

Submission Date: Feb 12, 2008

Priority: 1 of 1



Ted Stevens

United States Senator for Alaska

Please Note:

- Fill out one request form for each request
- This form (and any attachments) can be returned via:

Fax - (202) 224-2354
 Mail - The Honorable Ted Stevens
 United States Senate
 522 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
 Washington, D.C. 20510

- Requests are due by February 15, 2008.

FISCAL YEAR 2009 PROJECT REQUEST FORM

Project Name: Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission

Project Location: Alaska Statewide

Project Description (please attach additional pages as required):

This project supports base operations of the Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission (ANHSC) and has continued since 1997. ANHSC serves six Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) Regions and over 62 communities that harvest harbor seals for subsistence. In 1999 ANHSC entered into Marine Mammal Protection Act Sec 119 Agreement with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for the co-management of the subsistence harvest of the harbor seals. This project supports ANHSC Board of Directors semi-annual and co-management meetings with NMFS. A full-time executive director serves the board in organizing meetings with scientists and resource managers. 150K
 The ANHSC board oversees a harvest data assessment program and biological sampling program that has been funded under "Harbor Seals" in cooperation with both ADF&G and NMFS. It supports a full-time Masters level Wildlife Biologist, who works with over 150
 (continued on page 2)

Related Appropriations Bill: Commerce, Justice, State Spending Bill

Amount of federal funding requested for FY09: 750,000

Total funding to complete this project: 3,750,000

Number of years to fund this project: 5

Matching funds from the State of Alaska: 0.00

Matching funds from local and private entities:

List legislation that authorizes this project:

MMPA Section 119

Check all that apply:

- A change in the current law is necessary in order to proceed with the project. (If so, attach language and a list of laws that need to be amended)
- Bill or report language is needed. (If so, attach requested language)

If this project was funded in prior appropriations bills (within the last five years), list each bill and the amount funded:

Harbor Seal Research Native Marine Mammal Commissions
 Commerce, State, Justice FY-97 thru FY06
 FY97 thru 06 150K each year
 FY02 450K 150K Total 600K
 FY03 300K 150K Total 450K (continued on page 2)

Amount included in the President's FY09 Budget: 0.00

Amount included in the State of Alaska FY09 Budget: 0.00

Check this box if state funding was sought but not provided.

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Project Description - continued.

certified hunters in data collection and a full time Harvest Data Coordinator that serves 62 communities. In addition we have an extensive outreach and educational program and we are starting to work on regional management plans. We are requesting continued funding in the amount of 600K

At this time we are requesting that both earmarks be combined into one under the "Composite Research and Development Program for Alaska Fisheries and Marine Mammals" line item in the Commerce, Justice, State Spending Bill For a total of 750K.

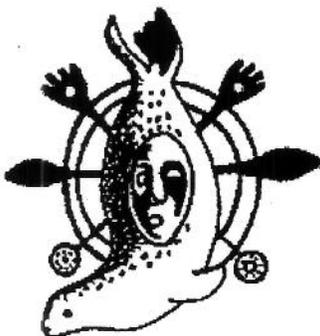
If this project was funded in prior appropriations bills (within the last five years), list each bill and the amount funded: - continued.

FY04 400K 150K Total 550K

FY05 600K 150K Total 750K

FY06 200K (nmfs/adf&g) 150K Total 350K

**FY2009 APPROPRIATION REQUEST FOR
CONTINUED FUNDING OF
THE ALASKA NATIVE HARBOR SEAL COMMISSION
to the
HOUSE/SENATE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
ON
COMMERCE, JUSTICE, STATE AND JUDICIARY**



**Submitted by
The Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission**

Feb 2008

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Submitted by
Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission

The Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission (ANHSC) and the National Marine Fisheries Service co-manage harbor seals in Alaska under the terms of Section 119 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). This request seeks funding to support the ANHSC in its co-management role.

The Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission (ANHSC) is a consortium organized by Native communities within the habitat range of the harbor seal (*Phoca vitulina*) in Alaska. The overall purpose of the ANHSC is to strengthen and increase the role of Alaska Natives resource policy affecting harbor seals and their uses. The goals of the ANHSC include: educating and informing the public and western scientists on the traditional and contemporary relationship between Alaska Natives and harbor seals; informing western scientists about the type and extent of knowledge held by the local people about the harbor seal; involving Alaska Natives directly in the research process; and involving Alaska Natives in the regulatory and management process for harbor seals. Harbor seals are a vital cultural, economic, and social resource to many Alaska Natives; the participation of Alaska Natives in all aspects of harbor seal research and management is, therefore, critical. Co-management enhances both the biological health of natural resources, as well as reflects the concepts of self-determination and local participation, ownership and responsibility, concepts integral to the viability and longevity of Alaska Native culture and community. Continuation of funding the Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission is a large step towards addressing these needs.

Sound management calls for a cooperative effort between Alaska Natives and federal agencies. The ANHSC collaborates with the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Alaska Sea Life Center, the Alaska

Department of Fish and Game, and the University of Alaska in writing and revising the Alaska Harbor Seal Research Plan. The plan fosters collaboration among the research partners and prevents competition for funding for redundant studies. Annual stock assessments prepared by the NMFS as mandated by Section 117 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act raise important questions about harbor seal populations: the definition of stocks, the current population status, and current sustainable harvest levels. The stock assessments consistently point to the lack of data on many marine mammal species, especially harbor seals. The ANHSC intends to involve Alaska Natives in gathering these data through the programs outlined below.

Harvest monitoring

Through a cooperative agreement with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Subsistence Division, the ANHSC has assumed primary responsibility for documenting the level of harvest of harbor seals and Steller sea lions by Alaska Natives. This data is critical to determining if the take of these species exceeds the potential biological removal (PBR). Without these data the Alaska Scientific Review Group (SRG) is likely to recommend that harbor seal stocks be declared "strategic" under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

Regional researchers hire and train local researchers to conduct household surveys in their communities. The program is in its thirteenth year and has continued participation from over 60 communities (see Figure 1). Technical reports published each year analyze the trends in harvest levels and provide the best available reference on Alaska Native harvest for the NMFS stock assessment reports (see Figure 2).

According to the guidelines for preparing stock assessment reports pursuant to Section 117 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), in the absence of data on sources of mortality the precautionary principle should be followed and the default stock status should be strategic until information is available to demonstrate otherwise. Therefore, without the data provided by the ANHSC Harvest Data Assessment Program the Alaska Scientific Review Group (SRG) is likely to recommend that harbor seal stocks in Alaska be declared strategic under the MMPA. This could have serious implications for subsistence users and commercial fisheries. Therefore we request that continued funding for this program be a priority.

Management plans

There is a growing need for harvest management plans, specifically in the areas showing documented declines. Native harvesters are in the best position to address this concern and proactive discussion on the subject is already taking place in parts of Alaska.

The ANHSC encourages Alaska Natives to develop and implement written harbor seal management plans. Historically, traditional knowledge has formed the basis for the local management of harbor seal harvests. Management plans written by the users of the resource will provide a sense of ownership and will increase compliance.

The ANHSC seeks funding for staff travel to local communities to initiate discussion and to provide management plan templates that the communities can modify to suit their needs. In some cases, such as in Prince William Sound, it will be necessary to have one management plan that several communities agree to abide by because they all hunt the same population of seals. In such instances several rounds of discussion may be necessary to reach consensus.

Discussion on the subject is beginning in Southeast Alaska. The ANHSC provided some funds to the Sitka Tribe of Alaska in support of a Southeast Alaska Marine Mammals Workshop aimed specifically at facilitating discussion on harvest management plans. The workshop took place February 8 – 10, 2006 in Sitka, Alaska and members of several Southeast Alaska villages participated along with federal agency biologists and managers. Workshops such as this will be supported in other regions as funding allows.

Biosampling program

The biosampling program has certified over 150 Alaska Native subsistence hunters to collect samples for biological research. Over 600 samples have been submitted since the program's inception in 1996 (see Figure 3 for distribution of biosample collection). The data provided by the biosampling program are necessary to identify biologically meaningful management stocks, which is currently the primary task of the NMFS-ANHSC co-management committee.

Samples are routinely used by our collaborators to address the causes of harbor seal population declines in Alaska. Ongoing research projects include:

Genetics and management stock structure – National Marine Fisheries Service

Contaminants analysis – Alaska Sea Life Center

Diet analysis – Alaska Department of Fish and Game; University of Alaska Fairbanks

Reproductive history – Alaska Sea Life Center

Age determination – Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Samples have historically been collected in the greatest numbers in areas of harbor seal population decline such as Prince William Sound and Kodiak Island (see Figure 3). Biosamplers from throughout the state are currently being certified in order to collect baseline data for the entire range of harbor seals in Alaska. These data are necessary to identify biologically meaningful management stocks, which is currently the primary task of the NMFS-ANHSC co-management committee. Alaska Natives are the only people capable of collecting genetic samples in many areas of Alaska where the data are currently lacking. Other research entities simply do not have the funding to capture seals specifically for this purpose, so the samples they collect are clustered in space and time and are often not collected during the breeding season when the data are most relevant to the study of demographic isolation. The Southwest Fisheries Science Center of the NMFS relies heavily upon samples collected by the ANHSC biosampling program. Alaska Natives in some areas question the data because significant gaps in sampling distribution exist. As additional samples are collected the process of identifying new management stocks can move forward. The biosampling program allows Alaska Natives to participate in the process of identifying new stocks based on the data they collect and this helps them to trust the process.

Once adequate baseline data are collected it will be possible to collaborate with our research partners to compare stable harbor seal populations to declining populations to investigate the cause of the precipitous declines that are occurring in parts of Alaska such as Glacier Bay. Many of the projects listed above would not be possible to complete without the samples provided by the biosampling program.

Education is a key element of the biosampling program. Biosampling demonstrations are performed at youth culture camps across Alaska during the summer months to educate and engage Alaska Native Youth and encourage their participation in science. Recently an Anchorage high school student who is not Alaska Native assisted in the processing of biosamples and attended a biosampling training. Her internship with the Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission exposed her to Alaska Native culture, increased her sensitivity to Alaska Native issues, and educated her in terms of Alaska Native's capacity to participate in Western science. She aspires to study marine mammals and received school credit for her participation.

Management stock structure

Recent research suggests that the three management stocks currently recognized by NMFS may not be representative of harbor seal populations in Alaska (Southwest Fisheries Science Center, NMFS, NOAA). Through co-management the ANHSC is working with NMFS to reorganize harbor seal management stock structure in Alaska. Consensus has been reached among the members of the co-management committee and a joint proposal for twelve harbor seal stocks have been drafted (Figure 4).

The ANHSC and NMFS jointly sponsored an independent scientific peer review of the genetics study that provided evidence for stock structure reorganization. Following study of the report generated by that review the ANHSC-NMFS co-management committee met to discuss scenarios for revised management stock structure. Consensus was reached among the co-management committee members in September, 2005 and a draft proposal for twelve harbor seal management stocks was presented to the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission in October, 2005. The proposal was presented to the Alaska Native community October 13 – 15, 2005 at the 10-year anniversary meeting of the Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission. The entire co-management committee was present at the meeting and lengthy discussion on the issue took place. This discussion helped the public to understand the science involved in revising stock structure and helped increase the agency's sensitivity to the potential impacts revised stocks could have on Alaska Native culture. The draft stock structure was presented to the Alaska Scientific Review Group in January, 2006 and was accepted as based on the best available scientific data. On January 23, 2006, Monica Riedel, ANHSC Executive Director, presented the information to over 300 scientists at the

Marine Science in Alaska Symposium. The ANHSC will continue to seek approval from its constituents in order to move ahead with amending the stock structure of harbor seals in Alaska.

Sleeper shark predation on harbor seals

The ANHSC will support a study by the University of Alaska Southeast to investigate whether sleeper shark predation is a cause of harbor seal declines in Yakutat Bay, Alaska.

There is strong evidence that harbor seals (*Phoca vitulina*) are declining in the northern portion of southeastern Alaska. Glacier Bay National Park had one of the largest breeding colonies of harbor seals in Alaska (Mathews 1995), however the number of seals in Glacier Bay declined by more than 64% from 1992 to 2002 (Mathews and Pendleton 2005 in revision). Native hunters from Yakutat have also reported that harbor seal numbers in Disenchantment Bay and the Yakutat area have declined notably in recent years. The cause or causes of these harbor seal population declines are not known. In Glacier Bay (Taggart *et al.* 2005 (in revision)) and Disenchantment Bay (R. Pavlik, personal communication) there is evidence that sleeper sharks (*Somniosus pacificus*) are consuming harbor seals. The goals of this pilot project are to: 1) measure the relative abundance and distribution of sleeper sharks and harbor seals in Disenchantment Bay after harbor seal pupping (late June/early July), 2) determine if harbor seals or seal remains are present in the stomachs of sampled sleeper sharks, and 3) test for a correlation between the relative abundance and distribution of sleeper sharks and harbor seals.

Education and Outreach

The ANHSC is committed to educating the public regarding issues concerning marine mammals and subsistence. We are also dedicated to the preservation of Alaska Native culture and the education of our youth.

ANHSC staff participates in youth culture camps across Alaska during the summer months. Our program educates youth on traditional cultural practices and modern issues related to marine mammals and subsistence. Biosampling demonstrations encourage Alaska Native youth to participate in science, and workshops on management plans encourage them

to be active in conservation.

The ANHSC publishes a biannual newsletter that is circulated widely among Alaska Native communities updating them on current issues and our programs. We periodically hold regional workshops to train and educate Alaska Native subsistence users of harbor seals. These workshops provide an opportunity for people from different communities to gather to share their ideas and experiences.

The ANHSC regularly presents information on its programs in public fora and at scientific conferences such as the Alaska Oceans Festival, the Society for Marine Mammalogy Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals, the Alaska Forum on the Environment, the Marine Science in Alaska Symposium, the American Association for the Advancement of Science Arctic Science conference and the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention.

In conclusion, Western scientists, state and federal agencies, and Alaska Native hunters and users all agree that supporting the programs of the ANHSC is an important step towards long-term harbor seal conservation and restoration. Therefore, the ANHSC respectfully requests continued funding at the level of \$750,000. in the "Composite Research and Development Program for Alaska Fisheries and Marine Mammals". These funds will be administered as they have been for the past 7 years through the National Marine Fisheries Service's marine mammal program. The funding needs have been identified based on the need to continue and improve upon the programs outlined above.

On behalf of the board of directors of the ANHSC, I appreciate the opportunity to present this information to the House/Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Commerce, Justice, State and Judiciary.

Respectfully submitted,

Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission

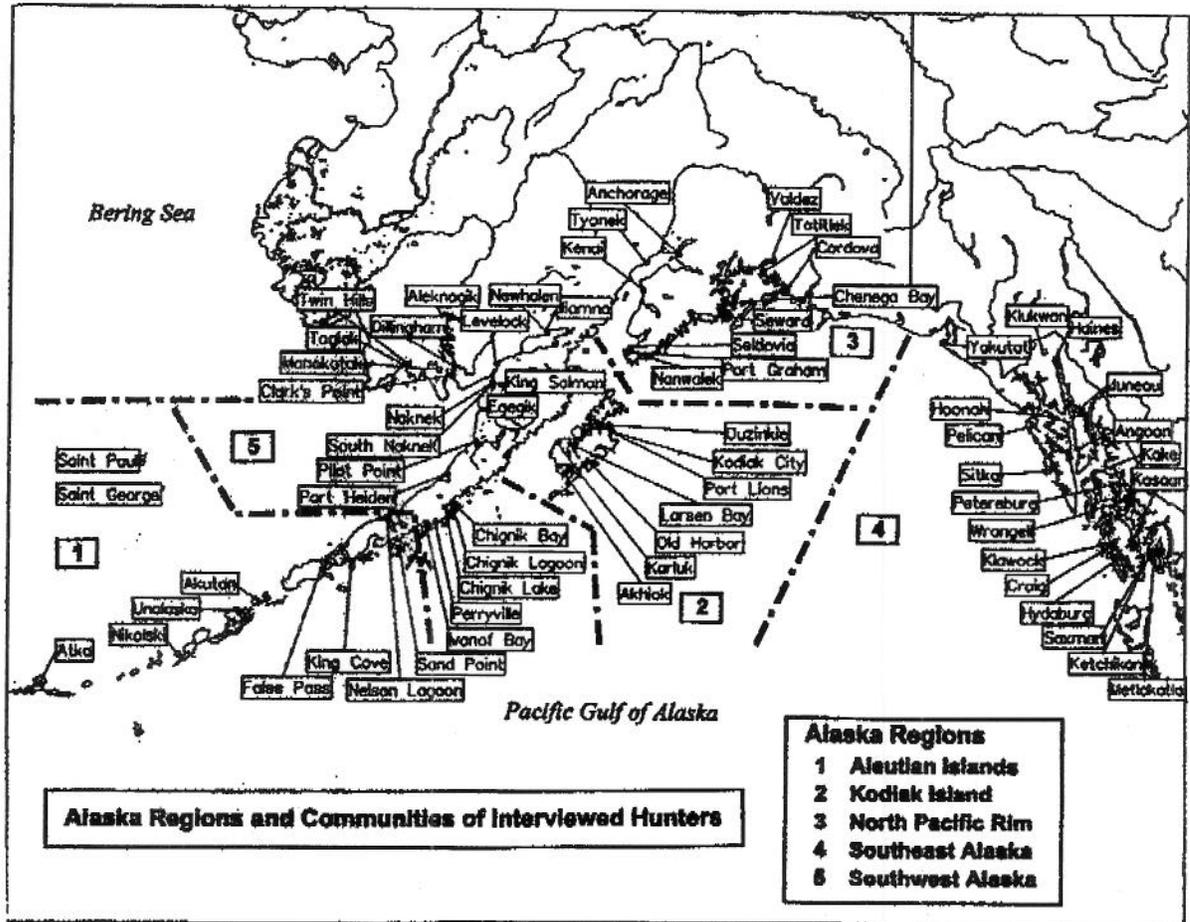


Figure 1. Alaska Native communities that participate in annual harvest monitoring surveys.

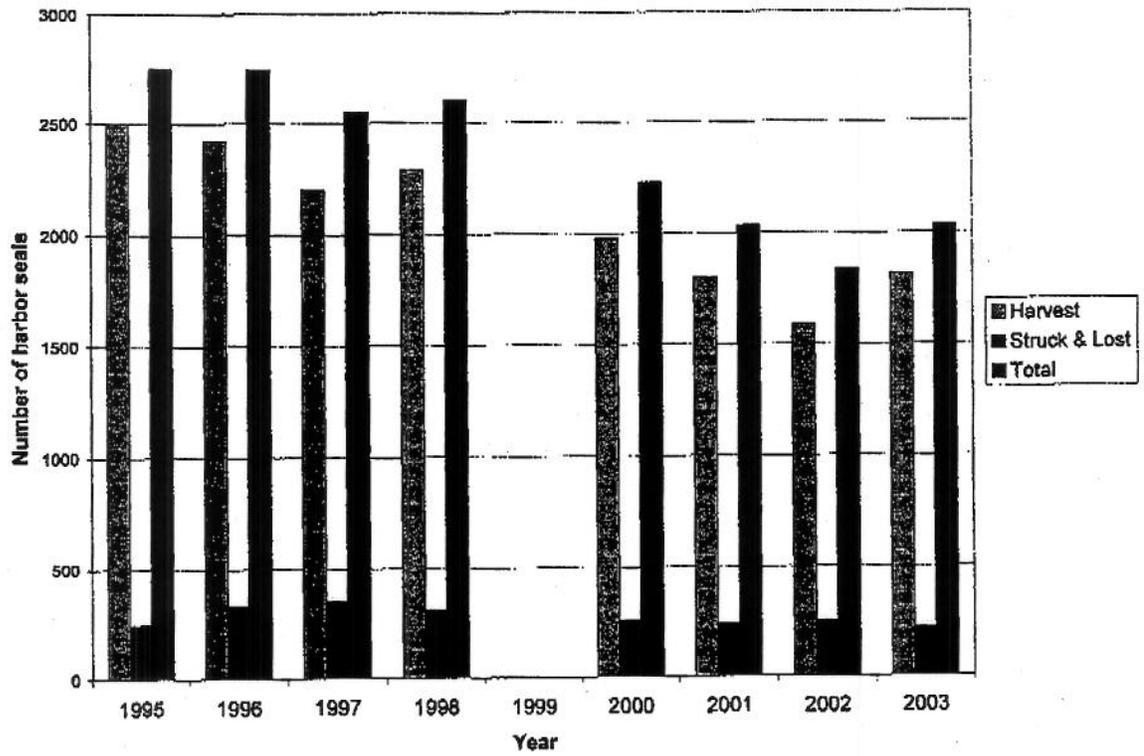


Figure 2. Data on the harvest level of harbor seals in Alaska provided by the harvest monitoring program.

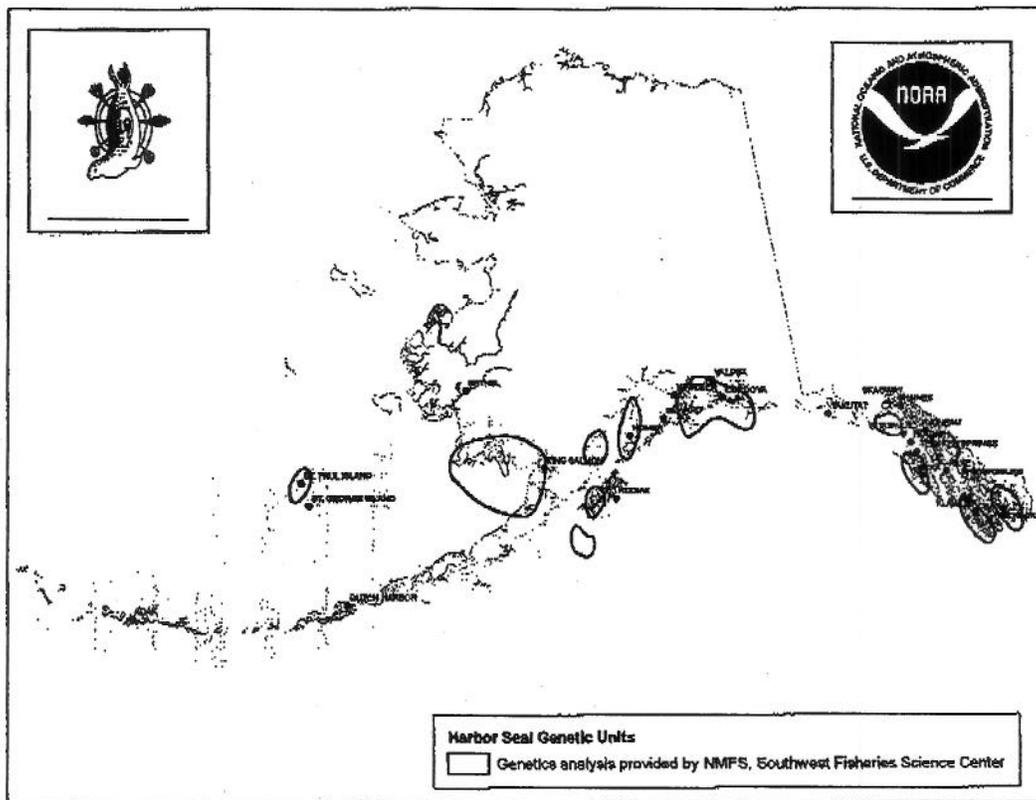


Figure 4. Shaded areas represent the revised harbor seal management stocks proposed by the ANHSC-NMFS co-management committee. This stock structure represents the consensus reached by the co-management committee however, additional work needs to be done by the ANHSC to reach consensus among its constituents before proceeding with revising stock structure.