



WALRUS IVORY

LEGAL. SUSTAINABLE. ETHICAL. TRADITIONAL.

Alaska Natives rely on hunting for food, clothing and cultural traditions.

In coastal communities, their lifestyles – and livelihoods – depend on walrus harvests.

By following the waste-not spirit of their cultures, subsistence harvests allow communities to survive - and thrive. Alaska Natives have been preserving the land and its resources for thousands of years, and walrus has always been an important and appreciated resource.

Artists who use walrus ivory are an example of the interconnectedness among Alaska Native culture, natural resources and economic viability.

When harvested, the entire animal is used, bringing great value to communities. The ivory is also put to use by making art pieces that help share Alaska Native stories and experiences. This is at the heart of the cultures and traditions of the people.

Unfortunately, this way of life is in danger, an unintended consequence of walrus harvests being associated with illegal poaching for ivory.

WALRUS
IVORY

THE FACTS:

To stop the poaching of African elephants, the United States implemented a near-total ban on the commercial trade of African elephant ivory.

Several U.S. states have passed laws banning the sale, use and possession of all ivory, including walrus.

Elephant ivory and walrus ivory are not the same.

Alaska Native people have been responsibly and respectfully harvesting walrus for centuries. The walrus population remains healthy today.

Walrus ivory continues to be a source of pride, tradition and artistic production.

WHY IT MATTERS

- Blanket bans are criminalizing possession of legally, sustainably and ethically harvested walrus ivory handicrafts.
- These broad bans on commercial ivory are causing uncertainty for visitors over whether they are allowed to buy, own or bring home legally acquired walrus ivory from Alaska. This creates confusion and prevents purchases, which is hurting Alaska Native artists and their small communities.

WHAT'S NEXT?

- Visit Alaska and celebrate Alaska Natives' living tradition.
- Support Alaska Native artists, their communities and their cultures by purchasing ivory artwork.
- Learn more about the responsible, traditional and legal use of walrus ivory by visiting walrusivory.org.



WALRUSIVORY.ORG

WALRUS IVORY IS MORE THAN A PIECE OF ART.

THE PURCHASE OF WALRUS IVORY SUPPORTS ALASKA NATIVE CULTURE, TRADITIONS, ARTISTS AND COMMUNITY ECONOMIES.

AT A GLANCE

**LESS
THAN
2%**

The percentage of the Pacific walrus population represented by the annual walrus harvest in Alaska Native communities.*

283,000

The current Pacific walrus population.*

**MARINE
MAMMAL
PROTECTION
ACT OF 1972**

The federal law that explicitly allows the sale and ownership of walrus ivory products when legally produced by Alaska Native people.

SIX

The number of states with overbroad ivory bans (California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York, Oregon and Washington)** causing severe unintended consequences for Alaska Native communities and violating the federal Marine Mammals Protection Act.

AT A GLANCE

42%

The percent of Alaska Native artists whose ivory art sales account for at least half their annual incomes.***

YOU CAN BUY WALRUS IVORY

Federal law allows the sale and ownership of walrus ivory products when legally produced by Alaska Native people. Walrus ivory offered for sale may only be carved by Alaska Native people. Once carved and sold, anyone may resell Alaska Native art and craftwork made of walrus ivory.

TIME IMMEMORIAL

The length of time walrus has been an important and highly valued resource for Alaska Native people who rely heavily on subsistence lifestyles. In a subsistence harvest, the entire animal is used – meat, hide, blubber and ivory. It is used in traditional ways for food and nutrition, tools, clothing and more, which brings great value to remote Native communities. As part of the waste-not spirit of Alaska Native cultures, the ivory also is put to use by carvers who make beautiful art to share their stories and provide income for their families.

SUPPORTING ALASKA NATIVE ARTISTS

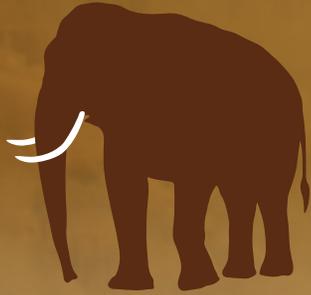
Travelers are encouraged to visit Alaska and celebrate these living traditions of Alaska Native people. Support Alaska Native artists, their communities and their cultures by purchasing ivory artwork.

* Data provided by the Eskimo Walrus Commission

** State laws as of 2021

*** Based on a survey of 172 artists reported in the Arts of the Bering Strait Region: The Economic, Social, and Cultural Role of Traditional Art and Crafts, prepared by McDowell Group and published by Kawerak, Inc. in 2020.

WALRUS v. ELEPHANT IVORY



ELEPHANT IVORY



WALRUS IVORY

COMMON USES:

Sold illegally as whole tusks, which are often sold several times for money before ever made into art, crafts or jewelry.

When walrus is harvested for food and other materials, artists put the ivory to use, as well. Local carvers create walrus ivory art to share their cultures and experiences, and create income for their families.

LEGALITY:

ILLEGAL

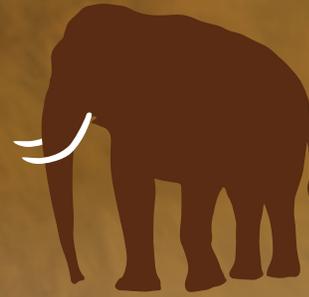
Walrus harvests and ivory art sales by Alaska Natives are federally protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act. However, some states have enacted “blanket bans” in an effort to help stop elephant poaching across the world, and this has unintentionally made walrus ivory illegal in those states.

POPULATION:

Endangered; poaching continues to threaten elephant populations worldwide.

Healthy; Alaska Native people have responsibly harvested walrus and other marine mammals for centuries.

WALRUS v. ELEPHANT IVORY



ELEPHANT IVORY

Wasteful and horrific. Only the ivory is taken, and the elephants are slaughtered with no use for the rest of the animal.

HUNTING PRACTICES:

INDUSTRY:

Although elephant and walrus ivory look similar, they can be properly identified in most situations based on some distinct features. For example, walrus ivory is normally white, but it may darken through age or exposure to environmental factors.



WALRUS IVORY

Walrus are harvested with respect and gratitude for the animal and the resources it provides. This is a centuries-old practice in relationship with the land and commitment to sustaining all it has to offer. Alaska Native communities share in the bounty, and the entire animal is put to use for food, heat, clothing and materials.

Ivory purchase promotes barbaric animal poaching practices.

Ivory is one of many parts of the walrus that is put to use. Walrus ivory art tells stories, shares Native cultures and creates economy for artists and their families. Walrus ivory art sales support the well-being of both people and the animal.





MYTHS v. FACTS



MYTH: Like elephants, walrus are poached for their ivory. **FALSE!**

FACT: Walrus are used in Alaska's coastal communities for food, clothing and other important materials for everyday life. Alaska Native people have depended on and responsibly sourced walrus for centuries. The entire animal is put to use. Ivory is a byproduct of this harvest and used for artistic expression and economy.

MYTH: Walrus populations are in danger from over hunting. **FALSE!**

FACT: Alaska Native people have harvested walrus to feed their families and provide important materials to their communities since time immemorial. The annual walrus harvest in Alaska Native communities represents less than 2% of the current population, according to the Eskimo Walrus Commission. Sustainable harvesting practices ensure the walrus population thrives for generations to come. The walrus harvest is an excellent example of the strong relationship between Alaska Native people and the environment on which they continue to depend for survival.

MYTH: Alaska Native artwork created from walrus ivory is "just" a hobby for many people. **FALSE!**

FACT: Alaska Native artwork has become valued worldwide and provides a window to the beautiful and unique cultures across the vast state. It takes incredible skill, patience and tedious attention to detail to carve walrus ivory into the works of art often seen for sale. Carvers use their pieces to tell stories and share the experiences and cultures of the area. When sold, these carvings provide income in communities where there are very few economic options. Art sales are the main source of income for many artists and their families, who depend on selling their work to help put food on the table.



MYTHS v. FACTS



MYTH: It is illegal to purchase Alaska Native artwork made with walrus ivory. FALSE (usually)!

FACT: Federal law explicitly allows the sale, transport and ownership of walrus ivory products when legally produced by an Alaska Native artist. In most cases, people can purchase and transport walrus ivory art with no problem, although it is a good idea to keep the receipt. The receipt should include the name, address, and tribal affiliation of the vendor, and clear identification that the item was purchased in the United States. Some states, however, do have a “blanket ban” law on all ivory, including walrus ivory. These blanket bans are well-intended and aim to help end elephant poaching. Unfortunately, they are ill-informed and have caused severe consequences for Alaska Native communities. These laws violate the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act. While only a handful of states have enacted “blanket ban” ivory laws, consumers are encouraged to check their state laws to be sure.

MYTH: Purchasing Alaska Native ivory artwork harms walrus populations and contributes to an unethical hunting practices. FALSE!

FACT: The symbiotic relationship between Alaska Native people and the land they use for survival is based on need, respect and responsible use. According to the Eskimo Walrus Commission, the co-management organization representing 19 Alaska Native coastal communities' interests in Pacific walrus, the Pacific walrus population is estimated at 283,000. The annual walrus harvest in Alaska Native communities represents less than 2% of the current walrus population. Walrus have been responsibly and respectfully harvested for centuries by Alaska Native people who use all parts of the walrus to meet the needs of their families and communities.

FAQs

WALRUS HARVESTS

IN A WALRUS HARVEST, WHAT PARTS OF THE ANIMAL ARE USED?

Alaska Native people have depended on Pacific walrus for millennia. Today, walrus remain crucial for the food security of Alaska Native Arctic coastal communities. The meat, organs and blubber are prepared and preserved for food throughout the year, while other parts are used for tools and materials, drums and art pieces. In a walrus harvest, the entire animal is used. A fundamental cultural practice of Arctic Indigenous people is respecting and honoring the whales, walrus, seals and other marine or land animals. It is understood the animals give themselves for the harvest, which means the people - receivers of this precious gift - cherish all it offers, including the bone and ivory that become artwork and handicrafts.

HOW MANY WALRUS ARE HARVESTED ANNUALLY?

The annual harvest of Pacific walrus is less than 2% of the current population estimate of 283,000 as determined by U.S. government managers in collaboration with Russian researchers and Alaska Native communities. The annual harvest is sustainable to maintain a healthy walrus population and is shared with Native Chukotkans across the Bering Strait in Russia who also rely on walrus for their food security.

(Information provided by the Eskimo Walrus Commission, the co-management organization representing 19 Alaska Native coastal communities' interests in Pacific walrus.)

ARE WALRUS HARVESTED RESPONSIBLY?

Yes. Alaska Native communities and the Eskimo Walrus Commission strongly advocate and promote the traditional harvest management practices that have conserved and protected the Pacific walrus population for thousands of years. Additionally, the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) provides protection, management and enforcement of regulations for marine mammal harvests. MMPA allows for Alaska Native harvests 1) for subsistence purposes, 2) for the purposes of creating and selling authentic Alaska Native artwork, handicrafts and clothing, and 3) that are not done in a wasteful manner.

WALRUS IVORY

WHO IS ALLOWED TO CARVE WALRUS IVORY?

Pacific walrus are protected by the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and may only be harvested by coastal-dwelling Alaska Native people. After MMPA became law in 1972, raw walrus ivory may only be sold by Alaska Native people to other Alaska Native people. Only Alaska Native people can carve or scrimshaw walrus ivory into art and craftwork that can be legally sold whether directly to an individual or a store for resale.

HOW DOES WALRUS IVORY SUPPORT A COMMUNITY?

Alaska Natives in remote villages not only rely on subsistence hunting, gathering and fishing as a critical source of nutrition and usable materials, they also rely heavily on sales of authentic, Native craftwork to bring money into communities that have limited economic resources and high cost of living. In a recent survey of artists in the Bering Strait Region, 68% depend on the sale of their artwork to supplement their income for basic needs. The carving and etching of walrus ivory has a long history in Alaska Native communities. Ivory carving remains a strong tradition passed through generations reaching back millennia.

(Taken from Arts of the Bering Strait Region: The Economic, Social, and Cultural Role of Traditional Art and Crafts prepared by McDowell Group and published by Kawerak, Inc. 2020.)

HOW CAN I IDENTIFY VARIOUS TYPES OF IVORY?

Although ivory from different animal species, such as elephant and walrus, are similar in appearance, they can be properly identified in most situations, as each type has distinct features.

For example, walrus ivory is normally white but may darken through age or exposure to environmental factors.

For more information about identifying various types of ivory, visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's online forensic library.

WALRUS IVORY PURCHASES

AM I ALLOWED TO PURCHASE OR OWN WALRUS IVORY?

Federal law explicitly allows the sale and ownership of walrus ivory products when legally produced by Alaska Natives.

However, some states have banned all ivory, including walrus ivory. These "blanket ban" laws are well-intended and aim to help end elephant poaching, but the unintended consequences for Alaska Native communities have been severe. These laws also violate the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act. Alaska visitors and consumers are encouraged to check their own state laws and contact their legislators.

CAN I TRANSPORT ALASKA NATIVE IVORY ART AND CRAFTWORK?

Authentic Alaska Native artwork made of walrus ivory may be exported. Consumers should keep the receipt for any items purchased. The receipt should include the name, address and tribal affiliation of the vendor with clear identification that the item was purchased in the United States.

To determine whether an export permit is needed for travel out of the country, contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska at (907) 271-6198. Travelers should also check with the destination country as import permits also may be required.

LAWS ABOUT WALRUS IVORY

DO INDIVIDUAL STATES HAVE BANS ON WALRUS IVORY?

In 2018, after aggressive movement worldwide to halt the poaching of African elephants for their ivory, U.S. states began to pass laws that banned the sale of all ivory, and did not distinguish elephant ivory and walrus ivory.

State governments may not be familiar with the sustainable, responsible and traditional harvest of walrus, nor the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and its provisions.

As of 2021, six states have enacted overbroad bans on ivory sales, including walrus ivory, and several others are considering adoption of such laws.

While these blanket ivory ban laws are designed to help stop the horrific practices associated with the elephant ivory trade, they have unintentionally harmed the ability of Alaska Native people to effectively continue the respectful and responsible harvest of walrus in their communities. These laws also violate federal law as the harvest and sale of walrus ivory by Alaska Natives is protected by the MMPA.

Individual bans have caused confusion among consumers about the legality of possessing handcrafted works of walrus ivory art, dramatically impacting Native artists and their local economies.

HOW ARE BROAD IVORY BANS IMPACTING ALASKA NATIVES?

These bans have already had significant economic impacts on individuals, families and businesses in Alaska Native communities that make and/or sell walrus ivory products.

Alaska Native hunters will struggle to obtain the economic resources needed for gas and tools used to hunt for food to feed their families and communities. It would also contribute to loss of culture because artists would no longer be able to support themselves with traditional practices.

WHAT SHOULD STATES WITH BROAD IVORY BANS DO?

Lawmakers whose states have blanket ivory bans need to know about the unintended consequences their laws have on Alaska Native people and how deeply those laws negatively impact Alaska Native communities.

Legislators in states that have enacted ivory ban laws should check the language used in the legislation and ensure it distinguishes between the ivory types and does not inadvertently ban walrus, mammoth or mastodon ivory. Laws should be consistent with the Marine Mammal Protection Act because Alaska Natives can sell their legally harvested ivory anywhere in the United States.

States considering ivory bans should ensure the language distinguishes the type of ivory that is illegal and should avoid banning all ivory. Ivory that does not contribute to the decline of any species and is traditionally used by Alaska Natives comes from harvested walrus, and prehistoric mammoth and mastodon ivory.

ARE FEDERAL LAWMAKERS WORKING TO ADDRESS OVERLY BROAD IVORY BANS?

Senate Bill S.804, known as the Empowering Rural Economies Through Alaska Native Sustainable Arts and Handicrafts Act, made progress through the 116th Congress (2019-20). This bill amends

the Marine Mammal Protection Act to prohibit any state or locality from banning the importation, sale, barter, or possession of an authentic Native handicraft article of mammoth, mastodon, walrus ivory or marine mammal bones produced by an Alaska Native person. This bill also prohibits states from imposing bans on marine mammal and fossilized ivory products produced by Alaska Native people.

Unfortunately, S.804 didn't make it through the legislative process in time, and changes in Senate seats after the 2020 election required the bill to start the process over. The bill will be updated and reintroduced, and senators will need to be reeducated on the significance of walrus ivory among Alaska Native people, as well as the negative impacts of blanket ivory ban laws.

WALRUSIVORY.ORG

WHAT IS WALRUSIVORY.ORG?

This effort is designed to create awareness about the importance of walrus ivory art to Alaska Native people.

WalrusIvory.org aims to help lawmakers and consumers better understand the stark differences between the responsible, respectful and critical harvest of walrus and the tragedies of the elephant ivory trade.

Those with an interest in supporting Alaska Native art, culture, traditions and economies are asked to speak up and introduce both legislators and consumers to the beauty and necessity of the walrus harvest and use of walrus ivory.

PANDEMIC EFFECTS ON NATIVE ARTISTS

HOW IS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTING ALASKA NATIVE WALRUS IVORY ARTISTS?

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a considerable drop in the number of travelers visiting Alaska communities and shops. Tourism travel and travel by artists to access markets in larger communities came to an immediate halt.

This led to a notable decline in the purchase of Alaska Native handicrafts, which created a significant financial loss for Alaska Native artists.

In a 2020 survey of Alaska Native artists, 52% stated they suffered dire consequences as the result of almost no in-person tourist sales.

In addition to the lack of in-person sales, the opportunity to reach individuals to provide information correcting the misperceptions around walrus ivory was also impacted.

WHAT CAN SUPPORTERS DO TO HELP OFFSET THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON ALASKA NATIVE ARTISTS?

Travelers are encouraged to visit Alaska and celebrate Alaska Natives' living tradition. Support Alaska Native artists, their communities and their cultures by purchasing ivory artwork.