



**NOTICE TO PUBLIC**  
**BRISTOL BAY AND ALASKA PENINSULA STATE SPECIAL AREAS**

Pacific walrus have increasingly been hauling out in areas along the western coast of the Alaska Peninsula between Egegik and Unimak Island. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) is asking for your cooperation in avoiding disturbances to walruses using the Bristol Bay Critical Habitat Areas (Bristol Bay CHAs), Izembek State Game Refuge (SGR), Cape Newenham SGR, Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary (SGS), and other areas on the coast.

ADF&G manages the Bristol Bay CHAs (Egegik, Pilot Point, Cinder River, Port Heiden, and Port Moller), Izembek SGR, and Cape Newenham SGR for the protection of wildlife resources and public use. ADF&G manages the Walrus Islands SGS to protect the walruses and other game. Many activities within these legislatively designated special areas may require a Special Area Permit. Contact the ADF&G Habitat Section to determine if a permit is required for your intended use. Round Island, within the Walrus Islands SGS, also requires an Access Permit issued by ADF&G Division of Wildlife Conservation.

ADF&G Habitat Section Southcentral Region: (907) 267-2342 or [dfg.hab.infoanc@alaska.gov](mailto:dfg.hab.infoanc@alaska.gov)

Special Area Permit Information: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=uselicense.areas>

Round Island Access Permit Information: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=walrusislands.permits>

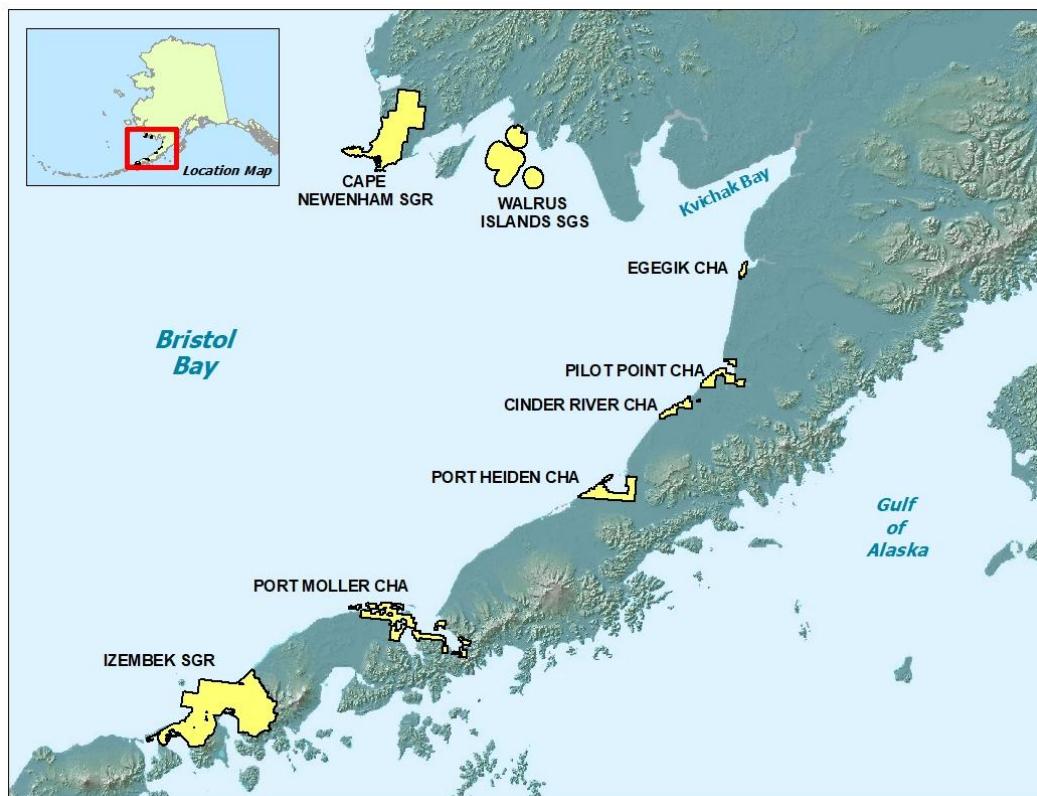
Pacific walrus in Bristol Bay and the western coast of the Alaska Peninsula come to shore to rest between trips to offshore feeding areas. These hauling out periods are important for walruses to rest and help with temperature regulation and molting. Human activity around walrus haulouts, including operating aircraft, vehicles, or boats, or approaching on foot, may result in large numbers of animals stampeding off the beach. Stampedes can result in injury and/or death to individual animals and would be considered a violation of State of Alaska regulations governing the special areas (5 AAC 95.420), unauthorized take of wildlife (AS 16.05.920 and AS 16.05.940(35)), and of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service developed the attached guidelines to help people reduce the chances of disturbing walruses with aircraft, vessels, vehicles, or on foot. These recommendations can be helpful in planning your activities in the area, but a Special Area Permit from ADF&G may still be necessary. Additionally, walrus responses to human activities are highly variable and therefore this guidance is not a guarantee that walruses will not be disturbed. If in doubt, please stay further away than the distances recommended in these guidelines.

The attached guidelines can also be accessed at the following websites.

[https://www.fws.gov/r7/fisheries/mmm/walrus/pdf/Guidelines\\_aircraft\\_pilots.pdf](https://www.fws.gov/r7/fisheries/mmm/walrus/pdf/Guidelines_aircraft_pilots.pdf)

[https://www.fws.gov/r7/fisheries/mmm/walrus/pdf/guidelines\\_mariners.pdf](https://www.fws.gov/r7/fisheries/mmm/walrus/pdf/guidelines_mariners.pdf)



*Location of Bristol Bay and Alaska Peninsula state special areas.*

ADF&G is interested in any information or observations of walruses from your planned activities. Observations can be reported to the ADF&G Lands & Refuges Program: [dfg.dwc.refuges@alaska.gov](mailto:dfg.dwc.refuges@alaska.gov) or (907) 267-2189.

# U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

## Approach & Viewing Guidelines for Pacific Walruses



### **BACKGROUND AND BEHAVIOR AWARENESS**

Walruses are highly sensitive to boats, aircraft, and human presence. Noises, smells, and sights may elicit a reaction. When hauled out in dense groups onto ice or land, calves and yearlings are particularly susceptible to being crushed during disturbance events that cause the herd to panic and stampede at these large haulouts.

### **Harassing or Disturbing Walruses is Illegal**

Pacific walruses are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (MMPA) and any human activity, including operating an aircraft, vehicle, or boat, or approaching on foot, in a manner which results in harassing walruses is prohibited. Harassment includes any act which has the potential to injure or disturb walruses and includes acts which disrupt behavioral patterns including, but not limited to migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering. Some exceptions are made for authorized scientific research and subsistence harvest by Alaska Natives.

When viewing walruses on land, ensure that your actions do not cause a change in their behavior. Since individual animal's reactions will vary, carefully observe animals and leave the vicinity if you observe any of the following behaviors (generally listed in increasing intensity of disturbance):

- Several individuals raising their heads simultaneously
- Increased vocalizations
- Increased interactions with other animals
- Aggressive behavior by animals towards the disturbance
- Movement towards the water
- Hurried entry into the water

Walruses in the water can be disturbed by underwater sounds produced by a vessel's engines and propellers.

Cautiously move away from the animals if you observe any of the following behaviors:

- Rapid changes in direction or swimming speed
- Erratic swimming patterns
- Grouping up and "head bobbing" to investigate the source of the disturbance
- Escape tactics such as prolonged diving, underwater exhalation, underwater course changes, or rapid swimming at the surface
- Females attempting to shield a calf with her body or by her movements

### **GUIDELINES FOR LAND BASED APPROACHES AND VIEWING**

Approach walruses hauled out on land unobtrusively. Viewing should be accomplished without the animal's awareness of your presence. You may not be the only one that day that has approached these same animals, please be aware that increasing levels of disturbance may occur with each successive visit. Using binoculars and telephoto lenses to view or photograph animals from a safe distance can help ensure that animals are not disturbed.

Avoid detection by sight, smell or sound:

- Do not approach on motorized vehicles. Park vehicles out of sight at least 0.5 mile away and approach by foot, moving slowly and staying hidden behind natural cover.
- Approach viewing areas quietly, avoid conversation, noisy movements and loose clothing that may flap in the wind.
- Approach from downwind; avoid smoking and use of scented and fragrant products.
- Keep a low profile and avoid being backlit against skylines, or other light backgrounds.
- Do not wear brightly colored clothes.

## **GUIDELINES FOR MARINE VESSELS**

Motor vessels should maintain a buffer from walruses hauled out on land or ice to avoid disturbance:

- Marine vessels 50 feet in length or less should remain at least 0.5 mile away from hauled out walruses.
- Marine vessels 50 - 100 feet should remain at least 1 mile from hauled out walruses.

Sound carries a long way across the water and often reverberates off of cliffs and bluffs adjacent to coastal walrus haulouts amplifying the level of noise. Avoid sudden changes in engine noise, using loud speakers, loud deck equipment or other operations that produce noise when in the vicinity of walruses.

Vessels traveling in a predictable manner appear to be less disturbing to animals. Avoid excessive speed or sudden changes in speed or direction when operating near walruses in the water. Harassment or pursuit of marine mammals is prohibited by law. Never attempt to herd, chase, or separate groups of walruses.

## **GUIDELINES FOR AIRCRAFT AND DRONES**

Walruses are particularly sensitive to changes in engine noise and are more likely to stampede off beaches when aircraft turn or fly overhead. Aerial photography of walruses from manned aircraft or unmanned aircraft systems (drones) poses a high potential for disturbance and is specifically discouraged. To help prevent disturbances, please follow these general guidelines when operating aircraft near walrus herds along the coast:

- Pilots of single engine manned aircraft and UAS devices should not knowingly fly over or fly within 0.5 mile of walruses hauled out on land or ice to avoid causing a disturbance. If weather or aircraft safety require flight operations within 0.5 mile of walruses, aircrafts should maintain a 2000' minimum altitude.
- Pilots of helicopters and multi-engine aircraft should not knowingly fly over or fly within 1 mile of walruses hauled out on land or ice to avoid causing a disturbance. If weather or aircraft safety require flight operations within 1 mile of a haulout site, helicopters and multi-engine aircraft should maintain a 3000' minimum altitude.
- Landings, take-offs, and taxiing should not occur within 0.5 mile of hauled out walruses for single engine aircraft or within 1 mile for multiple engine aircraft and helicopters. Please be aware that some locations have prohibitions on landing and takeoffs, check with the applicable land manager.
- Avoid unnecessary circling or turning near walruses hauled out on land or ice.
- Please be aware that some locations have stricter recommendations (such as Round Island within the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary). Pilots are requested to maintain a minimum altitude of 5,000 feet above ground level within a 3 mile radius of Round Island (58° 36' N. 159° 58' W.). Access to Round Island or adjacent waters requires written permission from ADF&G. Please check with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game for additional restrictions.

If aircraft safety requires flight operations below these recommended altitudes, please pass inland or seaward (within safe gliding distance to shore) of the haulout site at the greatest lateral distance manageable for safe operation of the aircraft (a minimum of 1 mile if possible).

Please note these are only guidelines, and may not prevent disturbances in all situations. You are responsible for your actions and operating your aircraft or marine vessel in a manner which does not cause disturbance or violate the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Marine Mammal Management Office  
1011 East Tudor Road  
Anchorage, AK 99503  
1-800-362-5148

To report incidences of harassment, injury, or potential wasteful harvest please contact:  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement 1-877-535-1795 or 1-800-858-7621.

# Flight Advisory for Pacific Walrus



## Bristol Bay

**The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seeks your support and cooperation in minimizing disturbances to walrus herds resting throughout Bristol Bay, Alaska.**

### HAULOUT LOCATIONS

Regularly used walrus haulout locations in Bristol Bay include Cape Newenham, Cape Pierce, Cape Senievain, Cape Grieg, Hagemeister Island, and Round Island. Sporadically used haulout locations include Izembek Lagoon (Cape Glaznap and Neuman Island), Amak Island, and Cape Sarichef and Okseno Point on Unimak Island. See graphics depicted on following pages.

**THESE ARE IMPORTANT RESTING AREAS FOR PACIFIC WALRUSES.** Each summer, thousands of male walruses migrate into Bristol Bay to feed on rich beds of clams and other marine organisms. Between feeding cycles, they come to shore to rest at isolated resting areas (haulouts) distributed throughout Bristol Bay.

**WALRUSES ARE SENSITIVE TO HUMAN DISTURBANCES.** Although responses to human activities are variable, walruses will often flee haulouts in response to the sight, sound, or odor of humans or their machines. Trampling deaths associated with haulout disturbance is one of the largest known sources of natural mortality for walrus. Frequent or prolonged disturbances may even result in haulout abandonment.

**HARASSING OR DISTURBING WALRUSES IS AGAINST THE LAW.** Any human activity, including operating an aircraft, vehicle, or boat, or approaching on foot, in a manner which results in harassing walruses is prohibited under provisions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Harassment includes any act which has the potential to injure or disturb walruses and includes acts which disrupt behavioral patterns including, but not limited to migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering.

**YOU CAN HELP MINIMIZE DISTURBANCE TO WALRUSES RESTING ALONG THE BRISTOL BAY COAST.** Walrus are particularly sensitive to changes in engine noise and are more likely to stampede off beaches when planes turn or fly low overhead. Aerial photography of walruses from manned aircraft or unmanned aircraft systems (drones) poses a high potential for disturbance and is specifically discouraged. In an effort to prevent disturbances, please follow these general guidelines when operating aircraft near walrus herds.

**Pilots of single engine manned aircraft and drones should not knowingly fly over or fly within 1/2 mile of walruses hauled out on land or ice to avoid causing a disturbance. If weather or aircraft safety require flight operations within 1/2 mile of walruses, small single engine aircraft should maintain a 2000' minimum altitude.**

**Pilots of helicopters and multi-engine aircraft should not knowingly fly over or fly within 1 mile of walruses hauled out on land or ice to avoid causing a disturbance. If aircraft safety requires flight operations within 1 mile of walruses, helicopters and multi-engine aircraft should maintain a 3000' minimum altitude.**

**If aircraft safety requires flight operations below these recommended altitudes, please pass inland or seaward (within safe gliding distance to shore) of the haulout site at the greatest lateral distance manageable for safe operation of the aircraft (1 mile if possible).**

Please be aware that some locations have stricter recommendations (such as Round Island within the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary) Pilots are requested to maintain a minimum altitude of 5,000 feet above ground level within a 3 mile radius of Round Island (58° 36' N. 159° 58' W.). Access to Round Island or adjacent waters requires written permission from ADF&G. Please check with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game for additional restrictions.

Please note these are only guidelines, and may not prevent disturbances in all situations. You are responsible for operating your aircraft in a manner which does not cause disturbance or violate the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

## **THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP AND COOPERATION**

To report incidences of disturbance or harassment please contact:

U.S Fish and Wildlife Service  
Division of Law Enforcement:  
4403 Lear Court Anchorage  
Alaska 99502  
Toll free: 1-800-858-7621

For questions about walruses please contact:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Marine Mammals Management Field Office  
1011 E. Tudor Road  
Anchorage Alaska 99503-6199  
Toll free: 1-800-362-5148  
<https://www.fws.gov/program/alaska-marine-mammals-management-office>



# How to avoid disturbance of Pacific walruses in Bristol Bay

## *Guidelines for Mariners*

In Bristol Bay during the months of March through December, walruses may be encountered in the water and resting on shore at Round and Hagemeister Islands, Capes Peirce, Newenham, Seniavin, Greig and Cinder River. Round Island is part of the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary and there are state regulations specific to that area mariners should follow. The guidelines provided here do not supersede or amend the state's regulations for Round Island.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) prohibits the take of all marine mammal species in U.S. waters. Take is defined as "to harass, hunt, capture, or kill, or attempt to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal." Harassment is defined under the MMPA as "any act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance which has the potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild; or has the potential to disturb a marine

mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild by causing disruption of behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering." Take is further defined by regulation to include feeding or attempting to feed a marine mammal in the wild. Some exceptions are made for authorized scientific research and subsistence hunting by Alaska Natives.

### **Disturbance**

Marine mammals swimming or hauled out on land, rock or ice are sensitive to boats, and human presence. Noises, smells, and sights may elicit a flight reaction. Trampling deaths associated with haulout disturbance are among the largest known sources of natural mortality for walruses. Frequent or prolonged disturbances may even result in long-term haulout abandonment. Your vessel may not be the only one that day that has interacted with a particular group of walruses, please be aware that increasing levels of disturbance may



*Pacific walrus fleeing a terrestrial haulout in response to human induced disturbance.*

occur with each successive interaction.

### **Signs of Disturbance**

Signs of disturbance to animals hauled out on the beach may include any of the following behaviors (generally listed in increasing intensity of disturbance):

- Several individuals raising their heads simultaneously
- Increased vocalizations
- Increased interactions among individuals in the herd
- Aggressive behavior by animals towards the disturbance Movement towards the water
- Hurried entry into the water

Much of the disturbance that impacts marine mammals in the water is related to underwater sound produced by a vessel's engines and propellers. Cautiously move away from the animals if you observe any of the following behaviors:

- Rapid changes in direction or swimming speed
- Erratic swimming patterns
- Grouping up and “head bobbing” to investigate the source of the disturbance
- Escape tactics such as prolonged diving, underwater exhalation, underwater course changes, or rapid swimming at the surface
- Females attempting to shield a calf with her body or by her movements

#### **Guidelines for Vessel Operation**

Note that state waters (0 – 3 nautical miles) around Round Island, within the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary are closed to all access without prior authorization under state regulations.

The following should be observed for all other Bristol Bay haulouts:



Anthony Fischbach USGS

*Walrus mortality due to disturbance*

- Maintain a buffer between their vessel and walruses hauled out on land or ice to avoid disturbance.
- Assume that known walrus haulouts will be occupied.
- Vessels 50 feet in length or less should remain at least a 0.5 nautical mile away from a walrus haulout.
- Vessels 50–100 feet in length should remain at least 1 nautical mile away from a walrus haulout.
- Vessels greater than 100 feet in length should remain at least 3 nautical miles away from a walrus haulout.
- All vessels should refrain from anchoring, or conducting tendering or fishing operations within 3 miles of hauled out walruses.

- Reduce noise levels near haulouts. Avoid sudden changes in engine noise, using loud speakers, loud deck equipment or other operations that produce noise when in the vicinity of walrus haulouts.
- Avoid excessive speed or sudden changes in speed or direction when approaching or departing walrus haulout areas. Vessels traveling in a predictable manner appear to be less disturbing to swimming walruses.

Mariners should take every precaution to avoid harassment of concentrations of walruses in the water. Harassment or pursuit of marine mammals is prohibited by under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Never attempt to herd, chase, or separate groups of walruses.

- Reduce speed and maintain a minimum 0.5 nautical mile exclusion zone around feeding walruses.
- Don't operate your vessel in such a way as to separate members of a group of walruses from other members of the group.
- When weather conditions require, such as when visibility drops, vessels should adjust speed accordingly to avoid the likelihood of injury to walruses.

**To report incidences of disturbance or harassment contact:**  
**U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska**  
**Division of Law Enforcement**  
**4403 Lear Court Anchorage**  
**Alaska 99502**  
**Toll free: 1-800-858-7621**

**For more information about walruses, contact:****U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska**  
**Marine Mammals Management Field Office**  
**1011 E. Tudor Road, MS-341**  
**Anchorage, Alaska 99503**  
**907/786 3800 or 800/362 5148**