

ACTION ALERT!

TAKE 5 MINUTES NOW TO PROTECT THE COOK INLET BELUGA WHALE! COMMENTS DUE MAY 16!

THE PROBLEM: The Cook Inlet beluga whale (*Delphinapterus leucas*) is a genetically distinct and geographically isolated population whose numbers have plummeted over 50% in the past decade. *The beluga's plight is so dire the National Marine Fisheries Service has listed it as "depleted" under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.* While subsistence hunting has been blamed as a primary cause for the whale's decline, the voluntary cessation of hunting in 1999 has not resulted in a population rebound as agency scientists predicted. Sewage discharges, oil and gas wastes, polluted run-off, shipping traffic and noise, competition for prey and habitat loss are but a few of the possible issues affecting beluga recovery. Current surveys suggest there are only 250-350 whales left in Cook Inlet (from historical highs of approximately 1300 animals), and some scientists believe the whale is teetering on the edge of extinction.

THE SOLUTION: TAKE ACTION! *The National Marine Fisheries is taking comments until May 16 on the draft Conservation Plan required under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.* You can read the draft plan at:

<http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/whales/beluga/mmpa/draft/conservationplan032005.pdf>

Take 5 minutes NOW to tell NMFS why the Cook Inlet Beluga whale is important to YOU, and that the draft Conservation Plan:

- Provides a good overview of the precarious status of the Cook Inlet beluga whale;
- Must focus more research and management resources on non-hunting impacts to the whale;
- Must provide discrete "action thresholds" describing specific management steps to be taken if whale numbers continue to decline;
- Must identify with greater certainty the funding sources needed to promote whale recovery;
- Must broaden the group of stakeholders participating in whale management decisions; and
- Must identify and protect important habitat areas in Upper Cook Inlet.

Comments can be sent by 5:00 PM, May 16 to:

Brad Smith
National Marine Fisheries Service
222 West 7th Avenue, Suite 43
Anchorage, AK 99513
Email: brad.smith@noaa.gov
Fax: 907.271.3030

For help with comments or for more information, contact:

Bob Shavelson, Cook Inlet Keeper: 907.235.4068 ext 22 or bob@inletkeeper.org