

Cook Inlet is the year-round home of a unique population of beluga whales whose numbers have decreased dramatically since 1979. To provide valuable information that could help scientists determine the causes of the Cook Inlet beluga decline and implement effective recovery efforts for this endangered species, Friends of the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge (FAR) created the Anchorage Coastal Beluga Survey with the support of Defenders of Wildlife and the National Marine Fisheries Service. The survey trains citizen volunteers to collect scientifically valid data on belugas along the Anchorage coast and needs your support and participation.

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## ANCHORAGE COASTAL BELUGA SURVEY

### PROJECT LEADER

**Friends of the Anchorage  
Coastal Wildlife Refuge**

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beluga@farak.org  
Barbara Carlson  
<http://farak.org>



### SUPPORTING PARTNER

**Defenders of Wildlife**

333 West 4th Avenue, Suite 302  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
907.276.9420 Karla Dutton  
kdutton@defenders.org  
<http://www.defenders.org/belugas>



### TO REPORT A DEAD, DYING OR STRANDED BELUGA OR OTHER MARINE MAMMAL:

**1.800.853.1964**

NOAA Fisheries National Enforcement Hotline

**1.888.774.7325**

Alaska SeaLife Center Rescue and Rehabilitation Hotline

**907.271.3448 or 907.360.3481**

Barb Mahoney, Biologist  
barbara.mahoney@noaa.gov

**907.271.3021**

Les Cockreham, Enforcement Officer

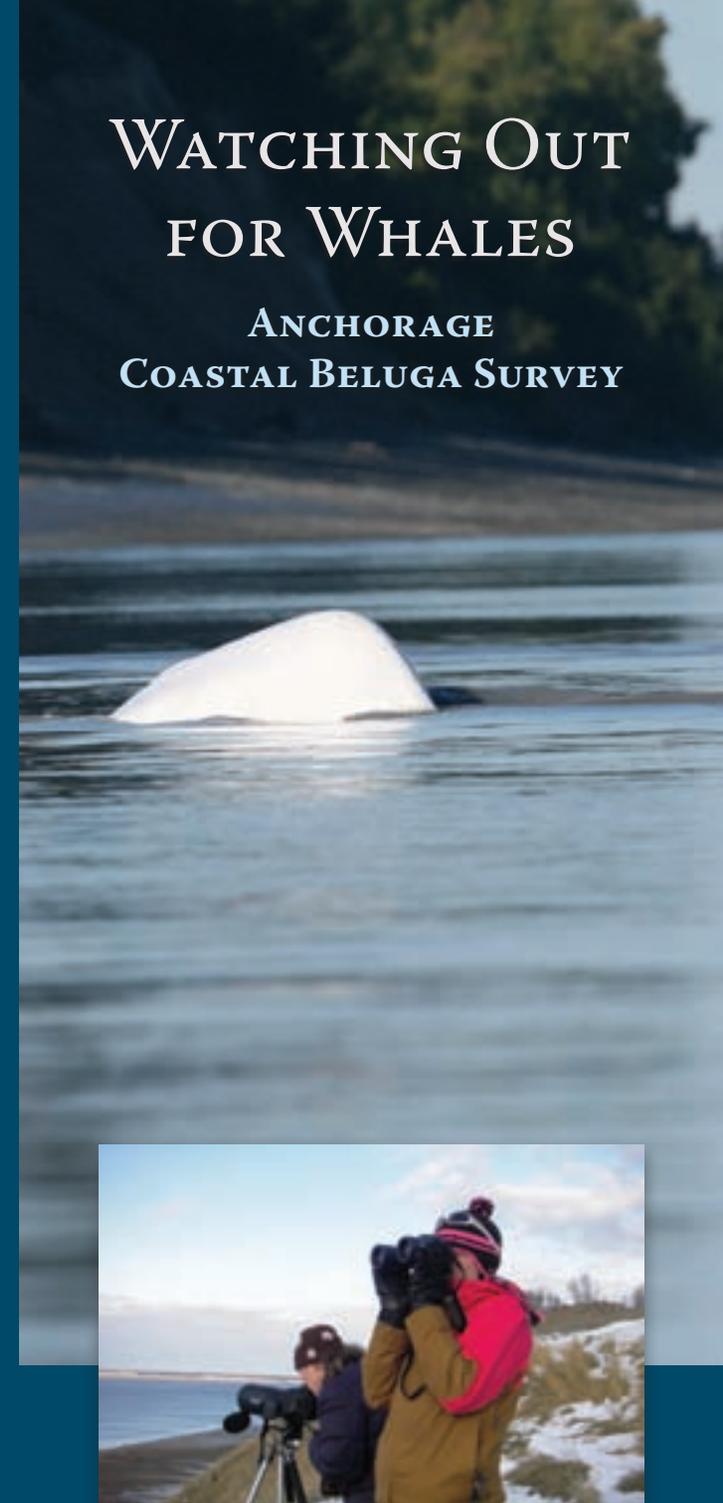
**National Marine Fisheries Service**

222 West 7th Avenue  
Anchorage, Alaska 99517  
<http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/protectedresources/whales/beluga.htm>



# WATCHING OUT FOR WHALES

## ANCHORAGE COASTAL BELUGA SURVEY



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## COOK INLET'S DISAPPEARING BELUGA WHALES

Isolated and genetically distinct from Alaska's four other beluga whale stocks, Cook Inlet belugas declined in number from about 1,300 in 1979 to around 375 in 2008, dropping 50 percent from 1994 to 1998 alone.

Over the past 20 years, a number of protective actions have been taken in an attempt to halt the decline of these imperiled whales:

- In 1988 the U.S. government identified Cook Inlet belugas as a "species of concern."
- In 1999, Alaska Native subsistence hunters voluntarily agreed not to take Cook Inlet belugas and worked with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to develop harvest regulations.
- In 2000, NMFS designated belugas a "depleted" species under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and a legislative moratorium on hunting the whales became official.
- In 2006, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) determined that Cook Inlet belugas were "critically endangered" and at risk of extinction.

Despite these measures, even after hunting ceased, Cook Inlet belugas continue to decline—at a rate of 1.45 percent annually.

Late in 2008, the federal government finally listed the Cook's Inlet beluga whale as an endangered species. To avoid eventual extinction, scientists estimate that this population must soon increase to more than 500 animals.

## ANCHORAGE COASTAL BELUGA SURVEY TO THE RESCUE

Using binoculars and spotting scopes, the trained volunteers of Anchorage Coastal Beluga Survey monitor carefully chosen segments of the Anchorage coast, counting and recording numbers of belugas sighted, their locations, directions of travel, vocalizations and behaviors such as feeding, milling or traveling. They also note the presence of other wildlife, people and activities that may affect the whales.

Friends of the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge (FAR) then shares this data with National Marine Fisheries Service scientists and others who want to know more about Cook Inlet belugas, the threats they face and how best to protect them.



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Belugas range in color from charcoal gray to pure white, and the males can grow to 16 feet and weigh 3,000 pounds. These relatively small whales can eat as much as 60 pounds of food a day, including numerous invertebrates and fish. Belugas have excellent eyesight and hearing. To help find their prey, belugas emit sounds and use the sound waves reflected back when they strike an object to zero in on it, a process known as echolocation. Among the most vocal whale species, belugas are sometimes called "sea canaries" because of their varied vocal repertoire. They are also highly social.

Along the Anchorage coast, belugas spend most of their time traveling around Cook Inlet hunting and interacting in groups. Unfortunately, no one is sure why this unique population continues to stagnate. Pollution, noise, climate change, inadequate food supply, predation by killer whales and disease are among the possible explanations, but more research is necessary to fine-tune the plan to save this endangered species.



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## HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Tell friends and colleagues about the Anchorage Coastal Beluga Survey.
  - Join our partner organizations to help support their work on belugas.
  - Make a donation to help purchase equipment or meet other project needs (contact FAR or Defenders).
  - Volunteer as an observer (contact FAR).
  - Have your business or organization become a survey site sponsor (contact FAR).
- For contact information, see back panel.

**SUPPORT THE SURVEY. WITHOUT YOUR HELP, COOK INLET BELUGAS MAY NOT SURVIVE.**