



Tribal Kotzebue Sound Beluga Plan

March 2020

GOAL

Restore the Kotzebue Sound beluga population to a healthy level to provide for a sustainable beluga subsistence harvest throughout Kotzebue Sound in the future.

Hunting Guidelines:

1. Each village has their own way of doing things. Hunters should listen to and abide by local hunting traditions and practices.
2. Encourage people not to hunt belugas during June to mid-July to allow them to come back and not be disturbed.
3. An exception would be groups of belugas over 100 consisting mostly of large white belugas with no gray animals or calves nearby. (These large groups are likely to be visiting belugas from the Beaufort Sea stock and usually show up after mid-July).
4. Encourage people not to hunt females with calves and young belugas.
5. Encourage people not to hunt or net belugas in the following “safe zones” at any time: Selawik Lake, Kobuk Lake, Goodhope Bay, Kiwalik Lagoon and Eschscholtz Bay. These areas would be places where belugas can recover. The safe zones will be in effect for 2-5 years, and then be re-evaluated.
6. Encourage people not to use subsistence beluga nets except for catching whales to be tagged for science because nets tend to catch females and young.
7. Encourage hunters to collect genetic tissue samples (skin), note color and sex, and other data from harvested belugas (work with your village Alaska Beluga Whale Committee representative).
8. Encourage hunters to include adequate hunting equipment (e.g., harpoons and markers) to minimize loss.
9. Secure support for Tribal implementation and monitoring, beluga hunter participation, and coordination with the Alaska Beluga Whale Committee and others.

Reduce Possible Human Impacts:

1. Reduce possible human-related noise and disturbance to belugas and beluga hunting.

Traditional Knowledge and Science:

1. Seek funding to continue to document traditional knowledge of belugas and beluga hunting in Kotzebue Sound and coastal villages, and to conduct cultural and educational projects.
2. Collect scientific information about belugas (e.g., tagging, acoustic monitoring, local and pilot observations, sampling of harvested belugas, drones or satellite counts of numbers of whales, etc.) with the involvement of local people whenever possible.
3. Improve our understanding of the presence and timing of beluga whales, harbor porpoises, and killer whales in Kotzebue Sound, including the impacts of climate change, especially through satellite tagging and acoustics studies.

4. When netting belugas to be tagged, use large mesh nets to prevent catching and accidental killing of calves and young belugas.
5. Designate a person in each village to record and document local sightings of belugas and killer whales.

Communication:

1. People need to work together; communication is the key.
2. Kotzebue Sound communities need to talk to each other regularly to coordinate hunters and implement efforts to increase the numbers of belugas.
3. Elders should provide youth with the knowledge needed to hunt and sustainably use belugas.
4. Youth and young adults should listen to elders and older hunters to learn more about belugas and hunting.
5. Elders and whaling boat captains should help direct what village hunters do and when hunting occurs. This may vary from one village to another.
6. Use technology (e.g., Facebook or iPhone APPS) to help with communication about beluga conservation issues.
7. Representatives from Kotzebue Sound beluga hunting communities should get together every year to discuss and update the Kotzebue Sound Beluga Plan, as funding permits.

Education:

1. Youth and young adults are the future leaders and hunters of the communities of Kotzebue Sound; they need to know more about belugas (particularly the calving areas and beluga hunting).
2. Youth and young adults should learn more from elders and older hunters.
3. Incorporate belugas and beluga hunting into the school curriculum/lesson plans and bring students into the field so they get familiar with traditional hunting areas and hunting practices.
4. Utilize “Inupiat Days” in schools to support beluga education programs.
5. Increase the understanding of youth and young adults about how belugas use certain areas and traditional hunting rules (e.g., the first beluga should not be hunted but let them come in to see that it is OK for the females and young belugas to also come into the area).
6. Involve youth in beluga meetings and in the collection of beluga samples, beluga research, and related marine research

IX. ADOPTION, DURATION, AND MODIFICATION

This Agreement will become effective when signed by the Tribal Councils of Kotzebue Sound (Buckland, Deering, Kivalina, Kotzebue, Noatak), and may be amended at any time by written agreement these Parties.

