovery of Cook Inlet belugas while providing for continued economic use of the Inlet.
3. Explore options for most effectively and practically (for agencies and applicants) addressing the above objectives and ensuring compliance for future activities.

To help achieve these objectives, we will provide background information through presentations on Monday November 3 and then promote discussion with stakeholders on the topics of identifying key mitigation strategies and defining priority monitoring on Tuesday November 4.

*** Please note we are unable to provide coffee/tea, snacks, and lunch at this meeting.**

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 3

9:00 – 9:15 Welcome, Introductions, Review Purpose and Objectives of Meeting, and Review of Meeting Rules (Jolie Harrison, Chief, Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS)

9:15 – 9:50 Basic Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Background (Rod Hobbs, Beluga Project Leader, National Marine Mammal Laboratory, NMFS)

- Abundance trends
- Life History – diet (prey), reproduction, and movement
- Distribution and habitat uses, including sensitive times and areas
- Overview of evolution of management/regulatory history

9:50 – 10:35 Cook Inlet Regulatory Background

- NMFS Mandates for Conserving and Recovering Belugas (30 min) (Jolie Harrison, NMFS)
 - Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA)
 - Endangered Species Act (ESA)
 - National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
 - Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act (MSA)
 - Executive Order 13175 (Government-to-Government Consultations)
- State Mandates for Conserving and Recovering Belugas (15 min) (Doug Vincent-Lang, Acting Director of the Division of Wildlife Conservation, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Sara Longan, Executive Director, Office of Project Management and Permitting, Alaska Department of Natural Resources)

10:35 – 10:50 Break

10:50 – 11:30 Understanding how Human Activities May Affect Beluga Whales

- Acoustics (Jolie Harrison, NMFS)
 - Importance of hearing to beluga whales
 - Potential effects to beluga whales
 - i.e., behavioral effects, threshold shifts, masking (e.g., acute and chronic)
 - How disturbance effects can translate to population level effects, energetics

11:30 – 12:45 Lunch (not provided)

12:45 – 2:00 Understanding how Human Activities May Affect Beluga Whales Continued (Mandy Migura, Marine Mammal Biologist, Protected Resources Division, Alaska Regional Office, NMFS)

- Direct Interactions
 - Activities with potential for injury or mortality
 - Activities with potential for non-injurious effects (e.g., harassment, displacement, behavioral changes)
- Indirect Interactions
 - Activities with potential to affect beluga prey

- Activities with potential to affect beluga habitat
- Cumulative and/or Synergistic Effects of the Stressors
 - Additive or synergistic effects to beluga whales
 - Climate change
- Summary of Anthropogenic Threats and Threat Rankings

2:00 – 2:20 Break

2:20 – 3:40 Presentations of Past and Current Monitoring Efforts

- Summarize project, mitigation, and monitoring efforts/results, and any lessons learned regarding the effectiveness of the monitoring (15 min/presentation)
 - Apache Alaska Corporation (Lisa Parker, Manager, Government Relations, Apache Alaska Corporation)
 - Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (Christopher Garner, Wildlife Biologist, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, United States Air Force)
 - NOAA National Marine Mammal Laboratory Aerial Surveys (Rod Hobbs, NMFS)
 - LGL Research Associates Photo-id Project (Tamara McGuire, Lead Researcher, LGL Alaska Research Associates)

3:40 – 4:00 Break

4:00 – 4:45 Brief Introduction/Discussion of Key Questions (Jolie Harrison, NMFS)

4:45 Wrap-Up and Adjourn

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4

9:00 – 9:10 Welcome/Brief Review of Purpose and Objectives and Day 1 Recap (Cathy Tortorici, Chief, ESA Interagency Cooperation Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS)

9:10 – 11:45 Discussion of Practicable Methods and Mitigation Strategies to Reduce Impacts to Beluga Whales

- Brief Stage Setting Presentations on the following (15 minutes) (Jolie Harrison, NMFS):
 - Review of Statutory Mitigation Requirements
 - Review of Priority Threats and Most Sensitive Times/Areas
 - Review of Past Implemented Mitigation Measures
 - Introduction to Panel Discussion of Future Mitigation Measures
- **Panel discussion** about ways to reduce impacts from acoustic, direct, indirect, and cumulative stressors and promote recovery (110 minutes with break in middle). The following are possible questions for discussion among invited panel members:
 - What mitigation measures have worked in the past? What hasn't worked?
 - Would time/area closures be feasible? When? Where?
 - What technologies have the potential to mitigate impacts? When will they be available and how might they be applied?
 - Should certain activities be limited? How?

- What additional measures could decrease risk posed by a stranding event, disaster, disease outbreak, etc.?
- What are the most promising measures to mitigate impacts?
- In what ways could cooperation among entities help reduce impacts to beluga whales?
- Audience input (30 minutes)

11:45 – 1:00 Lunch (not provided)

1:00 – 4:00 Discussion of Optimizing Monitoring Effectiveness in Cook Inlet

- Brief Stage Setting Presentations on the following (25 minutes) (Jolie Harrison, NMFS):
 - Review of the purpose of monitoring
 - Describe the need for a comprehensive monitoring plan
 - Preview the NMFS Cook Inlet Beluga Scientific Sightings Database (Rob Bochenek, Axiom Consulting and Design)
 - Introduction to Panel Discussion
- **Panel discussion** about the need for and the components of a potential comprehensive monitoring plan (125 minutes with break in middle). The following are possible questions for discussion among invited panel members:
 - What are the most important questions that need to be answered about the effects of human activities on Cook Inlet beluga whales?
 - What are the most effective monitoring methods for addressing needed information (discuss standardization)?
 - What is the best format for monitoring data to be provided to answer questions?
 - How can data be better shared, analyzed, and disseminated to maximize impact?
 - How can entities best work together or with other researchers to increase effectiveness of monitoring efforts?
 - Are there effective non-regulatory options for minimizing impacts and promoting recovery of the belugas?
- Audience input (30 minutes)

4:00 – 5:00 Parking Lot and Wrap-up

- Parking Lot Items Discussion
- Action items
- Future Steps