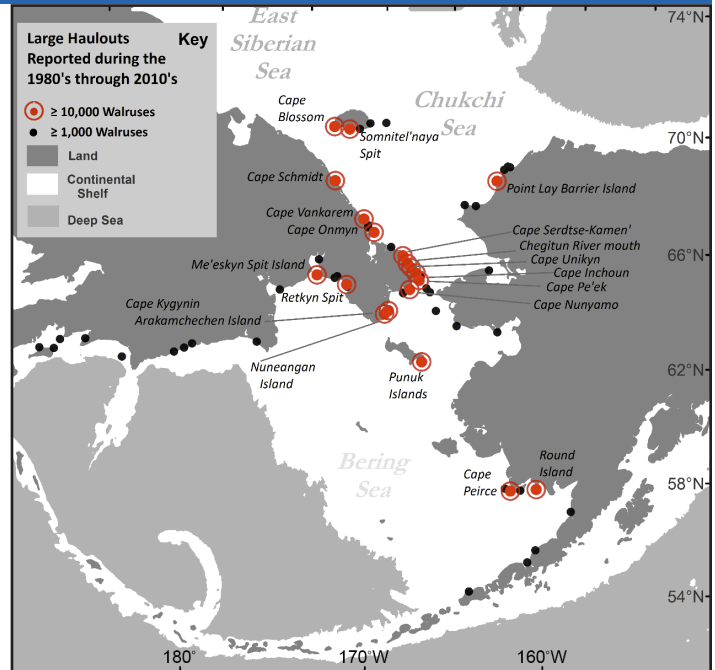


160 Years of Walrus Haulout Observations in Russia and Alaska

Management agencies recognize a need to protect Pacific walrus when they are aggregated in large numbers at coastal haulouts and adjacent waters, because of the potential for trampling deaths and exposure to marine pollution. Walrus are large benthic predators that rest out of water between foraging bouts. Coastal “haulouts” are places where walrus rest on land. They are formed by adult males and by females and young when sea ice is absent. Haulouts are often used repeatedly across seasons and years. Understanding the geography and historical use of haulouts provides a context for conservation efforts.

Scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey, the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published the first comprehensive database compiling more than 160 years of observed walrus haulout locations along the Russian and U.S. coasts. This database contains records from 150 haulouts that may be viewed and queried in their geographic context. Each haulout record is traceable back to original log entries, accounts and maps from 19th century marine explorers, interviews with coastal residents and pilots, or to published management and scientific reports from both countries.

The georeferenced database reveals that haulouts were distributed across the coasts of the Pacific walrus range. However, the largest of the haulouts, those with greater than 10,000 walrus, reported in the recent 4 decades (n=19) were concentrated on the Russian shores in regions near the Bering Strait and northward into the western Chukchi Sea (n=17). Haulouts of adult female and young walrus, which are most sensitive to disturbance, occurred primarily in the Bering Strait region and areas northward.



Map showing Pacific walrus coastal haulout locations reported in the past four decades (1980s–2010s), with a maximum aggregation size of greater than or equal to 1,000 walrus. USGS graphic (public domain).



Russian Wildlife Biologist Anatoly Kochnev observing a very large walrus haulout at Cape Serdtse-Kamen' October 13, 2009, during a dedicated walrus haulout monitoring effort. Photo courtesy of Anatoly Kochnev.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- This database provides information that is vital to reduce the risk of mortality events from human-caused disturbance or marine pollution, will aid conservation planning, assist planning efforts of wildlife managers, industry, mariners, military, communities, and others operating in the Arctic.
- This collaborative work was possible under Area V of the 1972 *Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Protection*.

THIS BRIEF REFERS TO:

Fischbach, A.S., Kochnev, A.A., Garlich-Miller, J.L., and Jay, C.V., 2016, Pacific walrus coastal haulout database, 1852-2016—Background report: U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 2016-1108, 27 p. doi:10.3133/ofr20161108.

RESEARCH CONTACT

Anthony Fischbach
 USGS, Alaska Science Center
 afischbach@usgs.gov
 907-786-7145