

**Wildlife Restoration**  
**FINAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME  
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION  
PO Box 115526  
Juneau, AK 99811-5526

**Alaska Department of Fish and Game**  
**Wildlife Restoration Grant**

**GRANT NUMBER:** AKW-C-1-2018

**PROJECT NUMBER:** P1.0

**PROJECT TITLE:** Round Island Sanctuary Operations

**PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE:** 01 May 2018 – 31 December 2019

**REPORT DUE DATE:** April 1, 2020

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Joe Meehan, Statewide Program Coordinator

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**I. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON PROJECT:**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Operate all aspects of the visitor use program at Round Island.

**Job/Activity 1a:** Manage public access as required by statute and regulation at Round Island to include review and issuance of access permits, explanation of permit conditions, assistance with logistics and explaining wildlife viewing and other opportunities on the island.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** All aspects of Activity 1 a were accomplished. Forty camping and 5 day-use permits were issued for the 2018 season (April – August). For the 2019 season 19 camping and 1 day-use permits were issued. Actual visitation for 2018 and 2019 was 28 and 12, respectively; with 150 visitor use days in 2018 and 67 visitor use days for 2019. Staff provided safety, campground and wildlife viewing orientation briefings and collected permits and fees upon visitor arrival; as well as assisting visitors in accessing the island and setup in the campground.

**Job/Activity 1b:** Conduct visitor monitoring and educational programs at Round Island to include oversight of public activities to prevent impacts to wildlife, interpreting through informal presentations the natural history of the island's wildlife and habitats, and providing other educational opportunities as appropriate.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** ADF&G Fish & Wildlife Technicians were present on Round Island 26 April through 17 August 2018 and 15 May through 9 August 2019. During these times they managed visitor use at the sanctuary and provided oversight and guidance of wildlife viewing and habitat protection. Staff provided informal interpretation of wildlife, habitats, and sanctuary resources to sanctuary visitors.

Staff also participated in educational and informational online chat boards, blogs, and online live video discussions through Explore.org during the 2018 season to provide information on sanctuary wildlife resources and habitats. Explore.org did not operate the online cameras in 2019.

Staff also hosted Bristol Bay Native Association's Bristol Bay Summer Youth intern Heidi Kritz 22 July – 30 July 2019. Heidi received hands on experience in the ADF&G's wildlife surveys and monitoring programs for Pacific walrus, Steller sea lion, seabirds and other resources at Round Island.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Monitor or research changes in abundance, use patterns, population health, productivity, and/or other parameters of wildlife populations and their habitats.

**Job/Activity 2a:** Conduct wildlife surveys and monitoring programs to assess Pacific walrus, Steller sea lion, seabirds and other wildlife species and resources at Round Island. Surveys shall follow protocols and authorizations jointly developed with the department and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Office of Migratory Bird Management, and Marine Mammals Management Office) and NOAA/National Marine Fisheries Service and will include management of data from prior surveys.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: During the reporting period normal census monitoring and protection surveys were conducted 26 April through 17 August 2018, and 16 May through 9 August 2019 for the following: Pacific walrus and Steller sea lion haulouts; Steller sea lion brand re-sights and entanglement surveys; phenology, productivity and population surveys for black-legged kittiwake, common murre and pelagic cormorant; daily wildlife observations; pacific walrus disturbance surveys and floristic inventories. Data are summarized in annual reports and summaries and forwarded to USFWS and NOAA NMML as well as other entities for incorporation into larger datasets, analysis and reporting.

**OBJECTIVE 3:** Provide appropriate and safe facilities for public uses, research, management, maintenance and other administrative duties at Round Island.

**Job/Activity 3a:** Maintain, enhance, repair and expand as appropriate facilities including trails, boardwalks, viewing platforms, cabins, campgrounds, restrooms, signs, interpretive displays and other educational materials, and other facilities necessary for public use, research and administrative functions.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: During the reporting period staff conducted a number of maintenance and repair items including: deployment of a new rigid-hull inflatable boat, construction of boat storage platform, general building maintenance, campground and trail signage, trail maintenance and improvements, and the reroofing and leveling of the

public outhouse building. Educational materials were prepared and organized and made available to the visitors in the campground.

**Job/Activity 3b:** Maintain, repair, enhance and/or protect habitats and other resources as required to provide for public use and administrative facilities.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Staff conducted minor habitat protection actions through trail improvements, maintenance projects and minor removal of a couple invasive plant species as they were noted.

## II. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS:

1. After a number of problems, delays and adverse conditions early in the 2019 season, the season finished relatively smoothly. Normal field operations were suspended about a week early due to the lack of transportation later. This did not materially impair our ability to meet most major objectives.
2. Some of the 2019 seabird population and phenology data was inadvertently left on the island during departure; hence reporting on these data will not be possible until 2020.

## III. PUBLICATIONS:

Summary reports (attached) for the 2018 and 2019 season were issued under memos dated 1 September 2018, 9 October 2018, 30 August 2019, and 11 October 2019 to the Qayassiq Walrus Commission, and various funding organizations. The full versions of the 2018 and 2019 Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary Annual Management Reports are in preparation. It is hoped that both reports will be available prior to July 2020. When completed both the 2018 and 2019 Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary Annual Management Reports will be available via our web page at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=walrusislands.resources>

Information and data were also forwarded to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service on an annual basis during the performance period of for inclusion in their reports and publications.

Explore.org video archives and online chats for the performance period can be found at:  
<https://explore.org/livecams/oceans/walrus-cam-round-island>

Explore.org blogs authored by sanctuary staff on Round Island resources can be found at:  
<https://blog.explore.org/what-makes-a-walrus-a-keystone-species/>  
<https://blog.explore.org/round-islands-first-lady-walrus/>  
<https://blog.explore.org/round-island-foxes/>

Data and information gathered on this project during the reporting period also contributed to the following publications from other entities:

Maniscalco JM, Springer AM, Counihan KL, Hollmen T, Aderman HM, Toyukak Sr, M. 2020. Contemporary diets of walrus in community structure. *PeerJ* 8:e8735  
<http://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.8735>

Dragoo, D. E., H. M. Renner, and R. S. A. Kaler. 2019. Breeding status and population trends of seabirds in Alaska, 2018. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Report AMNWR 2019/03. Homer, Alaska.

Dragoo, D. E., H. M. Renner, and R. S. A. Kaler. 2020. Breeding status and population trends of seabirds in Alaska, 2019. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Report AMNWR 2020/01. Homer, Alaska.

Hastings KK, Rehberg MJ, O’Corry-Crowe GM, Pendleton GW, Jemison LA, Gelatt TS. 2020. Demographic consequences and characteristics of recent population mixing and colonization in Steller sea lions *Eumetopias jubatus*. *J Mammal* 101:107-120.

Sweeney, K. Towell R. and Gelatt, T. 2018. Memo to the Record: Results of Steller Sea Lion Surveys in Alaska, June-July 2018. NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service Marine Mammal Laboratory 4 Dec 2018. Seattle, Washington.

#### **IV. REVIEW OF PRIOR RESEARCH AND STUDIES IN PROGRESS ON THE PROBLEM OR NEED:**

N/A

**Prepared by:** Ed Weiss, Lands and refuges Manager, ADF&G

**Date:** 10 April 2020



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

## Department of Fish and Game

DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION  
Statewide Lands & Refuges Program

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Anchorage, Alaska 99518-1565  
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Fax: 907.267.2433

September 1, 2018

Helen M. Aderman  
Qayassiq Walrus Commission  
c/o Bristol Bay Native Association  
P.O. Box 310  
Dillingham, Alaska 99576

Dear Mrs. Aderman:

Per your request below is a summary of activities at Round Island in the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary during the 2018 season. This information is a summary of information provided at the Qayassiq Walrus Commission (QWC) pre hunt meeting, September 6, 2018. I would appreciate you passing this along to the commission. Staff returned from Qayassiq on August 17<sup>th</sup>, and we have not had time to finalize data and reports yet. As such the data and information below should be considered preliminary. The 2018 full season report will be forwarded to you for distribution to members when finished.

- ADF&G staff were present on Qayassiq April 26<sup>th</sup> through August 17, 2018. Staff conducted the normal census monitoring and productivity surveys of Pacific walrus, Steller sea lion and seabird colonies; managed the visitor use program, maintained sanctuary facilities, maintained the Explore live feed video cameras and conducted other sanctuary related duties.
- The Explore.org internet web cameras on Round Island overlooking First Beach and Main Beach were available again this year; the Cliff Overlook cam which overlooks Main Beach from a distance and the Main Walrus Cam which alternated between views of Main Beach and First Beach. All cameras and power generators were removed August 15 for servicing over the winter. No live feed camera views are currently available for fall 2018. It is planned that these cameras will be placed in operation again next season.
- Walrus counts of all 10 beaches were conducted 110 days during the April 26 to August 15 period. The average number present, as currently calculated for all beaches, was 296 for the normal May 1 – August 15 period. This is above the low numbers seen in 2016 (mean = 126); but considerably lower than last year's mean of 731 and the long term 2006 – 2017 average of 743. The peak count of 1,450 walrus occurred on July 1<sup>st</sup>. While there were only 3 days throughout the season with zero walrus at Round Island, there were 33 days where numbers fell below 100 and only 2 days where numbers exceeded 1,000. Numbers had declined by the time staff left the island on August 17<sup>th</sup> with 50 or less walrus being present beginning August 7.

- Steller Sea lion numbers at the East Cape haulout were similar to previous years. Steller sea lions were numerous early in the season with 300 – 600 generally being present in April and early May. The average number present was 276 compared to the long term 2006 – 2017 average of 190. Steller sea lion numbers generally declined and leveled out after mid-May, with 100 – 200 present through August. Brand re-sight information is still being tabulated.
- Common murre, Black-legged kittiwake production was pretty much a bust on our plots again this year.
- There were no BBNA BBSYSP Round Island Interns in 2018.
- We had several storms this year and a number of accidental birds as a result, including:
- ADF&G continued remote camera monitoring of selected walrus haulouts around Round Island. These photos will be reviewed post season to gather information on haulout movements, disturbances and environmental conditions. ADF&G cameras will continue remote monitoring this winter.
- We have secured funding through a USFWS grant and other sources to fund operations through the 2019 season.
- We plan to be out at Round Island September 13<sup>th</sup> and/or 14<sup>th</sup> to complete some cleanup activities. During this time we will be using a helicopter for access and removal of debris.
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As noted at the meeting if any hunt captains wish to hunt at Round Island this year please have them contact either Eunice Dyasuk or Neil Barten at the Dillingham office to authorize their 2018 hunt access permit. If anyone has any questions, please let me know. Thank you.

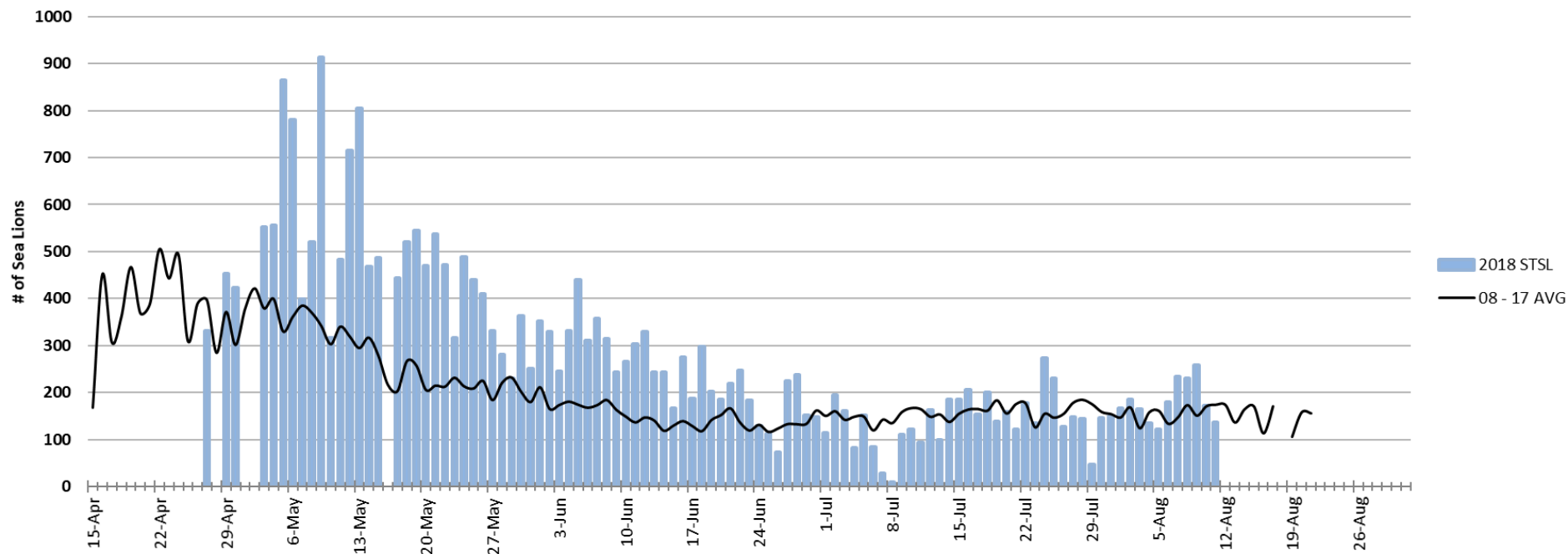
Sincerely,



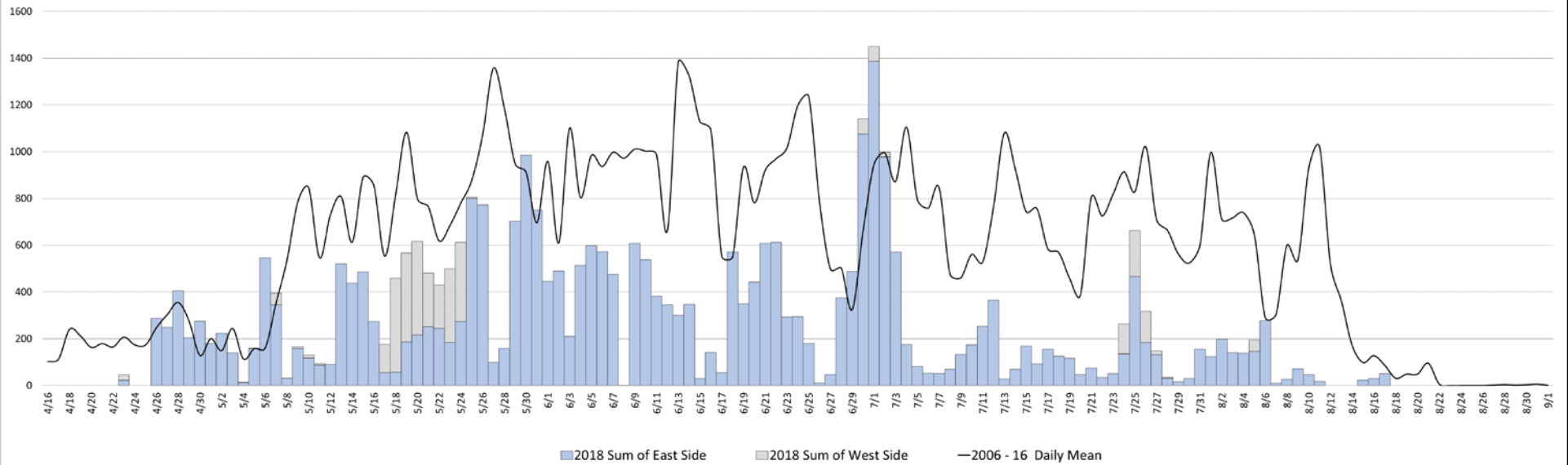
Edward W. Weiss  
Lands & Refuges Manager  
[ed.weiss@alaska.gov](mailto:ed.weiss@alaska.gov)

Cc: Ryan Morrill, ADF&G  
Eunice Dyasuk, ADF&G  
Neil Barten, ADF&G  
Joe Meehan, ADF&G  
Jonathan Snyder, USFWS

## 2018 Daily East Cape Steller Sea Lion Numbers



**2018 Daily Round Island Walrus Numbers (east & west)  
Compared to 2006 - 2017 Daily mean**



East side counts based on daily ground based surveys of 9 uglit (SP, SB, FB, FP, CG, BC, FR, NBC, MB). West side counts based on daily ground survey or photo count of one uglit (WM). Generally 1 May - 15 August.  
Pre 1 May and Post 15 August data are considered minimal counts based on limited ground based surveys or photo counts from WM, FB &/or MB, as well as other selected sites.  
Post 15 August data unavailable for 2006 - 2011; post 15 August Mean Data based on 2013 - 2014 data.







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## Department of Fish and Game

DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION  
Statewide Lands & Refuges Program

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Fax: 907.267.2433

October 9, 2018

Distribution

Dear Sirs & Madams:

Thank you all immensely for the funding and support your organization provided to the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) to continue its work at the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary (WISGS) during the 2018 season.

Below is a brief update highlighting this summer's activities, along with a number of photographs and some preliminary data. Please pass this on to your staff or others to illustrate what we were able to accomplish with the assistance your organization provided. Our annual report detailing accomplishments and data should be available later this winter. When complete, the 2018 WISGS Annual report will be available through the ADF&G WISGS website at: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=walrusislands.resources>.

- ADF&G Fish & Wildlife Technicians were present on Round Island 26 April through 17 August 2018. Normal census monitoring and protection surveys of Pacific walrus and Steller sea lion haulouts; Steller sea lion band resights and entanglement surveys; managing the visitor use program; and maintenance duties were conducted during the 113 days that staff occupied the island.
- Staff conducted black-legged kittiwake, common murre and pelagic cormorant phenology and productivity surveys again in 2018. While all three species attempted some nesting, there were fewer birds than normal on the colonies and little egg laying occurred. Similar to the last two years black-legged kittiwakes and common murrens had complete nesting failures on our study plots in 2018.
- Explore.org, assisted by ADF&G staff, continued streaming its walrus internet web cameras live from Round Island during the 2018 season. Cameras overlooking First Beach, Main Beach and the north end of the island began operation on 24 April. There were several improvements made to the system in March. Several technical problems were also encountered this year which resulted in cameras being down periodically. We plan on the live feed cameras being in operation again during the 2019 season.
- ADF&G also continued remote monitoring of selected walrus haulouts with cameras to supplement data gathered by field monitoring. Cameras placed around the island at selected

haulouts provide pre and post season haulout numbers, weather information and information on seasonality of other species.

- Mortality or beach cast ivory was recovered to discourage trespass and haulout disturbance from ivory collectors.
- While State of Alaska funding is still unavailable for this program; the Department has been able to leverage private funds received in 2018 to secure federal grants to carry the operations through December 2019. However, if additional private funds can be secured for the 2019 season it is hoped those funds can be used to secure additional federal funds and extend the existing federal grant into the 2020 season.

If anyone has any questions or needs any additional information or materials for their programs please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you again for your support of the program and support of the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary.

Sincerely,



Edward W. Weiss  
Lands & Refuges Manager  
[ed.weiss@alaska.gov](mailto:ed.weiss@alaska.gov)

Distribution:

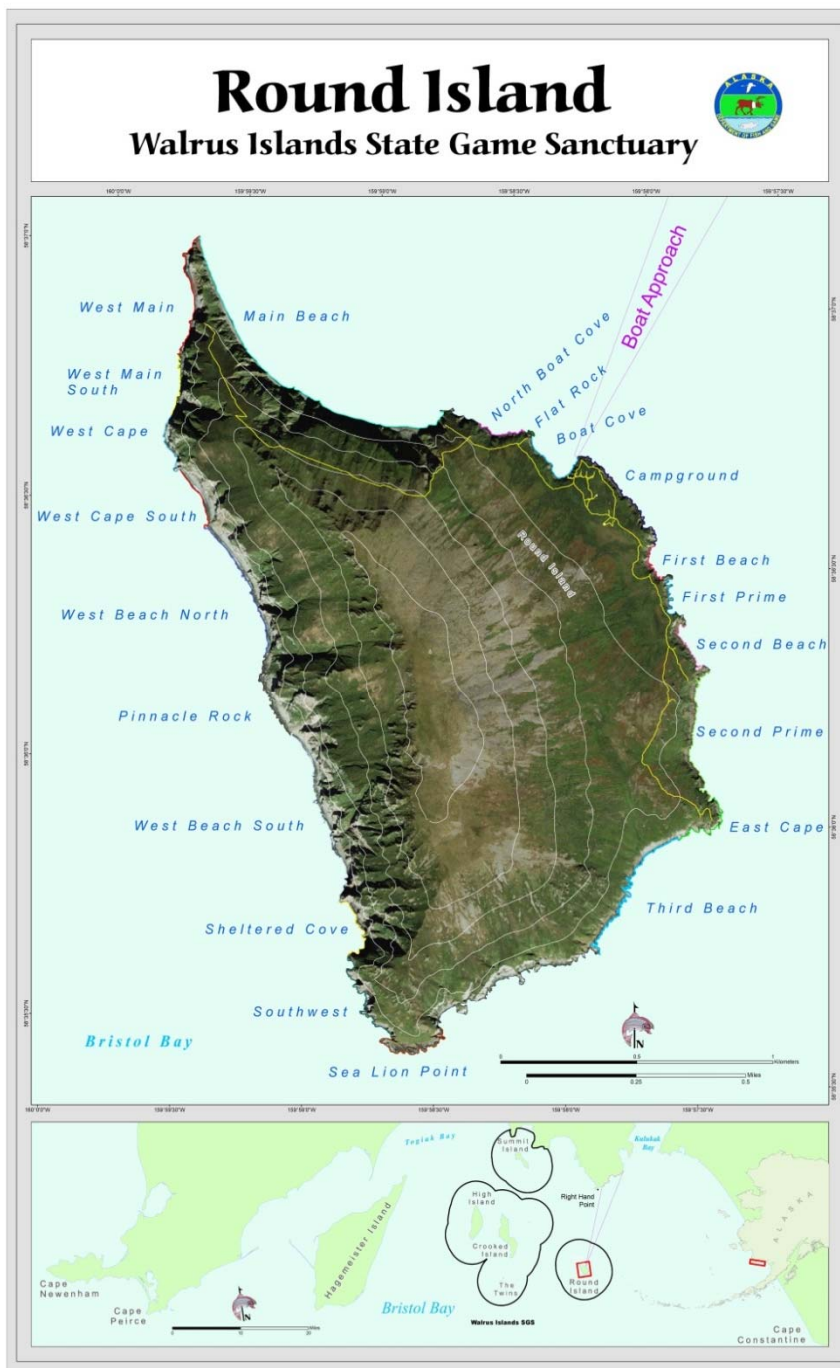
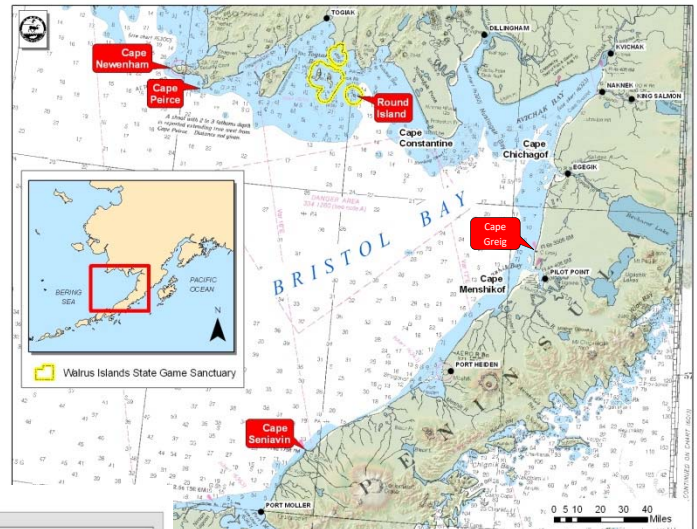
Tara Riemer, ASLC  
Adrienne Lindholm, NPS  
Betsy Palfreyman, WARIS

Jonathan Silvio, Explore Annenberg LLC  
Laurie Macha, Walrus Conservation Consortium

Cc: Ryan Morrill, ADF&G  
Todd Rinaldi, ADF&G  
Neil Barten, ADF&G  
Tony Kavalok, ADF&G  
Lauri Jemison, ADF&G  
Tara Miller, ASLC

Joe Meehan, ADF&G  
Eunice Dyasuk, ADF&G  
Maria Gladziszewski, ADF&G  
Jonathan Snyder, USFWS  
Nancy Anderson, ASLC

**The Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary (WISGS)** was created in 1960 by the Alaska State Legislature. The sanctuary consists of a group of seven rocky islands (Round Island, Summit Island, Crooked Island, High Island, Black Rock and The Twins) and their adjacent waters in northern Bristol Bay, approximately 65 miles southwest of Dillingham, Alaska. The sanctuary protects important habitats for Pacific walrus, Steller sea lions, numerous species of seabirds, and other marine and terrestrial birds and mammals.



Round Island, the centerpiece of the WISGS, is one of the largest most consistently used terrestrial haulout sites in North America for Pacific walrus. It also supports Steller sea lions, numerous species of nesting seabirds, and a number of terrestrial birds and mammals.

Round Island is one of 5 regularly used haul outs in Bristol Bay at the southern edge of Pacific walrus habitat. The other lesser used haul outs are at Cape Pierce, Cape Newenham, Hagemeister Island, and Cape Senjavin. In 2016 and 2017 Pacific walrus also hauled out at Cape Greig, a new location in eastern Bristol Bay. However, in 2018 walrus did not haul out at Cape Greig. About 2,000 walrus were observed near Port Heiden in early 2018, but did not continue hauling out there. Interchange between the 5 Bristol Bay haulouts has been documented in previous studies, so it is likely these walrus are also using Round Island and the other Bristol Bay haul outs.

Round Island (Qayassiq or “place to go in a kayak” in local Yupik

dialect) is a traditional walrus hunting ground for Alaskan Natives and site use dates back about 6,000 years before present. Round Island is also listed under the National Park Services National Natural Landmark program (1968) and now the National Historic Landmark program (2017). These two programs recognize the sanctuary's unique and important natural, cultural and historical resources.

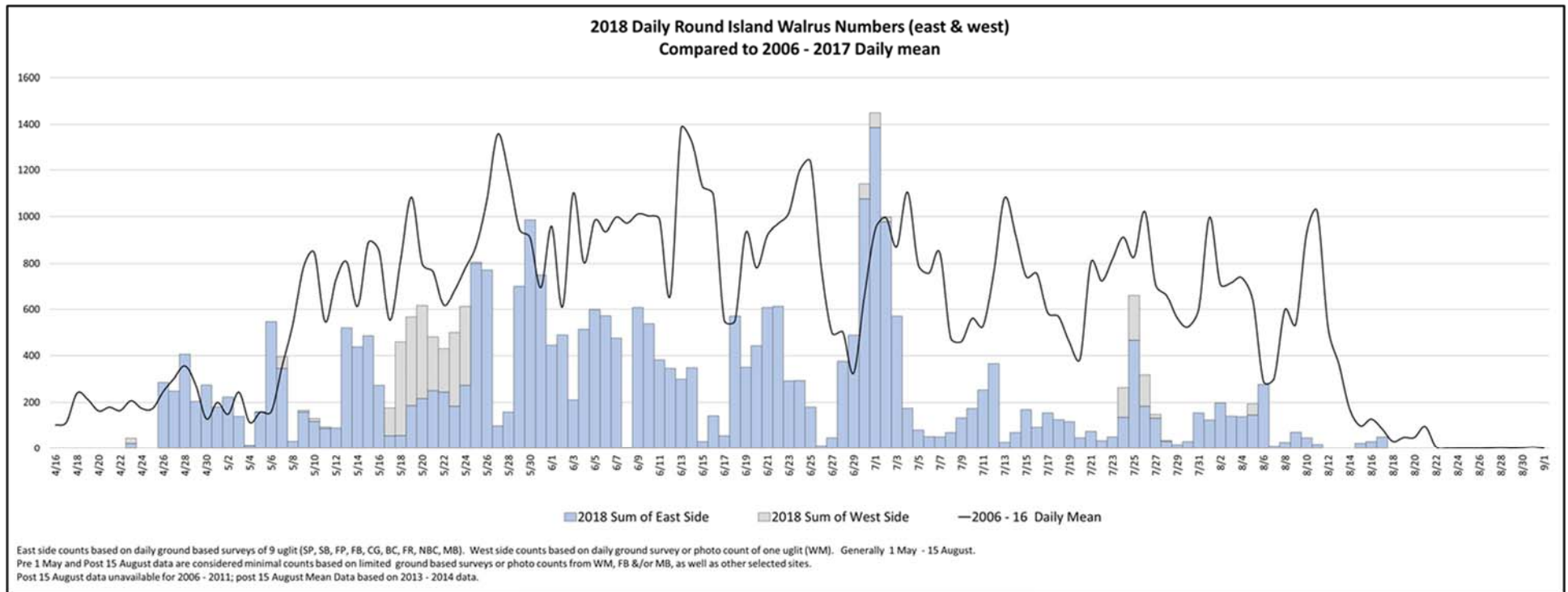
Since 1976 the ADF&G has staffed a camp at Round Island to protect these resources and operate a visitor use program. Staff and visitor facilities are at the campground site near Boat Cove. About 3 miles of trail and designated view points along the eastern and northern parts of the island provide access for staff and visitors for monitoring, data collection, photography and general viewing.



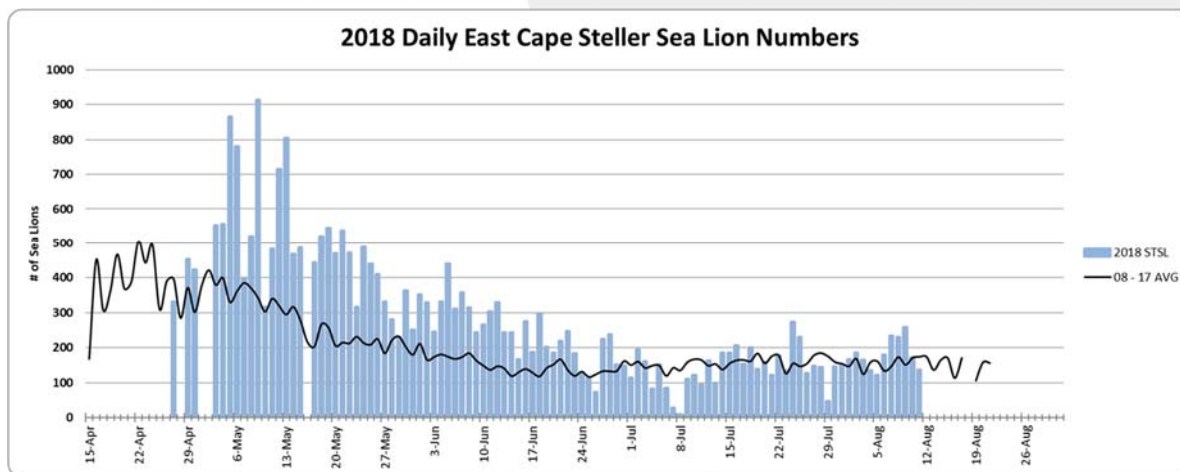
**Pacific walrus sun themselves on the shores of Round Island, August 2018.**

**A mature male Pacific walrus surveys the shoreline prior to hauling out.**





**Walrus** used Round Island up through 3 December during the fall of 2017 and then were regularly present on Round Island 28 March – camp closure on 17 August during 2018. Walrus counts of all 10 beaches were conducted 111 days during the 26 April to 17 August period. Similar to 2016, walrus numbers were lower than normal. The average walrus count for all beaches 1 May – 15 August 2018 was 296, down from last year’s average of 731, and the 2006 - 2018 average of 708. But still above the 2016 mean of 126. The peak count of 1,450 walrus occurred on 1 July (one of only two days where numbers exceeded 1,000 animals), later than our usual peaks. There were 33 days when numbers fell below 100 animals; with a minimum number of 0 on 3 days.



As in past years **Steller sea lions** were present in higher numbers in spring as sea lions congregate to feed on herring and other resources prior to breeding individuals moving off to rookeries. A peak number of 914 was observed 9 May; with a spring mean of 489. The mean number present throughout the season was 276

There were 255 photo confirmed sightings of 43 marked individuals. These individuals were marked at rookeries in Ugamak Island in the eastern Aleutians; Sugarloaf Island in the Barren Islands near Kodiak, Alaska; Fish Island, Prince William Sound, Marmot Island near Kodiak, AK, Kozlov Cape, Russia, and Mendy Island, Russia. Staff again deployed a remote DSLR camera to opportunistically document branded and entangled animals over winter into spring 2019.



**Female Pacific walrus and calf resting with Steller sea lions at East Cape haul out, Round Island, AK.**

As you may recall last year we had an unusual first recorded occurrence of a California Sea Lion (*Zalophus californianus*) at Round Island. This year the surprise was a female Pacific walrus and calf who were first noticed hauled out at East Cape resting among the Steller sea lions on 18 May. Walrus hauling out at Round Island, and in Bristol Bay in general, typically are an all-male portion of the population. Most of the males, as well as the females and calves, typically follow the ice northward as it retreats into the northern Bering and Chukchi Seas during the spring and summer. We're unsure why this female stayed behind but she was believed to be spotted sporadically throughout the summer with the rest of the herd at Main Beach on several occasions.

**Nesting chronology, productivity and population** data were gathered for **black-legged kittiwakes, common murre and pelagic cormorants**. Data are still being compiled for population counts and productivity. However, 2018 was the 3rd season in a row (2016, 2017, 2018) of low seabird attendance at Round Island colonies and another very low seabird productivity year. Black-legged kittiwake and common murre

experienced nesting failures again, and pelagic cormorants did little better. A few successful nesting birds were observed around the island.

**Explore.org** and ADF&G staff continued their partnership to stream live internet feed of the Pacific walrus at Round Island to communities around the world. In March, ADF&G and Explore.org contractors made several improvements to the system including a new power shed. ADF&G assisted with installations and completed most in-season maintenance. Staff also contributed to online discussion boards, blogs, and video chat sessions. Online feeds went live about 1 May with views alternating between the cameras at the Main Beach and First Beach haulouts, as well as the Cliff Cam view. At seasons end all cameras were taken down for the winter.



**A new power shed was constructed to house Explore.org power and internet electronics in support of the live stream cameras.**



**Round Island camp during March 2018 Explore.org installation trip.**



**West Main Beach repeater station.**



**Walrus lounging on Main Beach as viewed from the MB walrus camera**



**Remote cameras** are seasonally deployed at selected haul outs across the island to monitor sanctuary resources in season and overwinter. These remote trail cameras provide supplemental data on pre and post season Steller sea lion and Pacific walrus haul out attendance; temperatures and weather patterns; seasonality of species; as well as trespass and disturbance evidence.

**Visitor Services.** One of the primary goals of the sanctuary staff in managing the visitor program is to balance the quality of the experience for the visitors while protecting wildlife and other resources. When visitors arrive on Round Island, they are given an orientation that includes the visitation regulations and policies, a brief history of the Sanctuary, a safety briefing and a demonstration on how to approach viewpoints without disturbing the animals. Pre-season permit sales totaled 45 permits (40 camp permits and 5 day visits) between 40 applicants for a potential 205 user days. Actual public visitation was 20 unguided campers and 8 unguided day visitors; totaling 150 user days. Togiak Outfitters provided commercial transport for the 2018 season.



**Enforcement and Ivory collection.** Staff continued collecting data on anthropogenic sources and any consequent disturbances. Data on anthropogenic disturbances is still being compiled and analyzed.

Both beach cast ivory and that from mortalities is collected to discourage looters from illegally accessing and harvesting ivory from the island. This ivory is then made available to local native carvers via auctions, with proceeds going to the Pacific Walrus Conservation Fund.

Ivory collected during 2017 was sold in March at the annual Beaver Roundup festivities in Dillingham, Alaska; netting \$934.00 which went to the Pacific Walrus Conservation Fund.



August 30, 2019

Helen M. Aderman  
Qayassiq Walrus Commission  
c/o Bristol Bay Native Association  
P.O. Box 310  
Dillingham, Alaska 99576

Dear Mrs. Aderman:

Per your request below is a summary of activities at Round Island in the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary during the 2019 season. This information summary provided for the Qayassiq Walrus Commission (QWC) pre hunt meeting, September 5, 2019. I would appreciate you passing this along to the commission. Staff returned from Qayassiq on August 10<sup>th</sup>, and we have not had time to finalize data and reports yet. As such the data and information below should be considered preliminary. The 2019 full season report will be forwarded to you for distribution to members when finished.

- Margaret Archibald replaced Ryan Morrill as the sanctuary manager at Round Island this year. This was Margaret's 4<sup>th</sup> season at Round Island.
- Neil Barten retired this past spring and Lauren Watine is the new ADF&G Area Biologist in Dillingham.
- ADF&G staff were present on Qayassiq May 17<sup>th</sup> through August 9, 2019. Staff deployment was delayed due to staffing changes and logistical issues as a result of the early herring season. Staff conducted the normal census monitoring and productivity surveys of Pacific walrus, Steller sea lion and seabird colonies; managed the visitor use program, maintained sanctuary facilities, and conducted other sanctuary related duties.
- The Explore.org internet web cameras on Round Island were not available this year. Explore.org decided in early April to not provide the streaming service in 2019. It is hoped that these cameras will be placed in operation again in 2020.
- Exact arrival dates of walrus at Round Island in 2019 cannot be determined due to camera failures at Main Beach and West Main Beach. However, walrus were spotted by local residents returning to the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary area as early as 5 March and one walrus was evident on the First Beach cam on 8 March. Walrus were also present when staff arrived on the island 17 April to offload gear and supplies. Walrus numbers were uncharacteristically low early in the season, but there was only 1 day throughout the season with zero walrus at Round Island. There were 39 days where numbers fell below 100 and 12 days where numbers exceeded 1,000.

Walrus counts of the 9 east side beaches were conducted during 17 May to 5 August. Due to a camera failure photo and ground counts of West Main did not begin until 10 June; at which time walrus were already using West Main. The average number of walrus present at Round Island 17 May – 5 August, as currently calculated for all beaches, was 439. This is above the low numbers seen in 2016 (mean = 126); and above last year's mean of 296, but below the long term 2006 – 2018 average of 708. The peak count of 5,519 walrus occurred on 1 August. Pacific walrus numbers had increased significantly in early August; with several days of 2,500 to 5,500 walrus. It is believed that these are most likely from the 8,000 walrus that were hauling out in the Cinder River area earlier this summer, as those walruses were no longer at that site. At the time staff left the island on 9 August there were an estimated 4,000 or more walrus present.

- Steller Sea lion numbers at the East Cape haulout were similar to previous years. Steller sea lions were numerous early in the season with 300 – 600 generally being present in May. The average number present was 276 compared to the long term 2008 – 2018 average of 200. Steller sea lion numbers generally declined in June with 100 – 200 present then increased again in July. Brand re-sight information is still being tabulated.
- Seabird production appeared to show some improvement over the last several years. While production on our Common murre and Black-legged kittiwake plots were low; there was some production as evident from chicks and fledglings scattered around the island. No pelagic cormorants nested on our plots again this year, however, pelagic cormorants did successfully nest elsewhere on the island.
- ADF&G hosted BBNA BBSYSP Round Island Intern Heidi Kritz 20 - 30 July 2019.
- ADF&G continued remote camera monitoring of selected walrus haulouts around Round Island. These photos will be reviewed post season to gather information on haulout movements, disturbances and environmental conditions. ADF&G cameras will continue remote monitoring this winter.
- We have secured funding through a USFWS grant and other sources to fund operations through 30 June of the 2024 season.

As noted at the meeting if any hunt captains wish to hunt at Round Island this year please have them fill in the hunt captain and crew names and contact info on the permit; sign it and then send to either Eunice Dyasuk or Lauren Watine at the Dillingham office to authorize their 2019 hunt access permit. If anyone has any questions, please let me know. Thank you.

Sincerely,

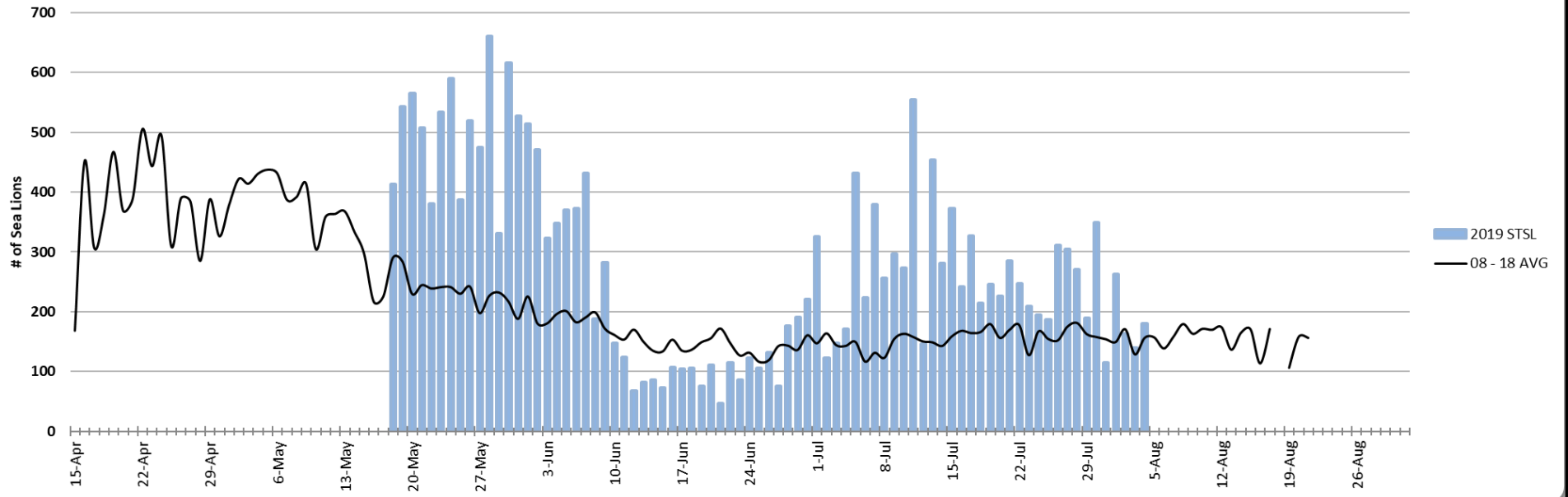


Edward W. Weiss  
Lands & Refuges Manager  
[ed.weiss@alaska.gov](mailto:ed.weiss@alaska.gov)

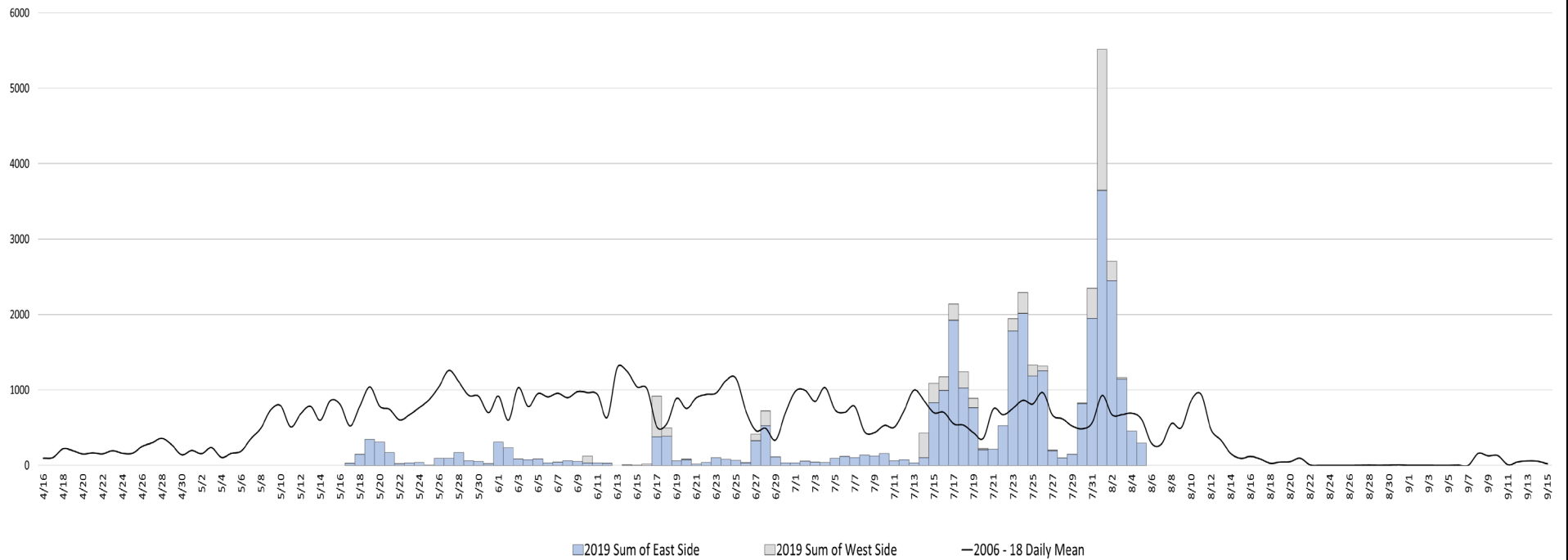
Cc: Margaret Archibald, ADF&G  
Jonathan Snyder, USFWS  
Lauri Jemison, ADF&G

Joe Meehan, ADF&G  
Eunice Dyasuk, ADF&G  
Lauren Watine, ADF&G

### 2019 Daily East Cape Steller Sea Lion Numbers



### 2019 Daily Round Island Walrus Numbers (east & west) Compared to 2006 - 2018 Daily mean



East side counts based on daily ground based surveys of 9 uglit (SP, SB, FP, FB, CG, BC, FR, NBC, MB). West side counts based on daily ground survey or photo count of one ugilit (WM). Generally 1 May - 15 August.

Pre 1 May and Post 15 August data are considered minimal counts based on limited ground based surveys or photo counts from WM, FB &/or MB, as well as other selected sites.

Post 15 August data unavailable for 2006 - 2011; post 15 August Mean Data based on 2013 - 2014 data.





October 11, 2019

Distribution

Dear Sirs & Madams:

Thank you for the funding and support your organization has provided to the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) to continue its work at the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary (WISGS) during the 2019 season.

Below is a brief update highlighting this summer's activities, along with the attached summary of the project, some photographs and preliminary data from this summer. Please pass this on to your staff or others to illustrate what we were able to accomplish with the assistance your organization provided. Our annual report detailing accomplishments and data should be available later this winter. When complete, the 2019 WISGS Annual report will be available through the ADF&G WISGS website at: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=walrusislands.resources>.

- Margaret Archibald replaced Ryan Morrill as the sanctuary manager at Round Island this year. This was Margaret's 4th season at Round Island.
- ADF&G Fish & Wildlife Technicians were present on Round Island May 17th through August 9, 2019. Staff deployment was delayed due to staffing changes and logistical issues as a result of the early herring season.
- Staff conducted the normal Pacific walrus and Steller sea lion census monitoring and protection surveys; Steller sea lion brand resights and entanglement surveys; seabird colony monitoring; managing the visitor use program; maintained sanctuary facilities; and conducted other sanctuary related duties.
- Staff conducted black-legged kittiwake, common murre and pelagic cormorant phenology and productivity surveys again in 2019. All three species showed some nesting improvement over the last few seasons. While production on our Common murre and Black-legged kittiwake plots was low; there was some production evident from chicks and fledglings scattered around the island. Pelagic cormorants did not nest on our plots again this year, however, pelagic cormorants did successfully nest elsewhere on the island.
- ADF&G hosted BBNA BBSYSP Round Island Intern Heidi Kritz 20 - 30 July 2019.
- ADF&G continued remote camera monitoring of selected walrus haulouts around Round Island. These photos will be reviewed post season to gather information on pre and post

season haulout numbers, weather information, seasonality of other species, disturbances and environmental conditions. Remote monitoring will continue this winter.

- Explore.org took a hiatus on streaming of the live walrus cameras in 2019; but we hope to have them return in 2020. In 2019 ADF&G staff continued to provide some photo and discussion content to Explore.org walrus web camera page as it was made available from the field.
- Mortality or beach cast ivory was recovered to discourage trespass and haulout disturbance from ivory collectors.
- While State of Alaska funding is still unavailable for this program; the Department has been able to leverage private funds received in 2019 to secure federal grants to carry the operations through June 2020. If additional private funds can be secured those funds can be matched against federal funds extending the existing federal grant through June 30, 2021.

If anyone has any questions or needs any additional information or materials for their programs please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you again for your support of the program and support of the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary.

Sincerely,



Edward W. Weiss  
Lands & Refuges Manager  
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Distribution:

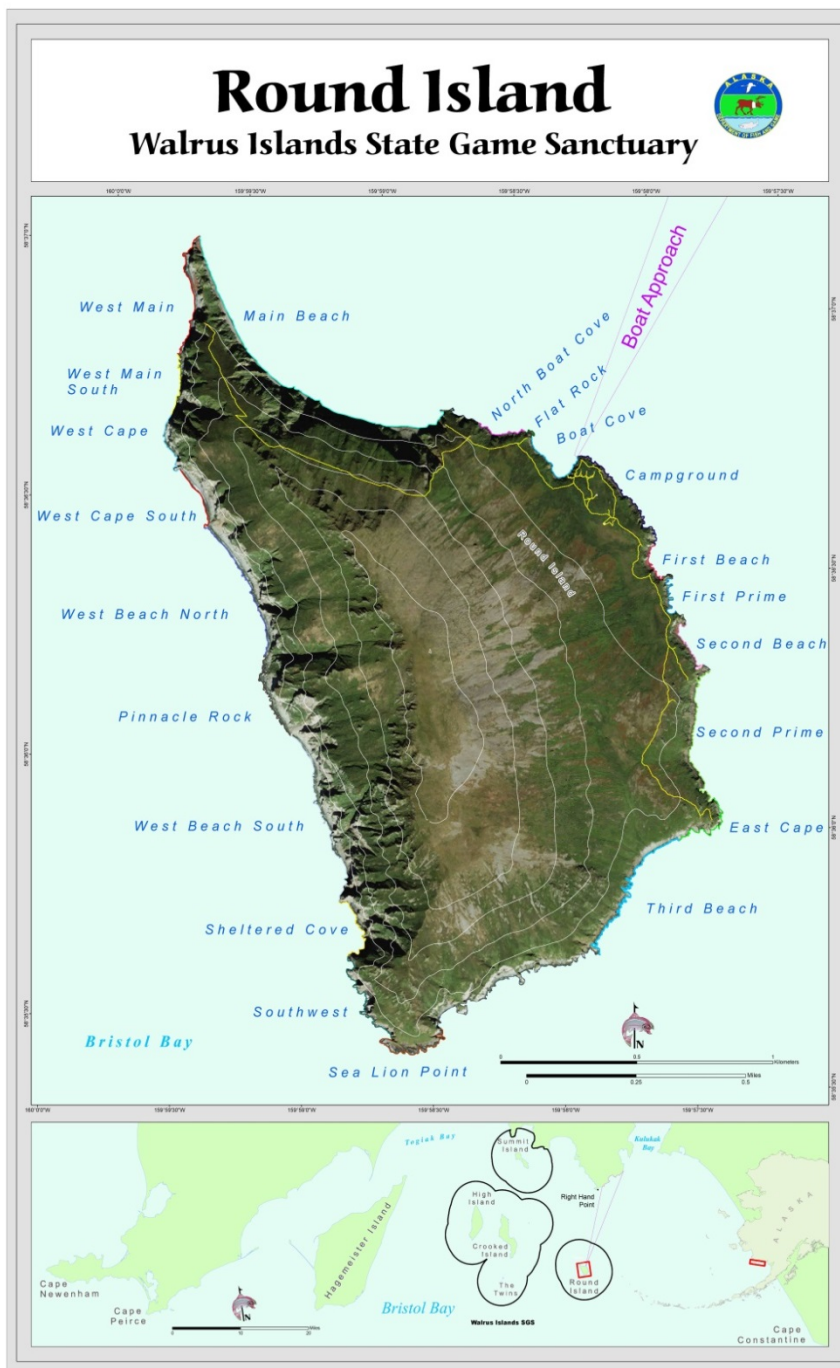
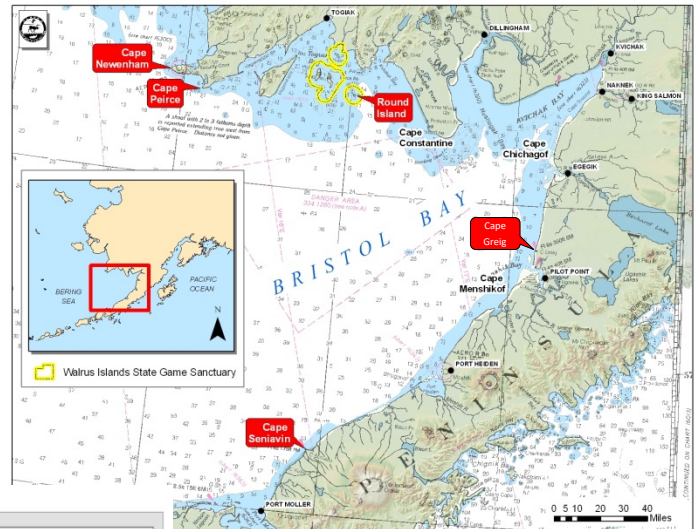
Tara Riemer, ASLC  
Adrienne Lindholm, NPS  
Betsy Palfreyman, WARIS

Jonathan Silvio, Explore Annenberg LLC  
Laurie Macha, Walrus Conservation Consortium

Cc: Joe Meehan, ADF&G  
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Lauren Watine, ADF&G  
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Lauri Jemison, ADF&G  
Tara Miller, ASLC

Eunice Dyasuk, ADF&G  
Maria Gladziszewski, ADF&G  
Jonathan Snyder, USFWS  
Nancy Anderson, ASLC

**The Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary (WISGS)** was created in 1960 by the Alaska State Legislature. The sanctuary consists of a group of seven rocky islands (Round Island, Summit Island, Crooked Island, High Island, Black Rock and The Twins) and their adjacent waters in northern Bristol Bay, approximately 65 miles southwest of Dillingham, Alaska. The sanctuary protects important habitats for Pacific walrus, Steller sea lions, numerous species of seabirds, and other marine and terrestrial birds and mammals.



Round Island, the centerpiece of the WISGS, is one of the largest most consistently used terrestrial haulout sites in North America for Pacific walrus. It also supports Steller sea lions, numerous species of nesting seabirds, and a number of terrestrial birds and mammals.

Round Island is one of 5 regularly used haul outs in Bristol Bay at the southern edge of Pacific walrus habitat. The other lesser used haul outs are at Cape Pierce, Cape Newenham, Hagemester Island, and Cape Seniavin. In 2016 and 2017 Pacific walrus also hauled out at Cape Greig, a new location in eastern Bristol Bay. During 2019 walrus only briefly hauled out at Cape Greig; but were seen using another site nearby. About 8,000 walruses were observed near Cinder River on the Alaska Peninsula, June-July 2019, but did not continue hauling out there. Interchange between Bristol Bay haulouts has been documented in previous studies, so it is likely these walruses are also using Round Island and the other Bristol Bay haul outs. Shortly after they discontinued use at the Cinder



River site there was a sharp increase in the number of walrus using Round Island.

Round Island (Qayassiq or “place to go in a kayak” in local Yupik dialect) is a traditional walrus hunting ground for Alaskan Natives and site use dates back about 6,000 years before present. Round Island is also listed under the National Park Services National Natural Landmark program (1968) and now the National Historic Landmark program (2017). These two programs recognize the sanctuary’s unique and important natural, cultural and historical resources.

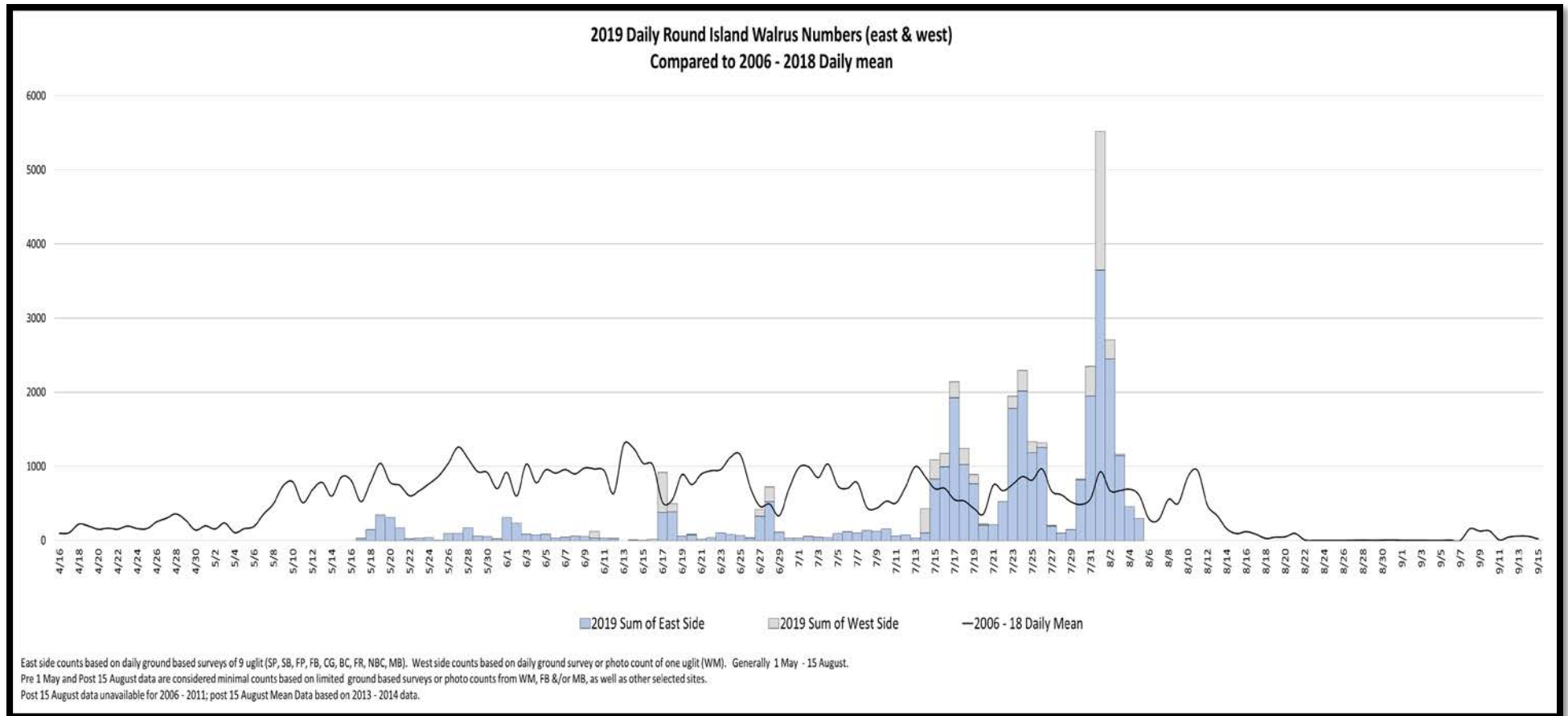
Since 1976 the ADF&G has staffed a camp at Round Island to protect these resources and operate a visitor use program. Staff and visitor facilities are at the campground site near Boat Cove. About 3 miles of trail and designated view points along the eastern and northern parts of the island provide access for staff and visitors for monitoring, data collection, photography and general viewing.



**Pacific walrus haul out on on of their favorite spots; Flat Rock, Round Island, July 2019.**

**Mature male Pacific walrus spar with one another along the shoreline prior to hauling out.**





- Walrus** used Round Island through at least 24 October during the fall of 2018; use after this date is unknown due to camera failures. Walrus were spotted by local residents returning to the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary area as early as 5 March. Walrus counts of the 9 east side beaches were conducted during 17 May to 5 August. Due to a camera failure West Main photo and ground counts did not begin until 10 June; at which time walrus were already using West Main. The average number of walrus present at Round Island 17 May – 5 August, as currently calculated for all beaches, was 439. This is above the low numbers seen in 2016 (mean = 126); and above last year’s mean of 296, but below the long term 2006 – 2018 average of 708. While average numbers were above the last several years; walrus numbers were uncharacteristically low early in the season, with 39 days where numbers fell below 100. But there was only 1 day throughout the season with zero walrus at Round Island. The twelve days where numbers exceeded 1,000 all occurred after 15 July. The peak count of 5,519 walrus occurred on 1 August when Pacific walrus numbers increased significantly; with several days of 2,500 to 5,500 walrus. It is believed that these were some of the 8,000 walrus that were hauling out in the Cinder River area earlier this summer, as those walrus were no longer at that site. At the time staff left the island on 9 August there were an estimated 4,000 walrus present.

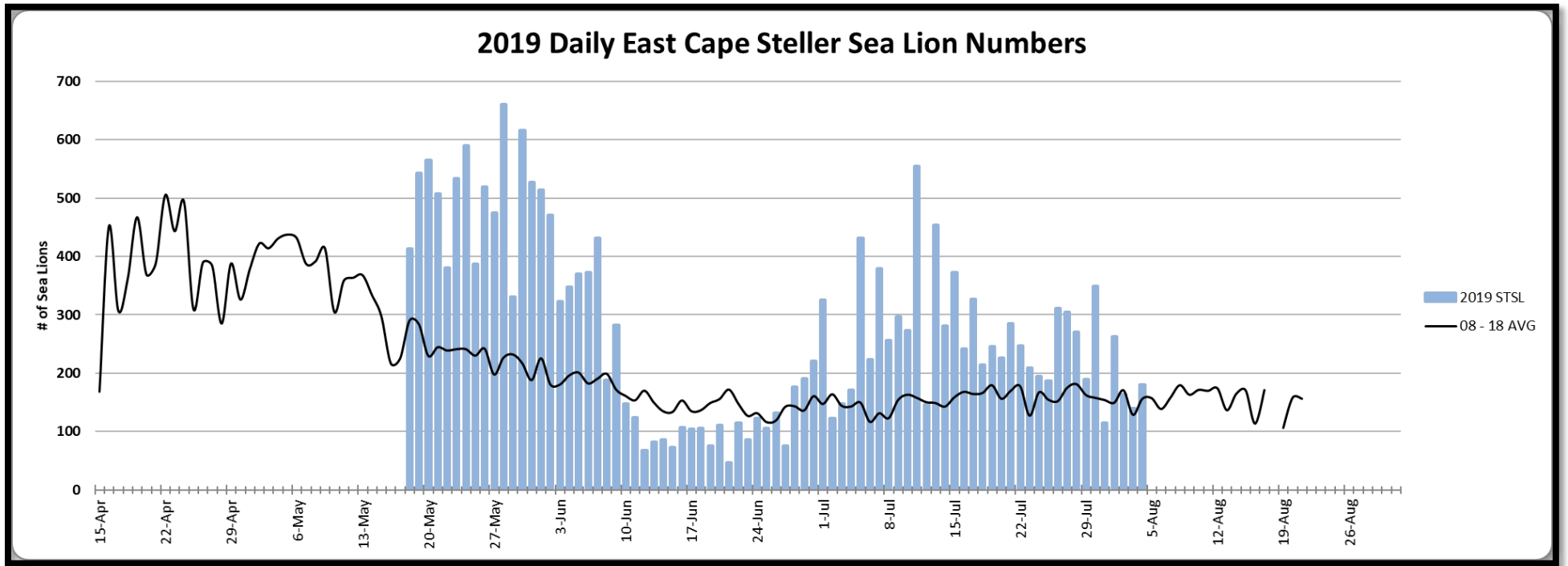


**Over 3,900 walrus hauled out along Main Beach on 1 August when walrus numbers peaked at 5,519.**

**Pacific walrus rest near the access stairway in Boat Cove. Staff and visitors use an alternate access site when walrus are in proximity to the stairway as they were on this day.**







**Steller sea lions** are present in higher numbers at the East Cape haulout in spring as sea lions congregate to feed on herring and other resources prior to breeding individuals moving off to rookeries. Even though we got a later start than normal Steller sea lions were numerous with 300 – 600 generally being present in May. The average number present was 294 compared to the long term 2008 – 2018 average of 200. A maximum number of 620 was noted on 28 May. Steller sea lion numbers generally declined in June with 100 – 200 present, then increased again in July. Brand re-sight information is still being tabulated.

There were 307 confirmed sightings of 34 marked individuals. These individuals were marked at rookeries in Ugamak Island in the eastern Aleutians; Sugarloaf Island in the Barren Islands near Kodiak, Alaska; Marmot Island near Kodiak, AK, Kozlov Cape, Russia, and Mendy Island, Russia. Staff again deployed a remote DSLR camera to opportunistically document branded and entangled animals over winter into spring 2020.

This year, three Steller sea lion pups were known to be born at the East Cape Steller sea lion haul out; one prematurely on 18 April which was likely dead at birth. Of the other two born on 9 June, one was not being cared for by adults and died within the week. The third pup was being cared for by its mother throughout the summer at East Cape and was alive and well on 8 August just prior to staff leaving the island.



In addition to daily Steller sea lion haul out censuses; staff also document marked animals which contributes to information on movements and distribution throughout the northern Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea.

Nesting chronology, productivity and population data were gathered for **black-legged kittiwakes, common murres and pelagic cormorants**. Data are still being compiled for population counts and productivity. All three species showed some nesting improvement over the last few seasons. While production on our Common murre and Black-legged kittiwake plots was low; there was some production evident from chicks and fledglings scattered around the island. Pelagic cormorants did not nest on our plots again this year, however, pelagic cormorants did successfully nest elsewhere on the island.



A young Black-legged kittiwake is cared for by its parent. Observation Point, Round Island Alaska.



A young Common murre sits among adults at its cliffside nest site. Observation Point, Round Island Alaska.



A young Black-legged kittiwake near fledging waits in nest. Observation Point, Round Island Alaska.

**Explore.org** and ADF&G staff continued their Pacific walrus camera partnership, however, during 2019 Explore made the decision not to stream the live internet feed. ADF&G continued in-season maintenance on equipment and provided some content to online discussion boards as it was made available from the island.

**Remote cameras** are seasonally deployed at selected haul outs across the island to monitor sanctuary resources in season and overwinter. These remote trail cameras provide supplemental data on pre and post season Steller sea lion and Pacific walrus haul out attendance; temperatures and weather patterns; seasonality of species; as well as trespass and disturbance evidence. Due to several camera failures during the winter of 2018-19 information on walrus haul out patterns and other resources was limited.

**Visitor Services.** One of the primary goals of the sanctuary staff in managing the visitor program is to balance the quality of the experience for the visitors while protecting wildlife and other resources. When visitors arrive on Round Island, they are given an orientation that includes the visitation regulations and policies, a brief history of the Sanctuary, a safety briefing and a demonstration on how to approach viewpoints without disturbing the animals. Pre-season permit sales totaled 20 permits (19 camp permits and 1 day visit) between 20 applicants for a potential 95 user days. Actual public visitation was 11 unguided campers; totaling 58 user days. Togiak Outfitters provided commercial transport for the 2019 season.

**Enforcement and Ivory collection.** Staff continued collecting data on anthropogenic sources and any consequent disturbances. Data on anthropogenic disturbances is still being compiled and analyzed.

Both beach cast ivory and that from mortalities is collected to discourage looters from illegally accessing and harvesting ivory from the island. This ivory is then made available to local native carvers via auctions, with proceeds going to the Pacific Walrus Conservation Fund.

Ivory collected during 2018 was sold in March at the annual Beaver Roundup festivities in Dillingham, Alaska along with other ivory collected elsewhere. A total of \$4,047.50 was generated and deposited to the Pacific Walrus Conservation Fund.