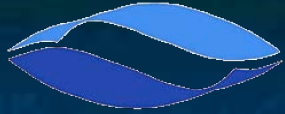




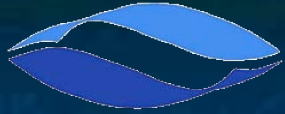
Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Critical Habitat

NOAA Fisheries Service

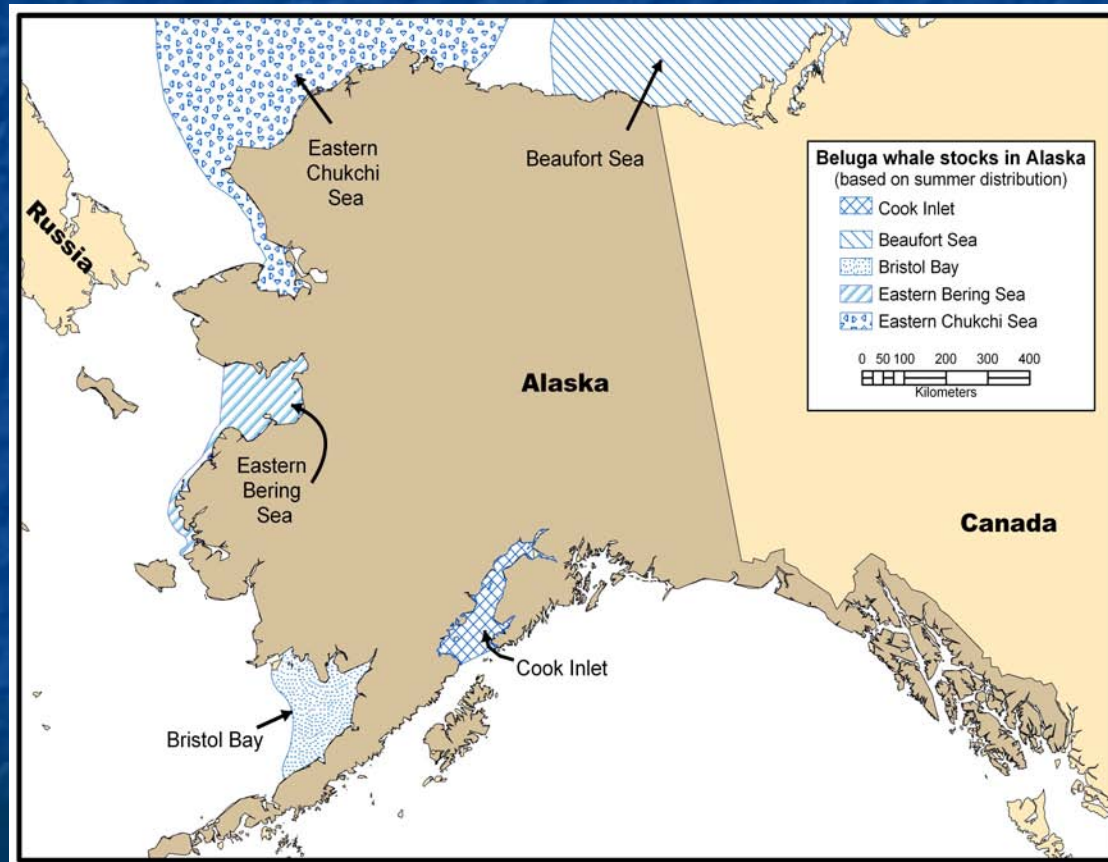
Alaska Region

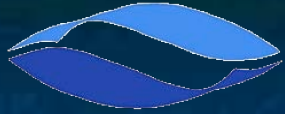


Cook Inlet beluga whales were listed as an endangered species in October 2008. A PR to designate critical habitat was published in the FR on December 2, 2009.



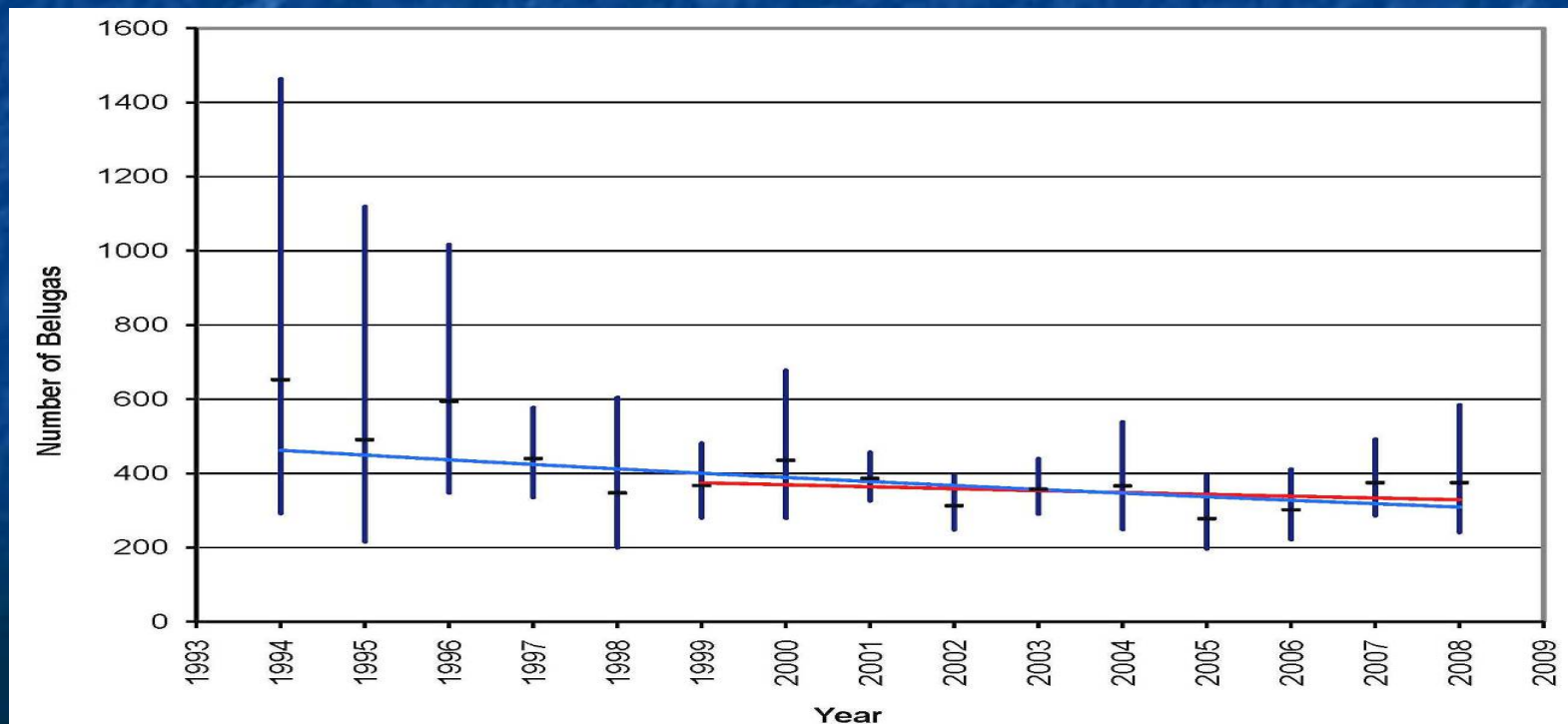
Alaska Beluga Stocks

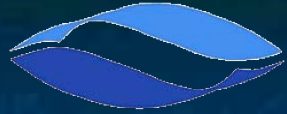




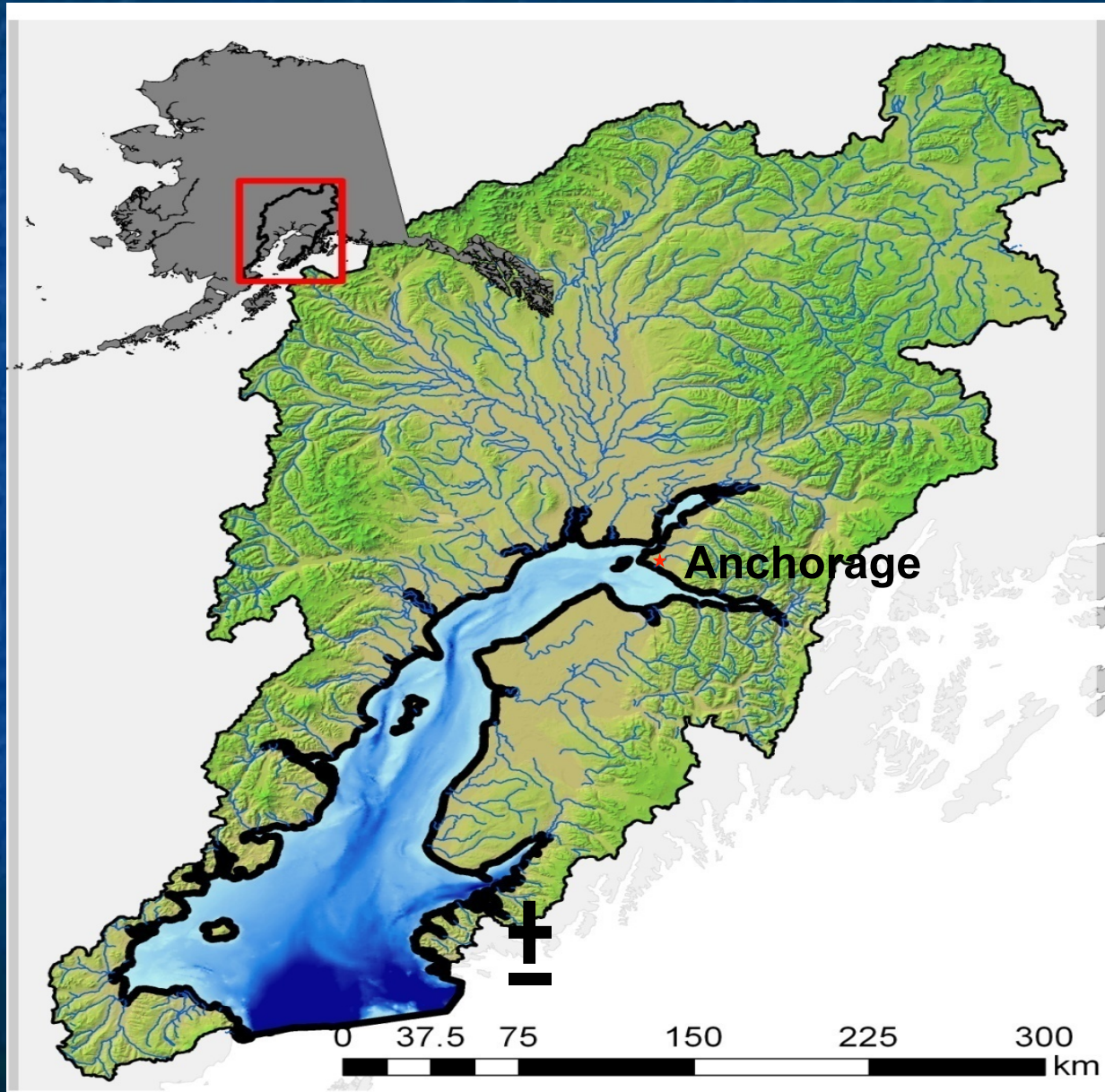
Population is Decreasing

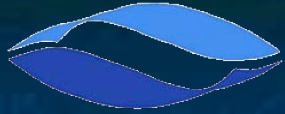
- Trend from 1999 (end of unregulated harvest) to 2008 = -1.45% annually



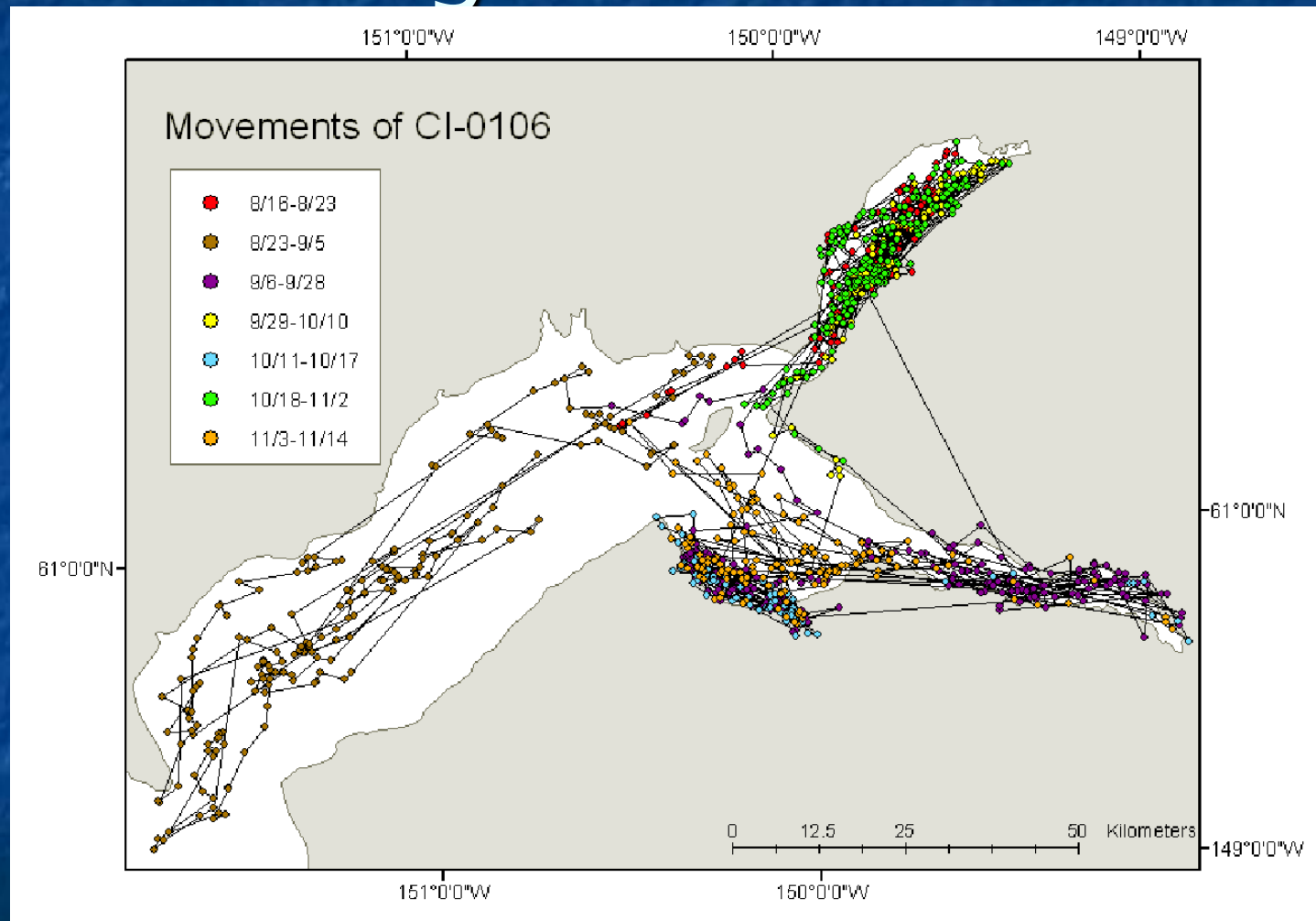


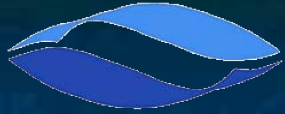
Cook Inlet Beluga Range





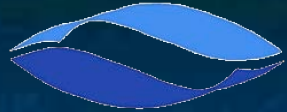
Beluga Distribution





Critical Habitat:

- 1. The specific areas within the geographical area occupied by the species... on which are found those **physical or biological features (I) essential to the conservation of the species** and (II) which may require special management considerations or protection (and)
- 2. Other areas essential to the conservation of the species (unoccupied habitat)
- 3. Requires economic evaluation: the Secretary of Commerce **may** exclude areas where cost of inclusion exceeds that of exclusion.
- 4. Secretary may exclude areas based on National Security "and any other relevant impact."



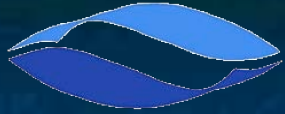
Identification of Essential Features

- General Distribution/Seasonal Abundance
- Concentrate at Mouths of Fish Streams
- Movement Between Stream Mouths
- Prey Species
- Importance of Sound to Whales

Tide Flats - Estuaries

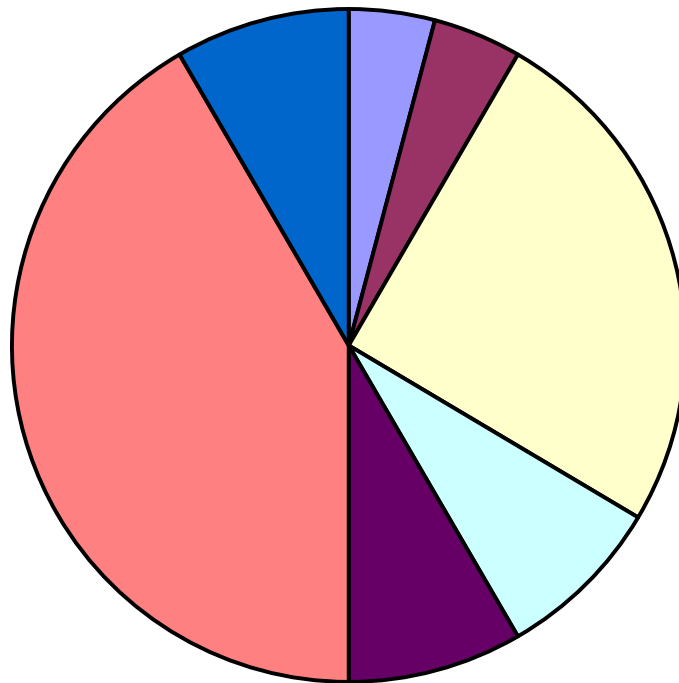
An aerial photograph of a vast estuarine system. The foreground and middle ground are dominated by a wide, light-colored river channel that has meandered extensively, creating several large, rounded oxbow-like features. The water is a pale, silty grey. The surrounding landscape is a mix of green grasslands and dense evergreen forests. In the background, rolling green hills lead up to a range of rugged mountains with significant snow cover under a cloudy sky.

Photo Credit: Olga Shpak

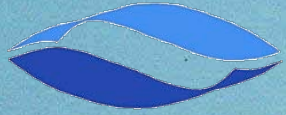


Prey as PCE

Cook Inlet Beluga Prey

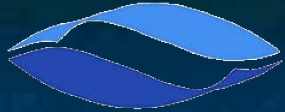


- Long nose sucker
- Sculpin
- Cod
- Eulachon
- Flounder
- Salmon
- Unidentified fish



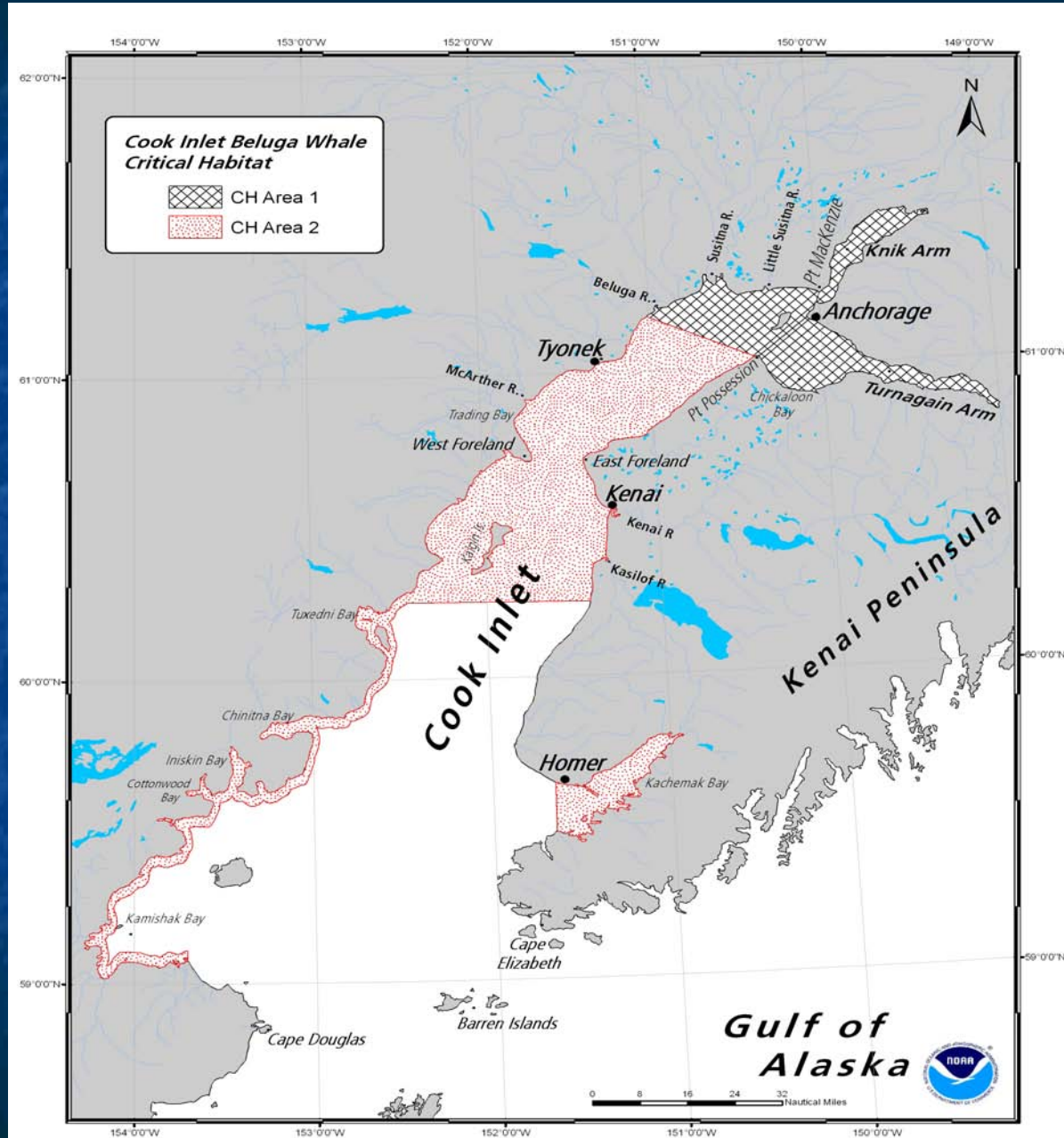
Other PCEs Considered

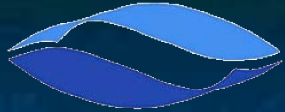
- Noise
- Water Quality/Pollutants
- Access Between Habitat Areas
- Turbidity
- Temperature
- Escape "Terrain"



PCEs for Cook Inlet Belugas

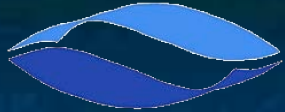
- 1. Intertidal and subtidal waters of Cook Inlet with depths <30 feet (MLLW) and within 5 miles of high and medium flow anadromous fish streams.
- 2. Primary prey species consisting of four (4) species of Pacific salmon (Chinook, sockeye, chum, and coho), Pacific eulachon, Pacific cod, walleye pollock, saffron cod, and yellowfin sole.
- 3. The absence of toxins or other agents of a type or amount harmful to beluga whales.
- 4. Unrestricted passage within or between the critical habitat areas.
- 5. The absence of in-water noise at levels resulting in the abandonment of habitat by Cook Inlet beluga whales.





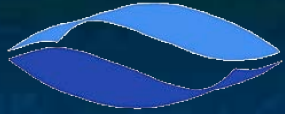
CI Beluga Critical Habitat

- Economic Analysis: Incremental costs of CH range from \$187,000 to 571,000, of which 86% expected within Area 1.
- No areas excluded for economic cause.
- One area to be excluded under Sikes Act.
- “Critical habitat does not include manmade structures and the land on which they rest”



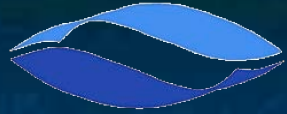
Exclusions to CH

- * The ESA (s. 4(b)(2) allows the secretary of Commerce to exclude any area if he determines the costs exceed the benefits (incl. economic), or for reasons of National security.
- * NMFS has completed a draft economic analysis – we have not proposed any 4(b)(2) exclusions in the proposed rule.



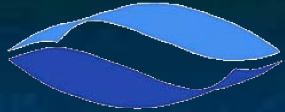
ESA section 7(a)(2)

- Each Federal agency shall, in consultation with the Secretary, insure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out by such agency..is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered species or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification (of critical habitat).



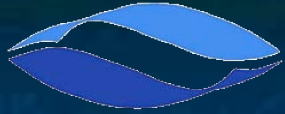
Section 7

- No effect – no consultation
- Informal consultation
- Formal consultation
- If jeopardy/adverse modification: NMFS to suggest reasonable and prudent alternatives that avoid the condition and can be taken..in implementing the action.



Section 7 - Consultation

- Species
- Jeopardy Standard
- Consultation req'd for direct and indirect affects
- Critical Habitat
- Adverse Modification
- Consultation req'd for direct and indirect affects
- Could include activities impacting PCEs (e.g. king salmon)



Existing Critical Habitat
Currently Surrounds the
Communities of Kenai and
Seward.



An aerial photograph showing four white belugas swimming in a line through dark blue, rippling water. The fish are oriented horizontally, moving from the top-left towards the bottom-right of the frame. Their white bodies contrast sharply with the deep blue water.

THANK YOU

(Not Cook Inlet...)