

**STUDY TITLE:** COMIDA: Impact Monitoring for Offshore Subsistence Hunting

**REPORT TITLE:** COMIDA: Impact Monitoring for Offshore Subsistence Hunting, Wainwright and Point Lay, Alaska.

CONTRACT NUMBER: M09PC00001

SPONSORING OCS REGION: Alaska

APPLICABLE PLANNING AREA: Alaska OCS, Chukchi Sea

FISCAL YEARS OF PROJECT FUNDING: 2009-2012

COMPLETION DATE OF REPORT: December 2013

COST(S): FY 2009 [\$300,000]; FY 2010: [\$200,000]; FY 2011: [\$284,780]; FY 2012: [\$215,025];

CUMMULATIVE PROJECT COST: [\$999,805]

PROJECT MANAGER: Stephen R. Braund

AFFILIATION: Stephen R. Braund & Associates

ADDRESS: P.O. Box 1480 Anchorage, AK 99510

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Stephen R. Braund

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**BACKGROUND:** In 2009, Stephen R. Braund & Associates (SRB&A) and Applied Sociocultural Research (ASR), under contract to the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (USDOI, BOEM), initiated monitoring efforts focused on offshore subsistence hunting for key marine mammals (bowhead and beluga whales, walrus, seals, and polar bears) in the two communities, Point Lay and Wainwright, that are most proximate to recent Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas leases and to currently anticipated offshore exploration and development in the Chukchi Sea. BOEM is the federal agency responsible for overseeing oil and gas leases on the OCS. SRB&A began the Chukchi Offshore Monitoring in Drilling Areas (COMIDA) study to establish updated subsistence baseline information in the Chukchi Sea area and monitor on an annual basis any significant changes in offshore subsistence harvest activities over time in the communities of Point Lay and Wainwright during the 2010, 2011, and 2012 boating seasons (i.e., March through October).

**OBJECTIVES:** The study had three primary objectives: 1) collect and document baseline offshore subsistence data for the study communities to allow the assessment of whether OCS oil development activities will result in changes to offshore subsistence hunting practices; 2) determine whether subsistence hunting in the Chukchi Sea displays significant variation over time; 3) determine whether variation can be attributed to offshore oil and gas industrial activities.

**DESCRIPTION:** The study worked to identify participants for the project who were active in offshore subsistence activities. The study team preferred potential participants to also own a boat, but considered exceptions in cases where the participant regularly used another person's boat but did not travel with the owner. If a community member expressed interest in the study, the study team explained the purpose and methods of the study and provided them with a consent form which provided a list of benefits and risks associated with participating in the study.

GPS units were used to record the spatial documentation of offshore hunting activities and the acquisition of systematic observations on hunting activities. Field researchers instructed each hunter, upon receiving their GPS unit, how to record tracks and waypoints. Specifically, the GPS units recorded the date and time of offshore trips, the location and direction of the participant's trip, and provided the participant with an opportunity to mark marine mammal sightings, harvest sites, and unusual observations with waypoints. Each GPS unit automatically recorded the location, direction of movement, and velocity of the unit. Participants were also instructed on how to make a waypoint for observations such as marine mammal sightings, harvest sites, and unusual observations during their offshore trips. During post-hunt interviews field researchers downloaded recorded tracks and waypoints onto a laptop computer and reviewed each one individually with participants to help guide interviews.

**SIGNIFICANT CONCLUSIONS:**

- 1) Wainwright's marine mammal subsistence activities are primarily focused on bearded seal, bowhead, and walrus. Wainwright's offshore hunting tracks during the three study years extended from as far south as Icy Cape north to Peard Bay. The farthest extent of hunting tracks ranged from approximately 26 to 32 miles offshore and up to 40 miles from Wainwright.
- 2) Point Lay's marine mammal subsistence activities are primarily focused on bearded seal, bowhead, and beluga. The majority of Point Lay's hunting tracks are located north from Omalik Lagoon to Icy Cape, although a few tracks were also recorded as far south as Point Hope and north as far as Wainwright. A large number of Point Lay hunting tracks are concentrated in Kasegaluk Lagoon. The furthest extent of offshore subsistence activity during the three study years ranged between 10 and 22 miles offshore with the farthest offshore track occurring west of Point Lay.
- 3) The remainder of offshore resources harvested by Wainwright and Point Lay include several species of seal, fish, waterfowl, and eggs all of which were targeted less frequently and closer to shore than the resources identified above. Caribou were also targeted by both communities, particularly Point Lay hunters, who utilized the offshore environment to access caribou hunting areas along the coastline.
- 4) The data collected in this study show that there is variation in offshore subsistence hunting activities due to ice conditions, wind conditions, aircraft and vessel traffic, and other reasons such as the health of resources or equipment failures. Whether variation in offshore subsistence hunting patterns is related to offshore oil and gas activities could not be answered with the current data set as oil and gas activities were relatively limited in the Chukchi Sea during the study years or were too far offshore to cause hunters to report industry interactions during their subsistence activities for the three study years.

**STUDY RESULTS:** Based on continuing discussion with knowledgeable community leaders and hunters and feedback received during community review meetings, SRB&A estimates that at least 75 to 80 percent of Wainwright and Point Lay offshore subsistence hunters participated in the study. In total 27 Wainwright individuals and 30 Point Lay individuals registered in the study during the course of the three study years (2010, 2011, and 2012). Of these participants, 17 provided GPS track data in Point Lay, and 24 provided GPS track data in Wainwright. The information provided by Point Lay and Wainwright participants provide a baseline characterization of offshore subsistence uses in several key topics including where did the participants go, what did they target, and when did they go. Data that can be used to address these topics include baseline indicators such as offshore hunting tracks, resources targeted, and months of offshore activities. Furthermore, variation or trends in these subsistence baseline indicators were put into context and explained through the environmental data (e.g., ice, wind, water conditions) and traditional knowledge provided by the participants.

**STUDY PRODUCT:** Braund, Stephen R. & Associates. 2013. COMIDA: Impact Monitoring for Offshore Subsistence Hunting, Wainwright and Point Lay, Alaska. US Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Alaska OCS Region. Anchorage, Alaska. OCS Study BOEM 2013-211. 298pp.

### Hunting Tracks, Wainwright and Point Lay 2010-2012

- study community
- Wainwright hunting tracks (361 boat tracks representing 389 hunting trips, 24 respondents)
- Point Lay hunting tracks (226 boat tracks representing 240 hunting trips, 17 respondents)

Stephen R. Braund & Associates  
 P.O. Box 1480  
 Anchorage, Alaska 99510  
 (907) 276-8222 srba@alaska.net

Under Contract to the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Stephen R. Braund and Associates (SRB&A) collected GPS data from Point Lay harvesters. SRB&A coordinated with the Native Village of Point Lay and local residents to identify appropriate study participants.

