



Billing Code 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RTID 0648-XQ006

Whaling Provisions; Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Quotas

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice; notification of quota for bowhead whales.

SUMMARY: NMFS notifies the public of the aboriginal subsistence whaling quota for bowhead whales that it has assigned to the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC), and of limitations on the use of the quota deriving from regulations of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). For 2020, the quota is 93 bowhead whales struck. This quota and other applicable limitations govern the harvest of bowhead whales by members of the AEWC.

DATES: Effective [*insert date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER*].

ADDRESSES: Office for International Affairs and Seafood Inspection, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kristin Rusello, (301) 427-8376.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Aboriginal subsistence whaling in the United States is governed by the Whaling Convention Act (WCA) (16 U.S.C. 916 *et seq.*). Under the WCA, IWC regulations shall generally become effective with respect to all persons and vessels subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, within 90 days of notification from the IWC Secretariat of an amendment to the IWC Schedule (16 U.S.C. 916k). Regulations that implement the WCA, found at 50 CFR 230.6, require the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) to publish, at least annually, aboriginal subsistence whaling quotas and any other limitations on aboriginal subsistence whaling deriving from regulations of the IWC.

At the 67th Meeting of the IWC, the Commission set catch limits for aboriginal subsistence use of bowhead whales from the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas stock. The bowhead and other aboriginal subsistence whaling catch limits were based on a joint request by Denmark on behalf of Greenland, the Russian Federation, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the United States, accompanied by documentation concerning the needs of the Native groups.

The IWC set a seven-year block catch limit of 392 bowhead whales landed. For each of the years 2019 through 2025, the number of bowhead whales struck may not exceed 67, with unused strikes from the three prior quota blocks carried forward and added to the annual strike quota of subsequent years, provided that no more than 50 percent of the annual strike limit is added to the strike quota for any one year. At the end of the 2019 harvest, there were 33 unused strikes available for carry-forward, so the combined strike quota set by the IWC for 2020 is 100 (67 + 33).

An arrangement between the United States and the Russian Federation ensures that the total quota of bowhead whales landed and struck in 2020 will not exceed the limits set by the IWC. Under this arrangement, the Russian natives may use no more than seven strikes, and the Alaska natives may use no more than 93 strikes.

Through its cooperative agreement with the AEWC, NOAA has assigned 93 strikes to the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission. The AEWC will in turn allocate these strikes among the 11 villages whose cultural and subsistence needs

have been documented, and will ensure that its hunters use no more than 93 strikes.

At its 67th Meeting, the IWC also provided for automatic renewal of aboriginal subsistence whaling catch limits under certain circumstances. Commencing in 2026, bowhead whale catch limits shall be extended every six years provided: (a) the IWC Scientific Committee advises in 2024, and every six years thereafter, that such limits will not harm the stock; (b) the Commission does not receive a request from the United States or the Russian Federation for a change in the bowhead whale catch limits based on need; and (c) the Commission determines that the United States and the Russian Federation have complied with the IWC's approved timeline and that the information provided represents a status quo continuation of the hunts.

Other Limitations

The IWC regulations, as well as the NOAA regulation at 50 CFR 230.4(c), forbid the taking of calves or any whale accompanied by a calf.

NOAA regulations (at 50 CFR 230.4) contain a number of other prohibitions relating to aboriginal subsistence whaling, some of which are summarized here:

- Only licensed whaling captains or crew under the control of those captains may engage in whaling;
- Captains and crew must follow the provisions of the relevant cooperative agreement between NOAA and a Native American whaling organization;
- The aboriginal hunters must have adequate crew, supplies, and equipment to engage in an efficient operation;
- Crew may not receive money for participating in the hunt;
- No person may sell or offer for sale whale products from whales taken in the hunt, except for authentic articles of Native American handicrafts; and
- Captains may not continue to whale after the relevant quota is taken, after the season has been closed, or if their licenses have been suspended. They may not engage in whaling in a wasteful manner.

Dated: December 23, 2019.

Alexa Cole, Director,
Office for International Affairs and Seafood
Inspection,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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