

Agency seeks to tap public knowledge of Inlet belugas

Don Hunter / Anchorage Daily News / April 16, 2009

Federal biologists are deciding what parts of Cook Inlet are vital to the survival of the area's population of beluga whales, and want to know what you know about the animals.

The National Marine Fisheries Service listed the belugas as an endangered species last October. Now scientists have to designate "critical habitat" for the whales.

Once that happens, federal agencies will have to make sure they don't fund activities or projects in those habitat areas that further endanger the whales.

NMFS is asking for help in answering several questions, including:

- What parts of the inlet are used by belugas, and when?
- What physical and biological features of the inlet are essential to the whales' survival?
- What kinds of protection are important for those areas?
- What are the economic trade-offs? Are some areas so important for other reasons that they should not be designated as "critical habitat?"
- What current or planned activities or projects in Cook Inlet might affect the whales' habitat?

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