

**DRAFT – September 30, 2024**  
**REVISED DRAFT – January 9, 2025**



## ICE SEAL CO-MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING **AGENDA**

**Mar 12, 2024 - 9:00 am to 5:00 pm**

**Federal Building Annex**  
222 West 8<sup>th</sup> Ave A-35, Anchorage, AK 99513

March 12, 2024

1. Call to order 9:26
2. Invocation Given by Sam Gosuk
3. Roll Call Jennifer Hooper  
Timothy Smith  
Billy Adams  
Anne Marie Eich  
Barbara Mahoney (virtual)  
Michael Cameron  
Chuck Menadelook (arrived at lunch time)
4. Introductions & meeting logistics
 

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Billy Adams – ISC</li> <li>Sam Gosuk – ISC</li> <li>Anne Marie Eich – NOAA</li> <li>Devin Sheldon – ISC</li> <li>Cyrus Harris – ISC</li> <li>Jenna Malik – NOAA<sup>1</sup></li> <li>Sierra Franks – NOAA</li> <li>Jared Nayakik – ISC</li> <li>Joe Leavitt – ISC</li> <li>Jennifer Hooper – ISC</li> <li>Andy Von Duyke – ISC</li> <li>Michael Cameron – NOAA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wybon Rivers – ISC</li> <li>Albert Simon I – ISC</li> <li>Albert Simon II – ISC</li> <li>Timothy Smith – ISC</li> <li>Kimberly Pikok – UAF ISC</li> <li>Barbara Mahoney – NOAA</li> <li>Erin Moreland – NOAA</li> <li>Heather Ziel – NOAA</li> <li>Skyla Walcott – NOAA</li> <li>Tammy Olson – NOAA</li> <li>Tyson Kade – ISC VNF</li> <li>Lauren Divine – Aleut Comm. St. Paul</li> </ul>
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5. Drop “Roberts Rules of Order” – Agree to proceed by consensus Dropped
6. Select chair from the ISC (ISC will generate meeting minutes) Billy Adams

<sup>1</sup> Ringed Seal Recovery Coordinator

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- 7. Adopt Agenda Adopted
- 8. Approve **March 23, 2023** CoMgmt Committee minutes Moved by A. Simon I  
Adopted by consent
- 9. NOAA NMFS Alaska Regional Office
  - A. Ringed seal 5-year review.....Anne Marie Eich

NOAA finalized the 5-year status review for ringed seals. Next step is to complete a recovery plan. Bearded seal 5-year status review is set for January of 2025. It is most efficient to combine both bearded and ringed seals into a single recovery plan.

Albert Simon I: Asked what a recovery plan is all about.

Anne Marie Eich:

Introduced Jenna Malik (ringed seal recovery coordinator). Introduced Caroline Cummings (not present) as the bearded seal recovery coordinator. Anne Marie Eich mentioned that the primary focus is for listing ringed and bearded seals. Jenna Malik discussed potential steps for putting together a recovery plan. Non-regulatory documents. NOAA to work with co-managers.

Billy Adams:

Acknowledged Albert Simon’s question and asked what is “recovery”? What will be “triggered” after the development of a recovery plan? Why do we need a recovery plan if animals are healthy, resilient, adaptable, and abundant (500K seals)?

Tammy Olson:

Explained the ESA process with respect to listing and a recovery plan. In a recovery plan, it states what actions will be done in the period of the threats. There is a reliance on stakeholder input. Recovery plans can help get funding.

Andy Von Duyke: Stated that the polar bear recovery plan was a good process.

Anne Marie Eich:

Stated that they were actually looking at the polar bear recovery plan – which was more of a conservation plan (vs. recovery) – as an example. She said this is very much in the early planning stages.

Jenna Malik:

Discussed some more thoughts on what would go into a recovery plan.

Sam Gosuk:

Asked about bearded seals. Expressed his concern about commercial trawlers, which caused him to ask what’s going happening on the seafloor after trawling?

## B. Other topics.....Barbara Mahoney

## 1) Stranding network

Barbara Mahoney gave a stranding network update.  
Strandings have dropped to the average and so the current UME will soon be closed.

## 2) Marine Mammal Health

Alopecia in some seals was reported by hunters.  
Gray whale UME (2019-2023) will close. Both UMEs are associated with warm winters of 2018-19.

## 3) Monthly call-in meetings

Call occurs on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month.

Billy Adams:

Commented about “normal” levels of marine mammal strandings over time and that sick and dying animals are part of the ecosystem. He wondered when strandings were first monitored?

Barbara Mahoney:

Mentioned that NOAA regions have monitored for different time periods... longer out east, shorter in the west and in Alaska. MMPA in 1994 created the Stranding Network. Value of monitoring helps to determine what is unusual. Numbers vary with species.

Cyrus Harris:

Asked whether there was a population abundance estimate for species during the UME? (e.g., did they hit carrying capacity?)

Michael Cameron:

Summarized efforts to estimate abundance. In short, we don't enough data yet to determine a trend (but we hope to after the aerial surveys planned for 2025). NOAA does have evidence of a decline in seal body condition (in pups and for ribbon seals of all age classes), based on data collected during our April tagging expeditions.

Wybon Rivers:

Commented about bearded and ringed seal recovery plans. Does not think a recovery plan is necessary in regions where there are abundant mammals, like Scammon Bay.

Albert Simon I:

Expressed the need to study climate change effects and also mentioned the Typhoon Merbok. Commented that climate change is already having a big effect.

Anne Marie Eich:

Acknowledged that the head of the Office of Protected Resources visited Nome, Savoonga, Utqiagvik, and Anchorage. She met with AEW, ISC, NSB. The NOAA director came away with a better understanding about food safety and food security.

Will soon be doing a Strait Science talk to discuss what they heard and have Q & A.  
Overall it was a very informative and helpful trip for NOAA.

## 10. NOAA NMFS

A. 2024 Ice Seal Aerial Survey update & plans for 2025 .....Erin Moreland

Summary is available at:

[https://www.iceseals.org/\\_files/ugd/a3b1bd\\_a68b12aa4d1140bb938cd16758dc460c.pdf](https://www.iceseals.org/_files/ugd/a3b1bd_a68b12aa4d1140bb938cd16758dc460c.pdf)

Billy Adams:

Asked the Bering Sea hunters when is the best time to do this type of research? He noted that timing and working with hunters is critical.

Erin Moreland:

Pointed out that limitations may cause differential success in surveys and stated that MML will not compare lower quality surveys as meaningful or equivalent to quality surveys. It really depends on what the weather conditions will allow.

Albert Simon:

Commented that during March and April they see bearded seals along with ringed seals. The best time to see seals on the ice is during March-April. By May, most seals will be in the water. Most seals present in May will be spotted seals. As the sea ice recedes, the ringed and bearded seals become scarcer. In late fall (November) a lot of seals are visible, including ringed, ribbon, and spotted seals.

Erin Moreland:

Mentioned that the Bering, Chukchi, Beaufort survey in 2025 will account for the movement of seals.

Wybon Rivers:

Mentioned the presence of high numbers of spotted seals on their coastal barrier islands. Also, a lot of young bearded seals occupy the Yukon Delta. He advocated for the need to bring researchers to this area.

Barbara Mahoney: Asked about comparable data points with 2012-13.

Erin Moreland: Answered that 2025 will be the next comparable data point.

Cyrus Harris:

Asked about getting in touch with local communities to update them on what is going on.

Erin Moreland:

Answered that Michael Cameron has been reaching out. With respect to Kotzebue, NOAA will connect with Alex Whiting.

Michael Cameron:

Summarized the efforts to reduce impacts, including increased flyover speed, higher altitude, and observing specific buffer zones. Gambell and Savoonga may allow flights<sup>2</sup> under certain conditions.

Andy Von Duyke:

Mentioned the 2025 Bowhead Census and that it would be good to coordinate, especially if there is value in working together.

Sam Gosuk:

Provided information on seal locations and numbers in Bristol Bay. He also mentioned tides and that low tide is better.

B. 2024 Ice Seal Research Cruise update ..... Heather Ziel

Summary is available at:

[https://www.iceseals.org/files/ugd/a3b1bd\\_7d9d86d353714589a37de89faf17fd9c.pdf](https://www.iceseals.org/files/ugd/a3b1bd_7d9d86d353714589a37de89faf17fd9c.pdf)

Wybon Rivers: Asked about tag placement on seals.

Michael Cameron:

Gave a summary of why tags are placed where they are. **ISC recommended that head mounted tags not be used** (e.g., in bearded seals this may cause difficulties in using head to break ice). There is very little difference in satellite tracking data based on tag placement, and so back mounted tags are OK.

An exception to this would be for ribbon seals, which linger in the water a lot during certain times of the year<sup>3</sup>. Michael Cameron asked if it would be OK to head mount tags on ribbon seals only in order to get good data. Other species would keep back mounted tags.

Billy Adams:

Suggested that the ISC consider and get back to Michael Cameron's question about head mounted tags. He also strongly suggested that this may be more of a regional question. Perhaps it would be good to ask the communities that subsist on ribbon seals.

Wybon Rivers:

Suggested that Kotlik may be a good community to work with to ask about head mounted tags.

Billy Adams:

Asked about how many seals will be tagged. How many years of tagging?

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Cameron noted that MML had not yet had a chance to discuss buffers at St. Lawrence Island since their changes in leadership.

<sup>3</sup> Note that when the antenna of a satellite transmitter tag is submerged, it cannot communicate with the satellites overhead and not data will be uploaded.

Michael Cameron:

Replied that roughly 20 ribbon seals + 20 spotted seals will be captured and tagged. Tag duration depends on molt. Roughly 7 tags will go on before the molt and 14 tags will be attached after the molt. This means that the 14 seals with post-molt tags will carry them for about 9-10 months. The Marine Mammal Lab is highly interested in ribbon seals. In 2018, during a very low sea ice year, almost no adult ribbon seals were seen. There is interest in the current ribbon seal population now that sea ice is not as low. He anticipates that tagging all species will continue bi-annually for the foreseeable future.

Wybon Rivers:

Mentioned that the ribbon seals bleed a lot.

Heather Ziel:

Responded to Wybon’s concern about bleeding with a short explanation of how researchers control bleeding when they punch holes in the rear flipper to mount the SPOT tags.

Wybon Rivers:

Asked about whether tagged seals are healthy to eat?

Joe Mello Leavitt:

Asked if the seals would be tranquilized?

Heather Ziel:

Mentioned that some seals were lightly sedated, and were marked with a small flipper tag. The sedation is similar to that used on pregnant women.

Wybon Rivers:

Concerned about the presence of a tumor on a tagged caribou.

Michael Cameron:

Replied that the tumor was not related to being tagged.

LUNCH BREAK 12:25

RESUME MEETING 14:02

C. Alaska Native Participant Discussion.....Michael Cameron

Summary is available at:

[https://9140719a-5da1-4927-97fa-210ed5d57409.filesusr.com/ugd/a3b1bd\\_39ca3c6a4e53416f8547f8ab29af4e6e.pdf](https://9140719a-5da1-4927-97fa-210ed5d57409.filesusr.com/ugd/a3b1bd_39ca3c6a4e53416f8547f8ab29af4e6e.pdf)

Michael Cameron: Provided a historical summary of co-management projects.

Albert Simon I: Asked for clarification on seal age classes.

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Michael Cameron:

Summarized the following age classes:

- **Pup:** Seal that is still presumed to be nursing (i.e., not weaned)
- **Young of Year (YOY):** Seal <1yr old that is no longer nursing (i.e., weaned)
- **Sub-adult:** A seal  $\geq 1$  yr old that is thought to not yet be sexually mature (i.e., not a pup, YOY, or adult).
- **Adult:** Seal that is sexually mature

Jennifer Hooper: Asked about public relations regarding Alaska Native involvement in research.

Michael Cameron:

Answered Jennifer’s question by noting that the Marine Mammal Lab has a Tribal Research Coordinator (Mabel) who will be doing lots of outreach.

Albert Simon: Asked about emergency response.

Michael Cameron:

Responded that all NOAA have emergency training. Evacuation (if needed) would occur at St. Paul or at the closest port. Boats have eperbs etc.

Michael Cameron:

Also provided a summary of the aerial survey work as it pertains to the involvement of Alaska Native participants from local communities.

Jennifer Hooper: Asked about training.

Erin Moreland:

Responded with a short description of the online training modules.

Jennifer Hooper:

Mentioned the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program as a good source for participants.

Sam Gosuk:

Asked whether there can be other applications for other species?

Michael Cameron:

Described the crew tasks on the plane. If observers saw something interesting, then this would be noted. Not permitted to fly over eiders or large walrus haul-outs.

D. Trophic Roles Project.....Michael Cameron

Summary is available at:

[https://www.iceseals.org/files/ugd/a3b1bd\\_8b8ada4651794d819ba5a92d4fb1aacd.pdf](https://www.iceseals.org/files/ugd/a3b1bd_8b8ada4651794d819ba5a92d4fb1aacd.pdf)

11. Ice Seal Committee

A. Details to consider when hiring AK Native participants in research

- 1) Pay scale / Insurance requirements
- 2) Mechanisms to facilitate payment and insurance coverage for AK Native participants

Andy Von Duyke:

Brought up the need to adequately pay participants, and also insure them. Need to hope for the best and plan for the worst. These are very dangerous things to do.

Wybon Rivers:

Asked about the risks from walruses, bears, etc. when working on the ice.

12. Date for next meeting

This topic was tabled until the ISC Board Meeting

13. Closing comments

Chuck Menadelook:

Made comments about climate change, Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs), and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in seals. HPAI is a big deal, it is coming to Alaska, and we need to prepare.

14. Adjourn

**Executive session** (if needed).....CoMgmt Committee members only

- 1. Attendance policy needs to be clarified, and fair.
- 2. Need for alternates, one for the hunter representative and one for the regional representative.
- 3. Hunter representatives should be “active” hunters, be vetted by their region/community, and be tribally **approved**.
- 4. Regional representatives to be vetted and approved by their tribal consortium’s board.
- 5. Regional authorization for ISC should be clarified and renewed if necessary.
- 6. Honoraria should be pursued by the next meeting. This will make the meetings more focused and functional, and provide incentives for participation.
- 7. Table By-Laws till next meeting.
- 8. 2024 ISC Fall Meeting to be held virtually on 30-Sept 2024 from 0900-1300 AKT.
- 9. 2025 ISC Spring Meeting to be held in-person in January (immediately before AMSS and into the weekend)

**Acronyms**

<b>AEWC</b>	Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission	<b>NMFS</b>	National Marine Fisheries Service
<b>ANSEP</b>	Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program	<b>NOAA</b>	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
<b>HAB</b>	Harmful Algal Bloom	<b>UME</b>	Unusual Mortality Event
<b>HPAI</b>	Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza	<b>VNF</b>	Van Ness Feldman (law firm)
<b>ISC</b>	Ice Seal Committee	<b>YOY</b>	Young of the Year