



**BILLING CODE: 3510-22-P**

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**[RTID 0648-XF562]**

**Whaling Provisions; Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Quotas**

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Notice; notification of quota for bowhead whales.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS notifies the public of the aboriginal subsistence whaling quota for bowhead whales assigned to the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC), and of limitations on the use of the quota deriving from regulations of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). For 2026, the AEWC quota is 93 bowhead whales struck. This quota and other applicable limitations govern the harvest of bowhead whales by licensed whaling captains of the AEWC.

**DATES:** Applicable **[INSERT DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]**.

**ADDRESSES:** Office of International Affairs, Trade, and Commerce, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Madison Harris, (202) 480-4592.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Aboriginal subsistence whaling (ASW) in the United States is governed by the Whaling Convention Act (WCA; 16 U.S.C. 916 *et seq.*). Under the WCA, IWC regulations shall become effective with respect to all persons and vessels subject to the jurisdiction of the United States within 90 days of notification from

the IWC Secretariat of an amendment to the IWC Schedule (16 U.S.C. 916k).

Regulations that implement the WCA, found at 50 CFR part 230, require the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries to publish, at least annually, aboriginal subsistence whaling quotas and any other limitations on aboriginal subsistence whaling deriving from regulations of the IWC.

At the 69th meeting of the IWC in 2024, the Commission extended existing ASW strike/catch limits, including those for the bowhead whales from the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas stock, for the 6-year period 2026-2031. The new IWC quota block maintains that the number of bowhead whales struck each year shall not exceed 67, with the total quota block for the 6-year period at 336 bowhead whales landed. Unused strikes from the three prior quota blocks shall be carried forward and added to the annual strike quota of subsequent years, provided that no more than 50 percent of the annual strike limit is added to the strike quota for any 1 year. For the 2026 harvest, there are 33 strikes available for carry-forward, so the combined bowhead whale strike quota set by the IWC for 2026 is 100 (67 + 33).

The extension of existing ASW strike/catch limits at the 2024 meeting of the IWC was carried out following a process agreed to by the Commission in 2018 that would extend ASW strike/catch limits under certain circumstances. Under this process, commencing in 2026, bowhead whale strike/catch limits shall be extended every 6 years provided: (a) the IWC Scientific Committee advises in 2024, and every 6 years thereafter, that such limits will not harm the stock; (b) the IWC does not receive a request from the United States or the Russian Federation for a change in the bowhead whale catch limits based on need; and (c) the IWC determines that the United States and the Russian

Federation have complied with the IWC's approved timeline and that the information provided represents a status quo continuation of the hunts. In 2024, the Commission reviewed the above ASW extension criteria and determined by consensus that all of the conditions had been met, and thus extended the ASW strike/catch limits for 6 years, for the period from 2026 through 2031.

Both Alaska and Russian Natives hunt the bowhead whale, thus the IWC quota for the bowhead whale is shared between the two Native groups. To account for the shared quota, the United States and Russia have an understanding that the two countries share the bowhead whale quota. To facilitate the management of the bowhead quota, NOAA entered into a cooperative agreement with the AEWG. NOAA has assigned 93 strikes to the AEWG through its cooperative agreement with the AEWG, accounting for bowhead whales that may be hunted by Russian Natives. The AEWG will in turn allocate these strikes among the 11 villages whose cultural and subsistence needs have been documented and will ensure that AEWG whaling captains use no more than 93 strikes.

### **Other Limitations**

The IWC regulations, as well as the NOAA regulation at 50 CFR 230.4(c), forbid the taking of calves or any whale accompanied by a calf.

NOAA regulations (50 CFR 230.4) also contain other prohibitions relating to aboriginal subsistence whaling, some of which are summarized here:

- No person, other than licensed whaling captains or crew under the control of those captains, shall engage in aboriginal subsistence whaling;
- No whaling captain shall engage in whaling that is not in accordance with the regulations of the IWC, NOAA, and the relevant cooperative agreement;

- No whaling captain shall engage in whaling without an adequate crew or without adequate supplies and equipment;
- No person may receive money for participating in the hunt;
- No person may sell or offer for sale whale products from whales taken in the hunt, except for authentic articles of Native handicrafts;
- Captains cannot continue to whale after the relevant quota is reached, after the season has been closed, or if their licenses have been suspended; and
- No captain shall engage in whaling in a wasteful manner.

Dated: March 30, 2026.

**Alexa Cole,**

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