



NOAA
FISHERIES

Alaska Region

Proposed Arctic Ringed Seal Critical Habitat

Public Hearing Agenda:

- Introduction
- Overview of Proposed Critical Habitat
- Review of Procedure for Public Testimony
- Public Testimony

Proposed Critical Habitat Overview

- What is critical habitat and who may be affected?
- What is proposed for ringed seals?
- What are the likely impacts of the proposal?
- What happens next?



Photo by P. Clemente-Colon, NOAA

Endangered Species Act Listing

- NOAA Fisheries listed Arctic ringed seals as a threatened species, effective in February 2013.
- Listing was based on the anticipated responses of ringed seals to foreseeable future habitat alteration due to climate change.
- Critical habitat designation is required for newly listed species.



Photo by D. Withrow



What is Critical Habitat?

- Specific geographic area(s) that contain at least one habitat feature essential to conservation of the species and that may require special management considerations or protection.
- Identifies important habitat areas, but does not prohibit human activities.



Photo By: P. J. Smith, Colon, NOAA

Who May be Affected by Critical Habitat?

- Federal agencies must consult with NOAA Fisheries to ensure their actions are not likely to destroy or adversely modify critical habitat.
- Consultation applies only to activities with a federal link: activities authorized, funded, or carried out by a federal agency.

Photo by P. Clemente-Colon, NOAA

Who May be Affected by Critical Habitat?

- Designation of critical habitat will not affect the continued subsistence harvest of ringed seals by Alaska Natives.



Photo by B. Kelly

Identification of Ringed Seal Critical Habitat:

1. Identify the habitat features essential to conservation of ringed seals and that may require special management considerations or protection.
2. Determine the specific occupied geographic area(s) that contain the essential habitat features.



NOAA Photo

Proposed Ringed Seal Essential Habitat Features:

1. Sea ice habitat suitable for the formation and maintenance of subnivean (under the snow) birth lairs.



Photo by M. Cameron

Proposed Ringed Seal Essential Habitat Features:

2. Sea ice habitat suitable for basking and molting.



Photo by S. Dahle



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**Proposed Ringed Seal
Critical Habitat**

Proposed Ringed Seal Essential Habitat Features:

3. Primary prey resources to support ringed seals – Arctic cod, saffron cod, shrimps, and amphipods.



Photo by E. C. Sidorov, NOAA/NMFS



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**Proposed Ringed Seal
Critical Habitat**

U.S. Areas Occupied by Ringed Seals



Adapted from Kelly et al. (2010) status review report map, with more recent data that show ringed seals farther southwest of St. Matthew Island

Proposed Ringed Seal Critical Habitat



ESA Section 4(b)(2):

- NOAA Fisheries must consider the impacts of critical habitat designation.
- The direct incremental costs are expected to be limited to administrative costs of consultations.
- NOAA Fisheries does not expect that consultations on critical habitat will result in modifications to predicted future projects in the designated critical habitat areas.



NOAA Photo

ESA Section 4(b)(2):

- Secretary of Commerce has discretion to exclude areas from critical habitat if the benefits of exclusion outweigh the benefits of designation, unless it will result in extinction of the species.
- NOAA Fisheries is seeking comments on any areas to consider for exclusion and why.

Photo by J. Potter, NOAA

Ringed Seal Critical Habitat Next Steps:

Public comment period
closes March 31st



NMFS will consider comments
received in developing
a final designation



Final designation expected
~December 9, 2015



Public Comment Period Closes March 31, 2015:

- Internet comments: <http://www.regulations.gov>
 - Search for: NOAA-NMFS-2013-0114
- By mail: Address written comments to Jon Kurland, Assistant Regional Administrator for Protected Resources, Alaska Region NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Mail to P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668.
- Public hearings (Nome, Anchorage, Kotzebue, Barrow, and Bethel)
- For more information see:
<http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/protectedresources/seals/ice.htm>

Providing Testimony



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- Please clearly state your name and spell your name for the record
- Please state your title and what organization you represent, if applicable
- Please provide your comments on the critical habitat proposal
- Time limit for each speaker is 3 minutes (maximum)