

Northern
Fur Seal
Harvests, St.
George
Island, AK

2023

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Harvest report
for the 2023
Season,
7.7.2023-
8.8.2023

2023 Northern Fur Seal Sub-Adult Subsistence Harvest

INTRODUCTION

Laaqudax, or the northern fur seal (*callorhinus ursinus*) is an important customary traditional food for the Unangan of St. George Island, Alaska. Together, the Traditional Council of St. George along with the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) coordinated, monitored, and managed the subsistence harvest of northern fur seals to safeguard their existence. The 2023 subsistence fur seal harvest was conducted in accordance to 50 CFR §216.72 on St. George Island.

METHODS

The Island Sentinel of the St. George Traditional Council Kayumixtax Eco-Office monitored the 2023 subsistence fur seal harvest for the Aleut Community of St. George Island and in accordance with the Co-Management Agreement between the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Aleut Community of St. George. Within this context, management and activities were conducted under a cooperative agreement with the National Marine Fisheries Service. During the 2023 subsistence season, fur seal harvest information was collected on:

- a) the number of sub-adult male fur seals harvested
- b) incidence of by-products and waste during the harvest process
- c) the occurrence of older male seals judged to be 124.5 cm or more in length
- d) female seals killed or injured during the harvest operation
- e) the number of seal deaths due to overheating
- f) number of seals entangled in marine debris and the number of seals disentangled
- g) evidence of oil contaminated seal pelts
- h) other types of fur seal mortality
- i) weather conditions at the time of the harvest
- j) any other unusual conditions related to the harvest
- k) Research conducted during the harvest, and visitors requesting to view or film the harvest

RESULTS

Ten sub-adult male laaquadan were harvested in 2023. During this time, there was a lapse in staffing in the Island Sentinel position on St. George, so exact date, time, and weather for each harvest event were not recorded. A Sentinel was hired in the fall of 2023 who had knowledge of the harvest that had occurred over the summer, as St. George is a small community where those who harvest seals are well known to each other. The Sentinel surveyed seal harvesters and obtained number and sex of seals harvested at each event, and approximate dates of each harvest. All 2023 harvests occurred in July at East Rookery, and all seals taken were male.

a.) The number of sub-adult male fur seals harvested

Table 1: Dates, locations, weather, harvest time and number of Sub-adult males harvested.

Date of Harvest	Rookery	Weather	Time of Harvest	# Of Seals Harvested
07/21/23	East Rookery	Overcast Temp: 49 F	Start: 2 PM End: 2:30 PM	2
Estimated 07/2023	East Rookery	Unknown	Unknown	3
Estimated 07/2023	East Rookery	Unknown	Unknown	3
Estimated 07/2023	East Rookery	Unknown	Unknown	2
TOTAL				10

b.) Incidence of by-products and waste during the harvest process

No waste of edible portions of seals was observed during the harvest season. Harvesters did not collect pelts from the harvest for the creation of handicrafts. No other by-products were collected from the harvested seals.

c.) The occurrence of older male seals judged to be 124.5 or more in length

Older males are often rounded up during the harvest process and released during the drive to the killing field or released during the harvest. No seals judged to be longer than 124.5 cm in length were harvested in 2023.

d.) Female seals killed or injured during the harvest operation

No female fur seals were observed in the harvest roundups or killed accidentally during the harvest.

e.) The number of seal deaths due to overheating

No seals died during the harvest due to overheating.

f.) Number of seals entangled in marine debris and the number of seals disentangled/

No entangled seals were seen during the harvests. Should Island Sentinel find any entangled seals during the harvests, steps are taken to disentangle the seal provided that its safe enough for Island Sentinel personnel to do so and that it will not inflict further harm to the seal.

g.) Evidence of contaminated seal pelts

No evidence of oiled seal pelts or oiling of seals was observed during the harvest.

h.) Other types of seal mortality

No accidental or intentional mortality occurred during the harvest.

i.) Weather conditions at the time of the harvest

No unusual conditions were observed during the harvest.

j.) Any other unusual conditions related to the harvest

No unusual conditions were observed during the harvest.

k.) Research conducted during the harvest, and visitors requesting to view or film the harvest

Tagged seals were not seen during any of the four harvests that were conducted this year. Should Island Sentinel see any tagged seals, their tags are recorded and pictures are taken and submitted to NMFS. No harvest permits were issued during the harvest season.