

Aerial Surveys of Arctic Marine Mammals (ASAMM) collected by National Marine Mammal Laboratory, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, and other agencies in the Bering, Chukchi and Beaufort Seas (NODC Accession 0039614)

This archival package contains aerial survey data from the surveys described below. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), formerly the Minerals Management Service (MMS), and its precursor, the Bureau of Land Management, have funded aerial surveys in the Beaufort, Chukchi and Bering seas since 1979. In 2008, through an Interagency Agreement between MMS and the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC, National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), the National Marine Mammal Laboratory (NMML, a division of AFSC) assumed co-management responsibilities for these surveys. Throughout the history of the surveys, they have been referred to as the Bowhead Whale Aerial Survey Project (BWASP) and the Chukchi Offshore Monitoring in Drilling Area (COMIDA) marine mammal aerial surveys, both of which are described in more detail below. The surveys are currently conducted under the auspices of a single study, Aerial Surveys of Arctic Marine Mammals (ASAMM). Consistent survey protocol has been in effect on surveys conducted since 1982.

BEAUFORT SEA

Aerial surveys in the western Beaufort Sea (south of 72 degrees N, 140-157 degrees W) have been conducted each year since 1979. MMS personnel and contractors conducted the surveys from 1979-2007. From 2008-2015, the surveys were conducted by NMML. The primary goal of the project, also known as BWASP, was to document bowhead whales (*Balaena mysticetus*) during their fall migration through the western Beaufort Sea, although data were also collected for all other marine mammals that were sighted during the surveys. The surveys were typically conducted during the open water (i.e., ice-free) months of September and October, when offshore drilling and geophysical exploration are feasible and when the fall subsistence hunt for bowhead whales takes place near Kaktovik, Cross Island (village of Nuiqsut), and Barrow, Alaska. Additional surveys were conducted in the Beaufort Sea during spring and summer 1979-1986, and during summer 2011-2015.

EASTERN CHUKCHI SEA

Aerial surveys in the eastern Chukchi Sea (68-73 degrees N, 157-169 degrees W) were conducted by MMS (now BOEM) contractors from 1982-1991. From 2008-2015, the surveys were conducted by NMML using similar methodology to the surveys conducted in previous years. Beginning in 2014, surveys were expanded south to 67 degrees N. The goal of the surveys, also known as the Chukchi Offshore Monitoring in Drilling Area (COMIDA) marine mammal aerial survey project, was to investigate the distribution and relative abundance of marine mammals in the Chukchi Sea Planning Area (CSPA) during the open water (i.e., ice-free) months of June to October, when various species are undertaking seasonal migrations through the area. However, from 1979-1984, surveys were also conducted during spring.

NORTHERN BERING AND SOUTHERN CHUKCHI SEAS

Aerial surveys in the northern Bering and southern Chukchi seas (63-68 degrees N, east of the International Date Line) were conducted by MMS (now BOEM) contractors from 1979-1985. The goal of these surveys was to investigate the distribution, abundance, migration timing, habitat relationships and behavior of endangered whales during the spring migration. Surveys were conducted from April-July.

Collecting Institutions: BLM, MMS, BOEMRE, BOEM, NOAA/NMFS/AFSC/NMML

Contributing Projects: BWASP, COMIDA, ASAMM

Submitter: Amy Willoughby