

Marine Mammal management back to state?

An administrative law judge has recommended that the management of polar bears, walruses, sea otters, and six other marine mammal species be returned to the state of Alaska.

Under Judge Malcolm Littlefield's June 30 recommendation, a moratorium imposed in 1972 on taking and importing these animals, except for scientific research, public display, and Native subsistence should be waived, and management of their population should again become the State's responsibility. Notice of the recommended decision was published in the Federal Register on July 20.

The decision is now being reviewed by the two Directors of the Federal agencies with marine mammal jurisdiction: Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Commerce Department's National Marine Fisheries Service. Each of the two agency heads will then announce his own decision. The Fish and Wildlife Service had jurisdiction over polar bears, walruses, and sea otters, and the National Marine Fisheries Service had responsibility for beluga whales, ringed seals, bearded seals, harbor seals, northern seal lions, ribbon seals, and largha seals.

Interested parties have until August 22 in which to file comments on the recommended decision. Comments concerning the walrus, polar bear, and sea otter should be addressed to the Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington D.C. 20240.