

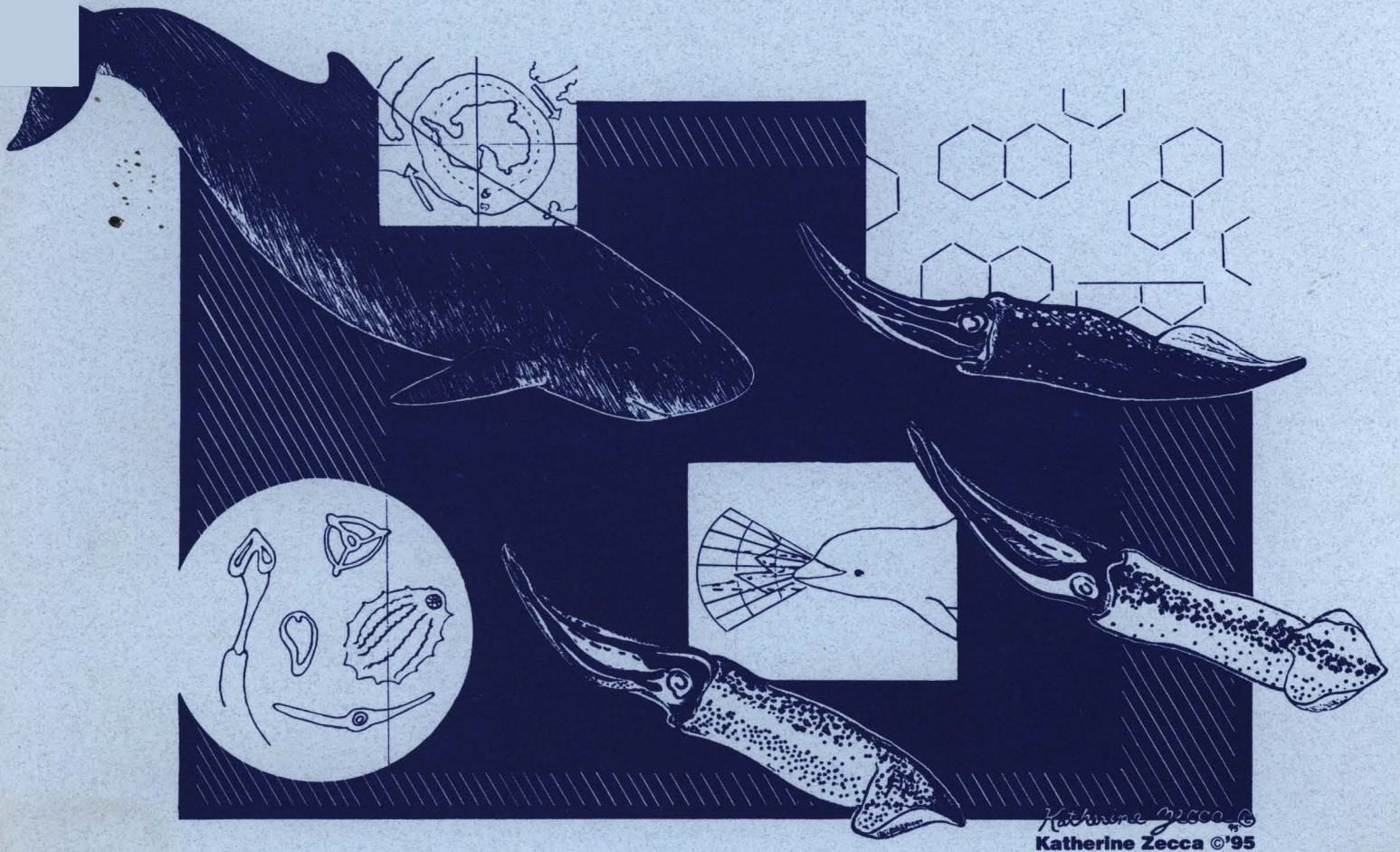
CURRENT RESEARCH AND CO-MANAGEMENT OF BELUGA WHALES BY THE  
ALASKA BELUGA WHALE COMMITTEE

Suydam, R.<sup>1</sup>, Frost, K.J.<sup>2</sup>, and Adams, M.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>North Slope Borough, Box 69, Barrow, AK 99723 and <sup>2</sup>Alaska Department of Fish and Game,  
1300 College Rd., Fairbanks, AK 99701

The Alaska Beluga Whale Committee (formerly Alaska and Inuvialuit Beluga Whale Committee) was formed in 1988 primarily to maintain healthy beluga whale stocks in Alaska for subsistence use and public enjoyment by future generations. Beluga whales are an important resource to coastal Alaska Natives; approximately 275 belugas are caught annually. The Committee is comprised of subsistence hunters, and local, state, and federal biologists and resource managers. The Committee functions under co-management principles whereby the hunters, biologists, and managers contribute equally in decisions about conservation matters. A management plan has been drafted to address several issues: (1) conservation, (2) safe and efficient harvest and use of belugas and the reduction of struck and lost whales, (3) accurate reporting of harvest information, (4) education about beluga issues among resource users, managers, and others, (5) local enforcement of regional management plans and hunting guidelines, and (6) research needed to make wise management decisions about belugas. The Alaska Beluga Whale Committee is also working with Canada on the management of the shared Beaufort Sea stock. Current research of the Committee includes: enumeration of the size of the five provisional stocks in Alaska; studies of genetic characteristics and stock differentiation; biological sampling to determine the age structure, sex ratio, and pregnancy rate of the harvested animals; food habits; contaminant loads in selected beluga tissues to assess beluga health risks and consumption risks to humans; and preliminary satellite tagging studies. Research projects are directed at obtaining the biological information necessary for the wise management and conservation of beluga whales.

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## ABSTRACTS