



United States Department of the Interior

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
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In Reply Refer to:
FWS/R7/FES

Report B8: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Report to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council, June 2025.

Migratory Bird Update

Working with partners, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) published a comprehensive study of common murre deaths from a marine heatwave in 2014-16. Through an analysis of long-term monitoring data covering two large Alaska ecosystems, we determined the mass mortality event was several times greater than initially estimated. About half of Alaska's common murre population perished – around four million birds – the largest single-species wildlife die-off documented in modern history. [Read more](#)

The FWS continues to prioritize communication with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and the Scientific and Statistical Committee concerning migratory bird issues, particularly as federal agency staffing changes occur. Additionally, we will maintain our involvement with the Alaska Groundfish and Halibut Seabird Working Group and provide relevant information annually for National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Ecosystem Status Report.

The FWS is proposing to conduct six at-sea surveys in Alaska in 2025 that will be coordinated with multidisciplinary vessel-based research projects to collect data on marine bird distribution and abundance. Surveys are scheduled seasonally (spring, summer, fall) in the Gulf of Alaska in collaboration with the Northern Gulf of Alaska Long-term Ecological Research Project (NGA-LTER) (Fig. 1). Additionally, partnerships with the Distributed Biological Observatory Program (DBO) and the Arctic Marine Biodiversity Program (AMBON) will facilitate surveys in July and August in the northern Bering and Chukchi Seas (Figs. 2–3). In partnership with NOAA's Alaska Fisheries Science Center, we will also conduct late summer surveys as part of the Northern Bering Sea Ecosystem Surface Trawl Survey (Fig. 4). Regional communities will be engaged in survey progress through daily cruise updates to coastal community stakeholders, facilitating real-time communication of observations.

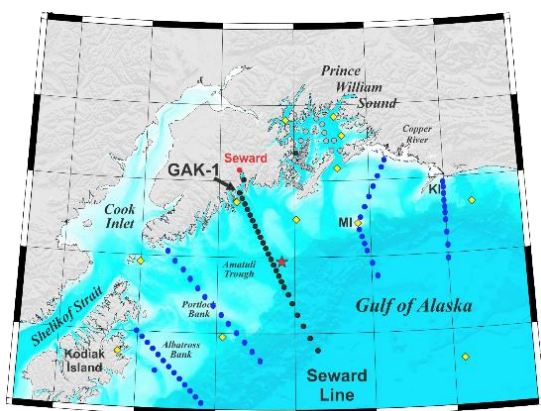


Figure 1. NGA-LTER cruise sampling area.

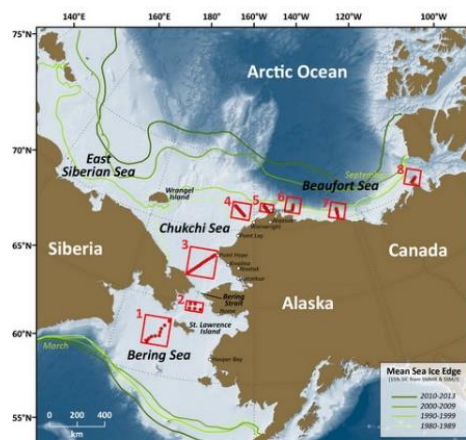


Figure 2. DBO cruise sampling area.

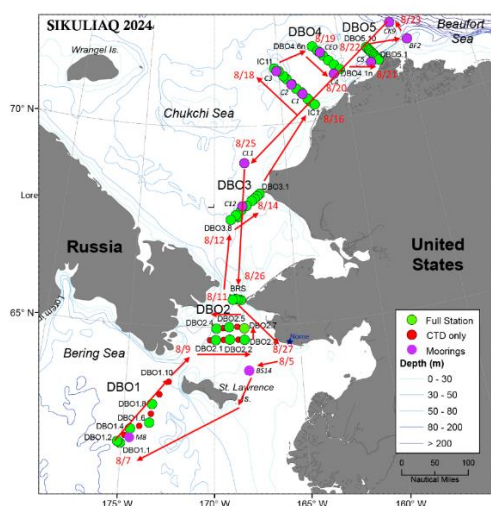


Figure 3. AMBON cruise sampling area.

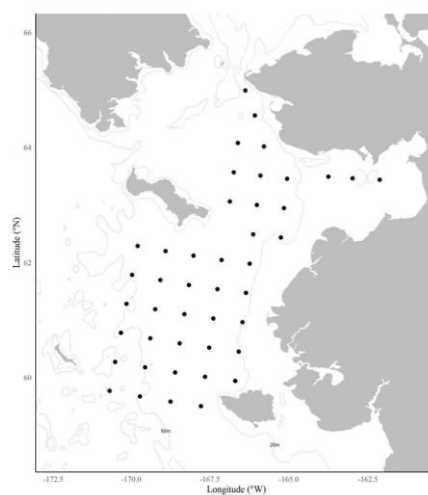


Figure 4. Northern Bering Sea Ecosystem Trawl survey sampling area.

Marine Mammal Update

This June the FWS and the U.S. Geological Survey will carry out walrus research beginning and ending in Nome on the RV Norseman II with aerial reconnaissance support. We expect to operate in the Bering Strait zone and further north in the Chukchi Sea, although sea ice conditions, weather, and the distribution of walrus dictate the route. The goal is to collect data to produce updated estimates of Pacific walrus abundance, survival, and reproduction. Researchers will collect genetic skin biopsy samples and age structure data of walrus groups. The FWS has coordinated with the Eskimo Walrus Commission and St. Lawrence Island walrus hunters on plans, and three walrus hunters will be participating in the research effort. We anticipate working near Little Diomed, Kivalina, Point Hope, Point Lay, Wales, Shishmaref, and Wainwright. The aircraft will likely transit regularly through the airspace surrounding Kotzebue

or Utqiagvik for recon flights. Both the research vessel and the aircraft will maintain a minimum distance of 10 miles from these communities. Whenever our operations occur within a 50-mile radius of a community, we will maintain daily radio contact to inform the community our vessel location and ensure that we do not interfere with traditional whale, walrus, or seal harvest.

Draft stock assessment reports for the two Alaska stocks (Chukchi/Bering Seas stock and Southern Beaufort Sea stock) of polar bears were issued in January 2025. Final versions should be available this summer. Stock assessment reports for Pacific walrus and the three stocks of northern sea otters in Alaska (Southeast, Southcentral, and Southwest Alaska stocks) were updated in 2023.