Environmental Studies Program: Ongoing Study

Title	Subsistence Harvest and Iñupiaq Knowledge of Beluga Whales for Kaktovik, Alaska (AK-20-06)
Administered by	Anchorage, Alaska Office
BOEM Contact(s)	TBD
Conducting Organizations(s)	TBD
Total BOEM Cost	TBD
Performance Period	FY 2020–2023
Final Report Due	TBD
Date Revised	April 14, 2020
PICOC Summary	
Problem	OCS resource developments could affect residents of Kaktovik and their subsistence way of life. Available information about where and when Kaktovik harvests beluga whales and associated traditional knowledge is either limited or dated and tends to be scattered among multiple sources.
Intervention	BOEM proposes a comprehensive synthesis of knowledge about beluga hunting for Kaktovik to learn about changes and analyze potential impacts of resource developments. This will include documentation of past practices and conditions, including indigenous knowledge of how people hunt belugas, and the cultural significance of belugas and beluga harvest.
Comparison	BOEM will compare study results and insights with existing data and management plans of the Alaska Beluga Whale Committee and the North Slope Borough. BOEM will also compare study results and insights with existing data from state and federal studies, including previous BOEM studies examining subsistence practices.
Outcome	BOEM will learn how people in Kaktovik currently hunt belugas and the cultural importance of beluga harvest. BOEM will gain spatial, temporal, and contextual information about beluga hunting to support impact analyses.
Context	Offshore waters of the Beaufort Sea in and around Kaktovik.

BOEM Information Need(s): BOEM needs up-to-date information on where, when, and how people in Kaktovik harvest beluga whales to inform National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analyses. BOEM will use the information to describe the affected environment, develop alternatives, and analyze potential impacts to the community from exploration and development activities. BOEM needs accurate harvest location and search data to define hunting areas for temporal and spatial mitigation measures.

Background: Beluga whales are the most abundant whale in the Beaufort Sea and provide an important source of food for people living in the North Slope Borough (NSB, 2014). Beluga is a core subsistence species for Kaktovik; in 2011, beluga was widely shared in the community; 76 percent of households reported using beluga whale for

subsistence purposes; and households used on average 121 pounds of beluga in 2011 (Kofinas *et al.*, 2016).

To better understand this important resource, this study will tie into other efforts, including the Beluga Whale Management Plan (ABWC, 1995) and harvest monitoring programs of the Alaska Beluga Whale Committee, as well as research and management conducted by the North Slope Borough. The study will complement and interpret existing information found in previous BOEM-funded studies of subsistence activities in the Beaufort and Chukchi seas (*e.g.*, SRBA, 2010; SRBA, 2013; Kofinas *et al.*, 2016).

Objectives:

- Evaluate baseline temporal and spatial data about subsistence beluga hunting in Kaktovik.
- Document how the people of Kaktovik hunt belugas and how beluga is processed.
- Examine the cultural importance of belugas and beluga harvest for Kaktovik.

Methods: For the first phase of the study, researchers will review and synthesize existing information (*e.g.*, ethnographies and harvest reports) about beluga hunting in Kaktovik. They will coordinate with the Alaska Beluga Whale Committee and the North Slope Borough DWM to obtain harvest records. The researchers will work to establish a trusting relationship with hunters and other residents of the community. Following the principles of conducting research with indigenous communities (IARPC, 2018), they will meet with community members to discuss their research plans and obtain input for the project, including but not limited to: which methods are appropriate, potential key informants, and what type of study products the community would like to receive.

For the second phase of the study, researchers will be present at Kaktovik for two seasons to document all aspects of the hunts. They will record details about hunts and harvests and may collect locations for hunting areas and beluga sightings. In addition, researchers will incorporate subsistence mapping, participant observation with field notes, and key informant interviews. Beluga hunters, elders, and other key informants will be selected using a referral technique called snowball sampling to participate in appropriate study activities (Bernard, 2006). Interviews will be audio recorded and modeled after established ethnographic techniques (Bernard, 2006; SRBA, 2010).

Study products will include a map of the subsistence use area for beluga searching, herding, and harvesting and a synthesis report that incorporates study findings, maps, transcripts, and photographs. Researchers will ask the community how to best develop audience-appropriate presentations and products such as written summaries in glossy brochure format and short videos in documentary format. The study will hire local residents to provide research assistance whenever practicable. Appropriate honoraria will be provided to project participants.

Specific Research Question(s):

1. What is the history of beluga hunting in Kaktovik?

2. How and why has beluga hunting changed over time?
3. Where and when do people hunt belugas?
4. How do people hunt and process belugas?
5. What is the cultural significance of belugas and beluga harvests for Kaktovik?

Current Status: In Procurement (ISD approved by CO)

Publications Completed: None

Affiliated WWW Sites: http://www.boem.gov/akstudies/

References:

Alaska Beluga Whale Committee (ABWC). 1995. Alaska Beluga Whale Management Plan. Kotzebue, AK: Alaska Beluga Whale Committee, 7 pp. (http://www.north-slope.org/assets/images/uploads/ABWC_Mngt_Plan.pdf)

Bernard, H.R. 2006. Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. Fourth Edition. New York: Altimira. 803 pp.

Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee (IARPC). 2018. Principles for Conducting Research in the Arctic. Washington D.C., 4 pp. (https://www.iarpccollaborations.org/uploads/cms/documents/principles_for_conducting_research_in_the_arctic_final_2018.pdf)

Kofinas, G., S.B. BurnSilver, J. Magdanz, R. Stotts, and M. Okada. 2016. Subsistence Sharing Networks and Cooperation: Kaktovik, Wainwright, and Venetie, Alaska. OCS Study BOEM 2015-023. Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska Fairbanks, School of Natural Resources and Extension, 263 pp.

NSB. 2014. Kaktovik Comprehensive Development Plan. Barrow, AK: North Slope Borough, Department of Planning and Community Services, 103 pp.

SRBA. 2010. Subsistence Mapping of Nuiqsut, Kaktovik, and Barrow. OCS Study MMS 2009-003. Anchorage, AK: Stephen R. Braund and Associates, 349 pp.

SRBA. 2013. COMIDA: Impact Monitoring for Offshore Subsistence Hunting, Wainwright and Point Lay, Alaska. OCS Study BOEM 2013-211. Anchorage, AK: Stephen R. Braund and Associates, 268 pp.