

ADF&G seeks public comment on marine mammal control

JUNEAU — The Alaska Department of Fish and Game is seeking public comments on the advisability of the state re-acquiring from the federal government management responsibility for three species of marine mammals, according to ADF&G officials.

The state is considering re-applying for management authority for polar bear, walrus and sea otter under the terms of the Marine Mammals Protection Act.

The state will apply for return of management authority if the public's major concerns can be addressed under a state management program, if there is adequate public support and if the necessary funding can be obtained. The department expects to make a recommendation to Gov. Steve Cowper by the end of November.

In 1984 and 1985, the department collected extensive public testimony throughout the state and recommended that Alaska request management authority for 10 species of marine mammals. The application was withheld because of declining state

revenues and other factors.

The department has now narrowed the field to three species based upon existing conservation issues which can best be addressed by state management, current status of populations, the probable effectiveness of state management, public support and funding availability.

"A state program can more effectively provide for conservation and management to these important marine mammal resources," said marine mammal coordinator Lloyd Lowry. "It's an opportunity to balance national and international concerns with those of Alaskans who are intimately involved with these species.

In order to manage the three species, ADF&G would have to submit a request for the return of management to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Alaska Board of Game also would have to determine the "optimum sustainable population" levels of the three species, set maximum allowable harvest levels and implement appropriate state regulations.