



**CO-OPS ENVIRONMENTAL BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (BMP'S)
CHECKLIST FOR WORK IN ALASKA**

Version 2.0, March
2025

Date of proposed visit:

Name station(s) covered by this form:

		COMMENTS
<p>PROTECTION OF STELLER SEA LION CRITICAL HABITAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was the vessel separation distance of 3 nautical miles (nm) from Steller sea lion critical habitat, rookeries, and other haulouts/rookeries observed during operations. If you must enter these areas to conduct the project, contact akr.prd.section7@noaa.gov during project planning to determine how to proceed. - Steller sea lion critical habitat - Coordinates and maps of rookery locations 		
<p>PROTECTION OF POLAR BEAR HABITAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensured that vessels maintained a 1.6 kilometer (km) (1 mile [mi]) separation distance from polar bears observed on ice, land, or water. - Kept alert to potential presence of polar bears, visually monitored the area and adjacent waters. Were especially vigilant for swimming bears. If a swimming bear(s) was encountered, allowed it to continue unhindered. Never approached, herded, chased, or attempted to lure swimming bear(s). Reduced speed when visibility was low and avoided sudden changes in travel direction. - Navigated slowly, steered around polar bears, and did not approach, circle, pursue, or otherwise forced bears to change direction when observed in the water. - Avoided multiple changes in direction and speed and did not restrict bears' movements on land or sea. - Did not conduct activities within 1.6 km (1 mi) of known or suspected polar bear dens. - Polar bear eco regions 		
<p>PROTECTION OF PACIFIC WALRUS HABITAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintained an appropriate minimum distance from walrus haulouts on ice or land: vessels less than 15 m (50 ft) in length – 1 km (0.5 nm); vessels 15 m or more but less than 30 m (100 ft) in length – 1.8 km (1 nm); vessels 30 m (100 ft) or more in length – 5.5 km (3 nm). - Reduced noise levels near haulouts. Avoided abrupt maneuvers, sudden changes in engine noise, using loudspeakers, loud deck equipment, or other operations that produced noise when in the vicinity of walrus haulouts. - Did not operate the vessel in such a way as to separate members of a group of walrus from other members of the group. Reduced speed and maintained a minimum distance of 0.8 km (0.5 mi) from groups of walrus in the water. - If walrus approached the vessel or were found to be in close proximity, placed boat engines in neutral and allowed the animals to pass. If vessel safety considerations prevented this, carefully steered around animals. - When weather conditions required, such as when visibility dropped, adjusted speed accordingly to avoid the likelihood of injury to walrus. Map of Pacific walrus habitat 		

PROTECTION OF NORTHERN SEA OTTER HABITAT

- Did not operate vessels in such a way as to separate sea otters from other members of their group.
- If northern sea otters were observed in groups of fewer than 10 animals, did not approach within 100 m (109 yd). If the group size was greater than 10, do not approach within 500 m (547 yd).
- [Map of northern sea otter habitat](#)

PROTECTION OF SPECTACLED AND STELLER'S EIDER DUCKS

- Avoided areas with congregations of spectacled eider and Steller's eider, and were extra vigilant in passes more heavily used by migrating eiders.
- Reduced vessel speeds to 8 knots or less when traversing spectacled eider critical habitat, or when eiders were present, to avoid interactions with wintering or molting spectacled eiders.
- Any encounter involving protected Alaskan seabirds must be reported using the [NOS Bird Encounter Reporting form](#) and submitted within two (2) business days of the incident to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Southern Alaska Field Office at ak_fisheries@fws.gov. The Alaska SeaLife Center stranded animal hotline (907-224-6395) is the primary contact for injured Alaskan seabirds. Additional contacts for Alaskan seabird-related inquiries and questions are provided in Section 3 of the NOS Bird Encounter Reporting Form.

- To the extent possible, avoided eastern Norton Sound (Unit 3) and Ledyard Bay Critical Habitat (Unit 4) from early July through late October to minimize impacts to concentrations of molting spectacled eiders.

- To the extent possible, avoided entering Kuskokwim Shoals (Unit 2), Seal Islands (Unit 3), and Nelson and Izembek lagoons (Units 4 and 5) from early August through April, to minimize impacts to molting, wintering, and staging Steller's eiders.
- [Spectacled eider critical habitat map](#)
- [Steller's eider critical habitat map](#)

- Reporting requirements:
- Informed USFWS of any injury or mortality of spectacled or Steller's eider(s) within two (2) business days of the incident. The encounter should be reported verbally and in writing. Use the [NOS Bird Encounter Reporting form](#) to send a written report to ak_fisheries@fws.gov. Report by phone to the Alaska SeaLife Center stranded animal hotline (907-224-6395).
- After normal business hours, leave a message for the Alaska Office of Law Enforcement: 800-858-7621.

- **If an injured or sick eider is found alive onboard**, it shall be released overboard if it looks normal and exhibits all of the following traits:
 - a. Capable of holding its head erect;
 - b. Responds to noise and motion stimuli;
 - c. Breathes without noise;
 - d. Capable of flapping and retracting both wings to a normal folded position on the back;
 - e. Capable of elevating itself to stand on both feet with its toes

<p>pointed in the proper position (forward); <i>f. Is waterproof (water beads up on feathers).</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Live injured eiders that do not meet the criteria for overboard release shall be retained in a safe location and transported to a qualified veterinarian or wildlife rehabilitation center for treatment.</i> - <i>Any injured or sick eider must be reported using the NOS Bird Encounter Reporting Form and submitted within two (2) business days of the incident to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Southern Alaska Field Office at ak_fisheries@fws.gov. The Alaska SeaLife Center stranded animal hotline (907-224-6395) is the primary contact for injured Alaskan seabirds. Additional contacts for Alaskan seabird-related inquiries and questions are provided in Section 3 of the NOS Bird Encounter Reporting Form.</i> - <i>Additional information can be found in the document: Procedures for Reporting and Handling Dead or Injured ESA-Listed Birds in Alaska</i> 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any sighting of a dead eider or other ESA-listed bird must be reported using the NOS Bird Encounter Reporting Form. - For Alaskan seabirds, the completed form must be submitted within two (2) business days of the incident to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Southern Alaska Field Office at ak_fisheries@fws.gov. - Additionally, all vessels must temporarily keep all potential ESA-listed species carcasses, or as many as possible, until they can be shipped to USFWS. Carcasses should immediately be frozen or kept as cold as possible and labeled accordingly: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Vessel name; 2) Coordinates; 3) Assumed cause of death; and 4) The numbers and colors of any leg bands (leg bands should be left attached). - If unable to keep the carcass, take photos and provide the information described below in the NOS Bird Encounter Reporting Form. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Three photos should be taken: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) One of the front (ventral) with wings outstretched; b) One from the back (dorsal) with wings outstretched; and c) One of the head and beak (lateral), preferably near a measurement board or other reference of size for the beak. 		
<p>CREWED AIRCRAFT OPERATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintained an altitude of at least 305 m (1,000 ft) when flying over northern sea otters. - Maintained an altitude of at least 457 m (1,500 ft) when flying within 805 m (0.5 mi) of polar bears. - Unless taking off from or landing at an airport/airstrip, pilots maintained a minimum of 457 m (1,500 ft) flight altitude and 0.8-km (0.5-mi) horizontal distance from polar bears in the water, and on ice or land. Avoided circling or turning aircraft near polar bears. - Did not fly fixed wing aircraft over or within 0.8 km (0.5 mi) of walrus hauled out on land or ice. If weather or aircraft safety 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - require fixed wing flight operations within 0.8 km (0.5 mi) of a haulout site, maintained a 610 m (2,000 ft) minimum altitude. - Did not fly rotary aircraft over or within 1.6 km (1 mi) of walruses hauled out on land or ice. If weather or aircraft safety required rotary aircraft flight operations within 1.6 km (1 mi) of a haulout site, maintain a 915 m (3,000 ft) minimum altitude. - Landings, take-offs, and taxiing of fixed wing aircraft did not occur within 0.8 km (0.5 mi) of hauled out walruses, or within 1.6 km (1 mi) for helicopters. - Avoided circling or turning near walruses hauled out on land or ice. - If aircraft safety requires flight operations below recommended altitudes near a haulout, pass inland or seaward of the haulout site at the greatest lateral distance manageable for safe operation of the aircraft. 		
<p>SHORE PARTY ACTIVITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoided polar bears on land, ice, and water. Conducted activities at the maximum distance possible from polar bears. - Be prepared. Carried deterrents, and practiced/knew how to use them. - Avoided surprise encounters. Traveled in groups, made noise, and were vigilant - especially on barrier islands, in river drainages, along bluff habitat or ice leads/polynyas, near whale or other marine mammal carcasses, or in the vicinity of fresh tracks. - Minimized attractants. Avoided carrying strongly scented attractants such as meat or fish while away from camp, or placed them in air-tight containers to minimize odor transmission. - Avoided disturbing denning bears. Between November and April, special care is needed to avoid disturbance of denning bears. If activities are to take place during that time period, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) should be contacted to determine if any additional mitigation is required. In general, activities are not permitted within one mile of known den sites. - Prepared deterrent(s). Did not run from or approached polar bears. If the bear was unaware of you, allowed it to continue what it was doing before you encountered it. Moved to safe shelter (e.g., vehicle or building) if available, and waited until it was safe to proceed. - Group up. If no safe shelter is available, group up with others and stand positioned to allow for safe deployment of deterrents (e.g., firearm, pistol launcher, bear pepper spray) – until the bear leaves. - Observed bear behavior. Polar bears that stop what they are doing to turn their head or sniff the air in your direction have likely become aware of your presence. These animals may exhibit various behaviors: 1) Curious polar bears typically move slowly, stopping frequently to sniff the air, moving their heads around to catch a scent, or holding their heads high with ears forward. They may also stand up. 2) A threatened or agitated polar bear may huff, snap its jaws together, stare at you (or the object of threat) and lower its head to below shoulder level, pressing its ears back and swaying from side to side. 3) A predatory bear may sneak up on an object it considers prey. It may also approach in a straight line at constant speed without exhibiting curious or threatened behavior. - Defend your group, increasing the intensity of your deterrence 		

<p>efforts as necessary. Use deterrents on any bear that approaches within range. Stand your ground; do not run. Be aware that lethal take of polar bears is permissible if such taking is imminently necessary in defense of human life.</p> <p>Defense-of-life kills must be reported to the USFWS Management Office in Alaska within 48 hours (800-362-5148).</p> <p>- If a bear makes physical contact, fight back. If deterrence/lethal efforts have failed and a polar bear attacks (i.e., makes physical contact), do not "play dead". Fight back using any deterrents available, aiming fists or objects at the bear's nose and face.</p>		
--	--	--

Additional Comments:

NOAA Fisheries Alaska Statewide 24-Hour Stranding Hotline	(877) 925-7773	Marine mammals, such as whales, seals, sea lions, porpoises, or dolphins.	Yes	This hotline covers the entire state of Alaska.
USFWS Marine Mammals Management Office	(800) 362-5148	USFWS species, such as walruses, sea otters, and polar bears.	No	This line is only staffed during regular business hours. During non-business hours, leave a message and call the Alaska SeaLife Center.
Alaska SeaLife Center Hotline	(888) 774-7325	USFWS species, but mainly sea otters.	Yes	This hotline is located in Seward, Alaska and should be contacted for animals that are injured or are in need of rehabilitation.