

Young of  
the Year  
Subsistence  
Harvest of  
Northern Fur  
Seals on  
St. George  
Island, AK

# 2018



St. George Island Sentinel holding a group of rounded up Northern Fur Seal pups.

*The U.S. Department of the Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Alaska Region Pribilof Program Office managed the 2018 Northern Fur Seal Pup Harvest on St. George Island with the assistance of Harvest Observers from InupiaQ Alaska Group, LLC, who worked closely with the St. George Tribal Government representatives.*

Harvest report for the  
2018 Season September  
15<sup>th</sup> to November 30<sup>th</sup>

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Laquudax, Unangan for northern fur seal pup (*Callorhinus ursinus*), is a customarily and culturally harvested food source for the Unangan of St. George Island, Alaska for centuries. It is also considered to be their ceremonial dish to share with friends, family or visitors to honor them, the animal, the harvest and their culture. Harvesting from the land and the sea is an important necessity where there are very few other food sources for this remote island that receives a few small grocery shipments per month. The Traditional Council of St. George (STG) together with the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), coordinated, monitored, and managed the subsistence harvest of northern fur seals to safeguard their existence. The 2018 subsistence pup fur seal harvest was conducted in accordance to 50 CFR §216 Subpart F on St. George Island.

## **II. CRITERIA FOR HARVEST MONITORING AND OBSERVER REPORTING**

During the subsistence fur seal harvest, the below data for items a-i were specified for *observed* harvests. Items a-e are presented in Table 1 below. Items f-h, along with additional data added to those specified in the NMFS template, are included in Exhibits A and B at the end of this report.

- a. Date
- b. Location
- c. Weather conditions
- d. Disturbance Start and end times
- e. Number of young seals taken
- f. Number and disposition of samples collected
- g. Number of seals released after determination of sex
- h. Number of non-pups in pup harvest round up
- i. Recommendations for improvements to the conduct of the harvest

The below additional criteria, for items j-q, were monitored and reported based on the specifications from NMFS. These items are additionally addressed in the narrative below.

- j. Incidence of by-products and waste during the harvest process
- k. Female seals killed or injured during the harvest operation
- l. Number of seal deaths due to overheating
- m. Number of seals entangled in marine debris and the number of seals disentangled
- n. Evidence of oil contaminated seal pelts
- o. Other types of fur seal mortality
- p. Attempted harvest and/or other unusual conditions related to the harvest
- q. Research conducted during the harvest

### **III. NARRATIVE OF RESULTS**

#### **a. Training/Planning:**

No training of new consultant observers or tribal members was conducted during the 2018 harvest period. The planned period of observation, September to November 2018, was shortened due to a security-related incident on the Island. The tribe was encouraged to continue the harvest activities during the absence of the consultant observers.

#### **b. Harvest Monitoring:**

The regulations authorize residents on St. George to harvest northern fur seal pups from September 15<sup>th</sup> to November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018, with the first harvest taking place on October 11<sup>th</sup> and the final harvest on November 15<sup>th</sup>. A total of 26 northern fur young of the year seals were harvested during the 2018 season. Four harvests were conducted in the two-and-a-half-month period. Table 1 below provides a summary of the harvests including items a-e above. More detail is available from the individual Pup Harvest Daily Reports.

#### **c. Sampling:**

No samples were collected/tested during this harvest period.

**d. Reporting:** (a-e are addressed in the table below).

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Weather</b>	<b>Times</b>	<b># of Females Released</b>	<b># of Seals Taken</b>
10/11/18	East Rookery By the Tripod	<b>Wind:</b> SW @ 9 <b>Temp:</b> 46	<b>Start:</b> 02:15 PM <b>End:</b> 02:22 PM	7	3
11/07/18	East Rookery By the Tripod	<b>Wind:</b> W @ 10 <b>Temp:</b> 48	<b>Start:</b> 01:52 PM <b>End:</b> 02:05 PM	8	9
11/15/18	North West Rk. West of the Blind	<b>Wind:</b> SW @ 15 <b>Temp:</b> 35 (Rain)	<b>Start:</b> 01:30 PM <b>End:</b> 01:47 PM	9	8
11/15/18	East Rookery By the Tripod	<b>Wind:</b> NE @ 20 <b>Temp:</b> 35 (Rain)	<b>Start:</b> 01:34 PM <b>End:</b> 01:40 PM	8	6
			<b>Total</b>	32	26

Table 1: Specified Data for Observed Harvests

Vally Haul out area is a new haul out area that was identified in September 2018 a photo of it from atop an adjacent cliff is below:



**e. Number and disposition of samples collected.**

No scientific samples were collected during the 2018 Harvest.

**f. Number of seals released after determination of sex:**

Harvesters handled, sexed, and released a total of 58 pups were sexed in the 4 roundups with 32 females being released and 26 males harvested. The number of seals in a round up was logged only for the harvest on 10/11/18 with 6 seals being released after sexing 10 seals with 7 being released females and harvesting 3 males. Handling and sexing seal pups is the most dangerous aspect of the harvest for people being bitten by seals and seals being bitten by one another or injured during handling as a result of biting the handlers.

**g. Number of non-pups in the pup harvest round up:**

No non-pups were unintentionally rounded up during this year's pup harvest. The intent of collecting this data was to understand and evaluate which harvest sites or times reduces harassment to adults or non-pups. More data are needed to understand whether it will be possible in future years to reduce harassment to non-target seals. Yearling seals (seals greater between one and two years old) have been inadvertently captured in the pup harvest round-ups in previous years. Yearling seals are very similar in size to pups, but their adult teeth have fully emerged and their bite will cause significant injury to the handler and should be avoided.

**h. Recommendations for improvements to the conduct of the harvest:**

None.

**i. Incidence of by-products and waste during the harvest process:**

There were no incidence of by-products and waste during this year's harvest season.

**j. Female seals killed or injured during the harvest operation:**

No female seals were killed or injured during this year's harvest season.

**k. Number of seal deaths due to overheating:**

There were no deaths of seals due to overheating.

**l. Number of seals entangled in marine debris and the number of seals disentangled:**

One young female seal disentangled during the harvest at North West Rookery on November 15th, 2018. Cameras were not available so therefore; no pictures were taken. Island Sentinel was able to safely disentangle the seal without inflicting further harm to said seal. A small green net was wrapped around the neck that did not break the seals skin.

**m. Evidence of oil-contaminated seal pelts:**

No evidence of oil-contaminated seal pelts was observed.

**n. Other types of fur seal mortality:**

There were no other types of fur seal mortality.

**o. Attempted harvest and/or other unusual conditions related to the harvest:**

The first attempted harvest at the South Arm of the Harbor occurred on 10/09/18 and due to no one willing to round up the seal pups, it was therefore canceled. The second attempted harvest that was once again canceled due to no one willing to round up the seal pups occurred the following day at East Rookery on 10/10/18.

The harvest needs were not fully met this season due to many contributing factors. The shrinking population along with an aging population and the lack of enough willing able bodied round up participants makes it hard to harvest the number wanted.

**p. Research conducted during the harvest:**

No research was conducted during this year's pup harvest.

**IV. LOGISTICS SUPPORTING OBSERVER TASKING**

Buffy Meyer arrived on 09/16/18 for the start of the young of the year harvest season. There was no community interest in participating in the harvests the first few weeks. Ms. Meyer worked with the NMFS Pribilof Program Manager, Michael Williams, and two Government biologists working for their first time with Northern Fur Seals and the Island Sentinel scouting for tagged adult females to remove video and satellite tags to recover data and to disentangle seals the first week.

The air carrier abruptly changed service to the Island of Saint George on 10/01/18 resulting in a commercial air transport system involving two different air carriers. The first leg of the routing to St George became Anchorage to Dutch Harbor or Anchorage to Saint Paul, followed by a change in carrier for follow-on service to Saint George. This change, outside the control of the consultant, created added risk of delays in arriving on St George Island for contracted for services.

The Government authorized utilization of the Government-owned and operated lodging facility on St. Paul Island if delays required an overnight stay on St. Paul. In contrast to the Dutch Harbor air route, where if the St. George flight was canceled a hotel would be required at an added cost.

On 10/07/18, the Government-owned and operated lodging facility on St. George Island “Cottage C”, experienced an attempted break-in resulting in door damage. For security reasons, Mr. Williams asked that the IAG employee take the next available flight to Anchorage until the security situation was resolved. Rebekah Leverty, an employee of InupiaQ Alaska Group, LLC, returned to Anchorage on 10/12/18 and the Government suspended contractor presence on St. George Island indefinitely until further guidance was provided. The doors were repaired by Government staff in late October 2018. The Alaska State Troopers were unable to investigate the incident on island, and NMFS determined that staff safety could not be ensured. NMFS determined that contractor presence was not warranted for the remainder of the season and the “temporary” suspension became permanent for the rest of the season.

## **V. LIST OF EXHIBITS**

Exhibit A – Sample Results (no samples were taken this harvest period)

Exhibit B – Photos with Captions