

Use these talking points to support awareness efforts about the importance of walrus ivory to Native people and communities.



ENVIRONMENT

KEY MESSAGE:

Alaska Native people have been responsibly and respectfully harvesting walrus for centuries.

The walrus population remains healthy.

PROOF POINTS:

The federal Marine Mammal Protection Act allows for the harvest of Pacific walrus for Alaska Native coastal residents because it is, and has been for thousands of years, a cultural, nutritional and important natural resource.

The Pacific walrus population is estimated at 283,000.

Coastal Alaska communities that harvest walrus operate under tribal marine mammal ordinances based on traditional management principles that have been approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The annual walrus harvest in Alaska Native communities represents less than 2% of the current population. (This estimate includes Chukotkans in Russia as it is a shared resource.)

The ordinances are monitored, supported and enforced by federal law enforcement.

When walrus are harvested, the entire animal is used.

It is understood the animals give themselves for the harvest, which means the people – receivers of this precious gift – cherish all it offers.

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CULTURE & TRADITION

KEY MESSAGE:

Alaska Native people in coastal communities rely heavily on walrus for their subsistence lifestyle.

Walrus ivory art is a source of tradition and culture sharing.

PROOF POINTS:

In a subsistence hunt, the animal's meat, organs and blubber are used to provide basic food and nutritional needs of the community.

The respect Alaska Natives have for the gift of the walrus means the ivory also is put to use.

Parts of the walrus are also used to make boats, tools, clothing and other materials.

Carvers make beautiful artwork with walrus ivory to help share their stories and experiences, and they have carved it for thousands of years.

ECONOMY

KEY MESSAGE:

Local carvers rely heavily on sales of authentic, Native craftwork to bring money into communities that have limited economic resources.

PROOF POINTS:

In the Bering Strait Region, 68% of artists surveyed depend on the sale of their artwork to supplement their income for basic needs.

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