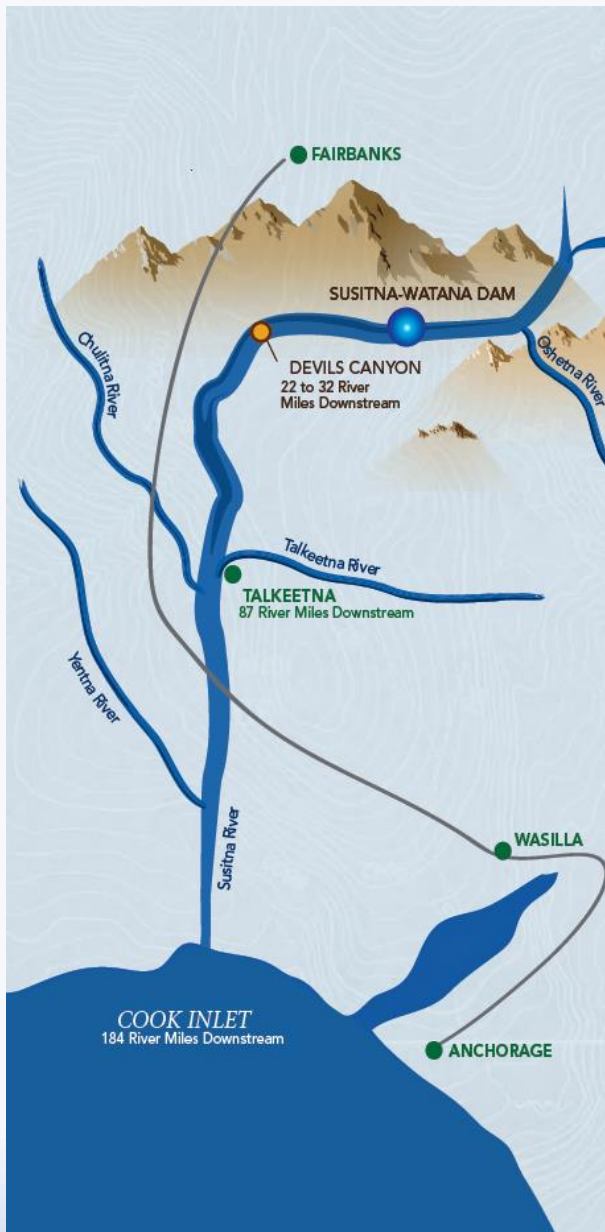


# Initial Study Report Meeting

## *Study 9.17* *Cook Inlet Beluga Whale*

*March 22, 2016*

Prepared by  
DOWL



## Study 9.17 Status

- **ISR Documents (ISR Part D, Section 4)**
  - Initial Study Report Parts A, B, and C (June 3, 2014)
    - Modified Revised Study Plan (ISR Part C, Attachment 1)
  - 2014 CIBW Study Implementation TM (Sept 26, 2014)
  - 2015 CIBW Implementation Plan TM (Sept 30, 2014)
  - ISR Part D (Nov 6, 2015)
- **First year of data collection completed** in 2013 (June 2014 ISR).
- **Vessel-based surveys** were conducted in 2014 to collect data on prey species and marine mammal distribution, behavior, and group composition (Sept 26, 2014 TM).
- **Modifications** to the June 2014 ISR have been identified but not implemented (Sept 30, 2014 TM and ISR Part D).

# Objectives

- Document CIBWs and other marine mammals in the Susitna River delta, focusing on CIBW distribution and upstream extent
- Document CIBW group size, group composition, and behavior within the Susitna River delta
- Develop a model to describe the relationships between river flows, water surface elevation, and CIBW foraging habitats in the Susitna River

# Components

- **Aerial surveys to document CIBW and other mammals within the Susitna River delta**
- A combination of video and still cameras to increase ability to detect CIBWs and to document group composition and behavior
- Development of a model to describe the relationships between river discharge and water surface elevation in CIBW foraging habits at the delta

# Variances

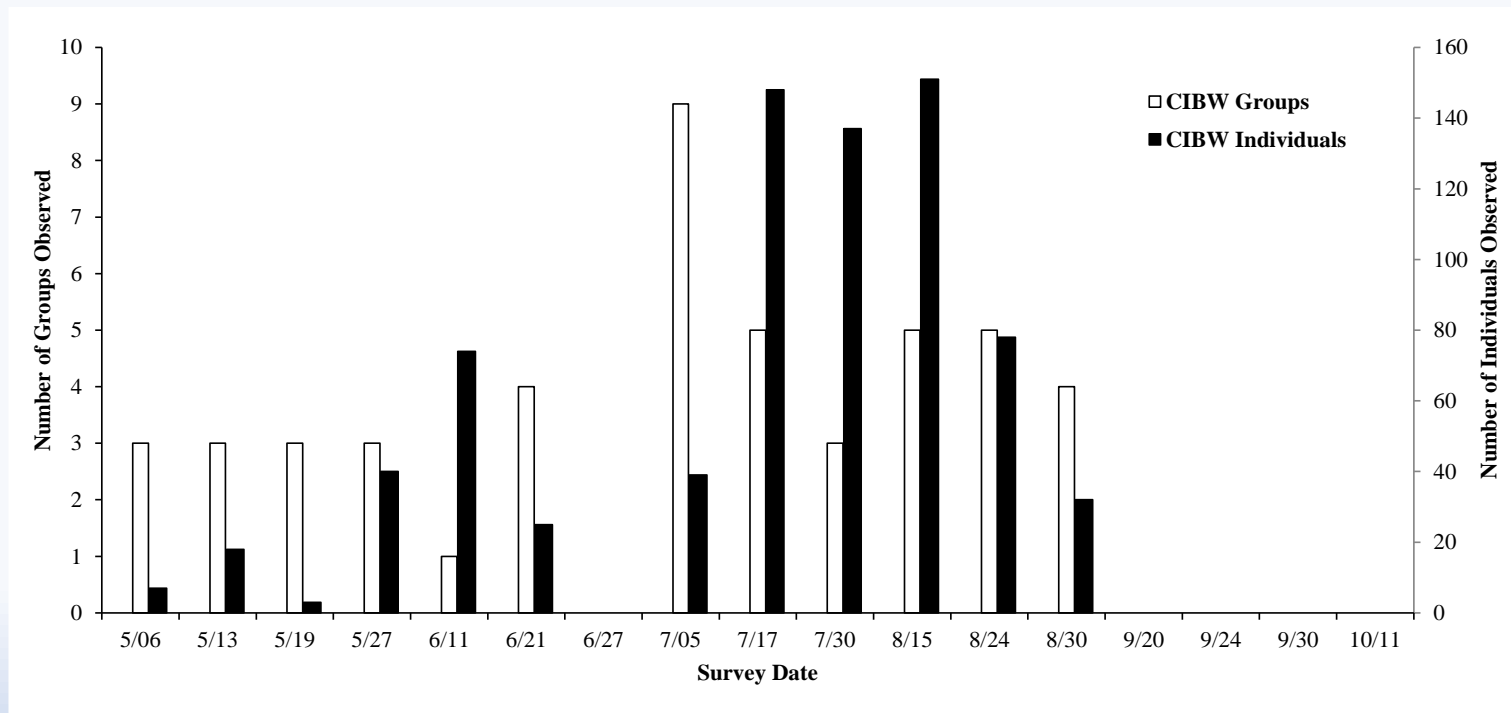
*(ISR Part A, Section 4.1; pg 2)*

- Observers did not document the angle of aerial survey sightings.  
(ISR Part A Section 9.17.4.2.1)
- Observers utilized a “best” count technique for each CIBW group.  
(ISR Part A Section 9.17.4.2.1)
- The live-feed function of the cameras was not operational until September 25, 2013. (ISR Part A Section 9.17.4.2.2)
- Water surface elevation modeling was deferred.  
(ISR Part A Section 9.17.4.2.3)

# Summary of Results – 2013 Aerial Surveys

(ISR Part A, Section 5.1; pg 8)

- CIBWs sighted on 12 of 17 aerial surveys
- Most sightings were within two miles of the shoreline
- Sighting rates increased from May to July
- Peak sightings occurred in July and August.



# Summary of Results – 2013 Cameras

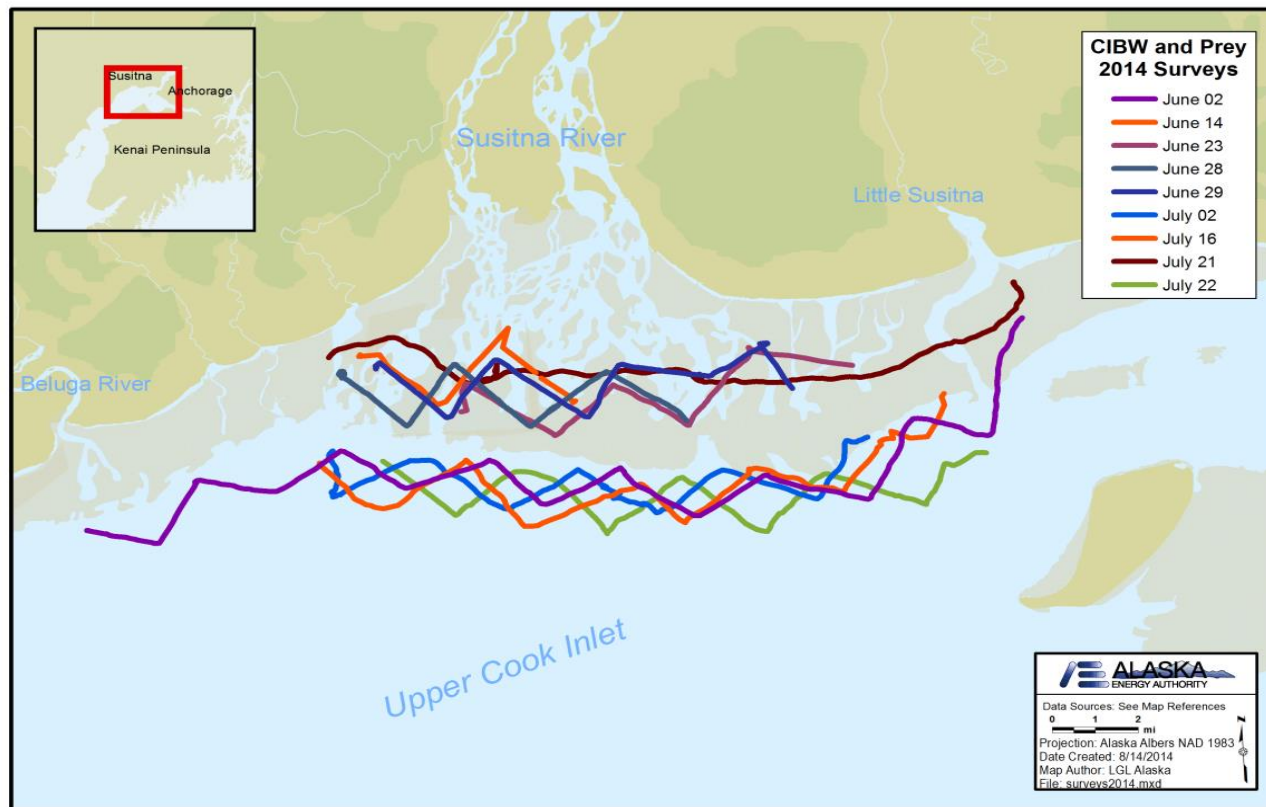
*(ISR Part A, Section 5.2; pg 10)*

- Video recorded Sept. 3 – 24 at PRM 6
  - 7 sightings (likely the same group) on Sept. 20
  - 2 sightings on Sept. 22
- Live-feed video was monitored Sept. 25 – Oct. 17
  - No sightings
- Still Cameras
  - PRM 6 (operational Sept. 3 – Oct. 17)
    - 1 group (2 CIBWs) was photographed on Sept. 4
  - PRM 11 – PRM 16 (operational July 1– Oct. 8)
    - No CIBW were photographed

# Summary of Results – 2014 Vessel Surveys

(Sept 26, 2014 TM)

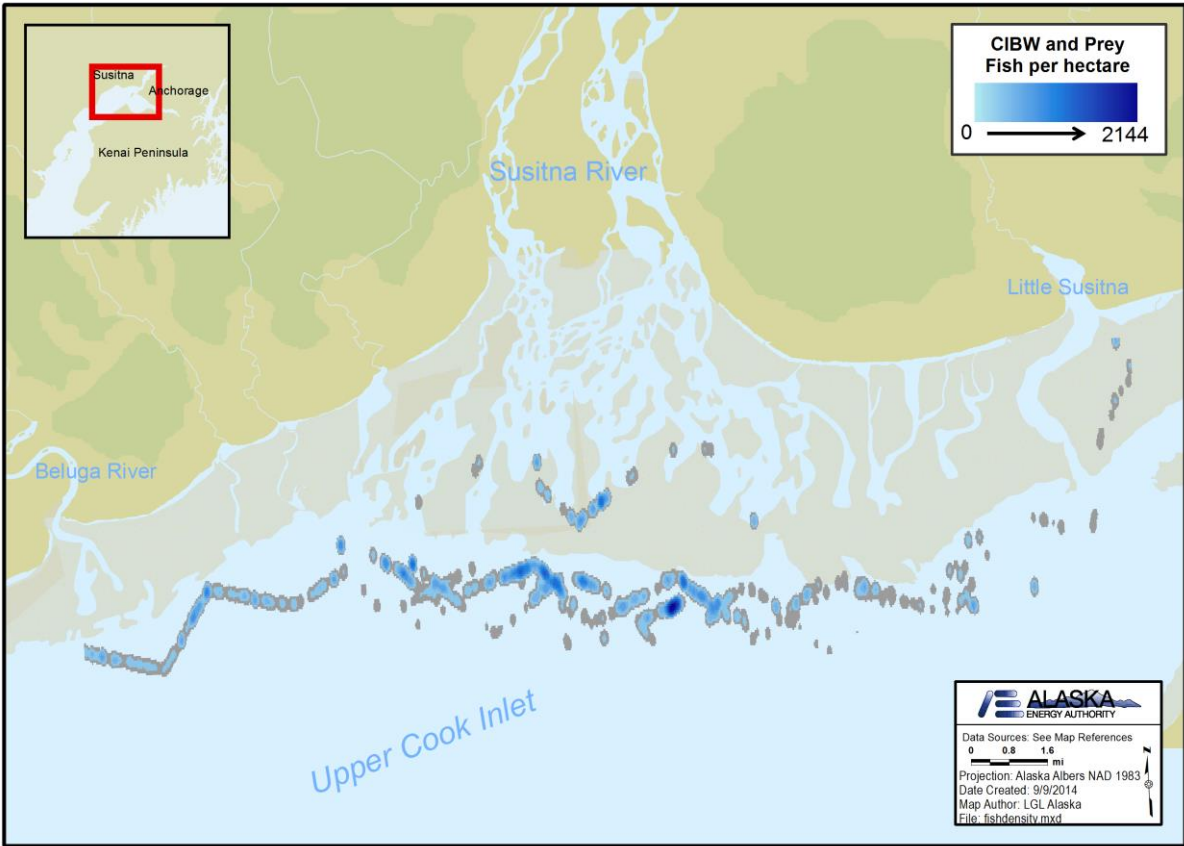
- Vessel-based surveys for beluga prey species
  - June and July 2014.





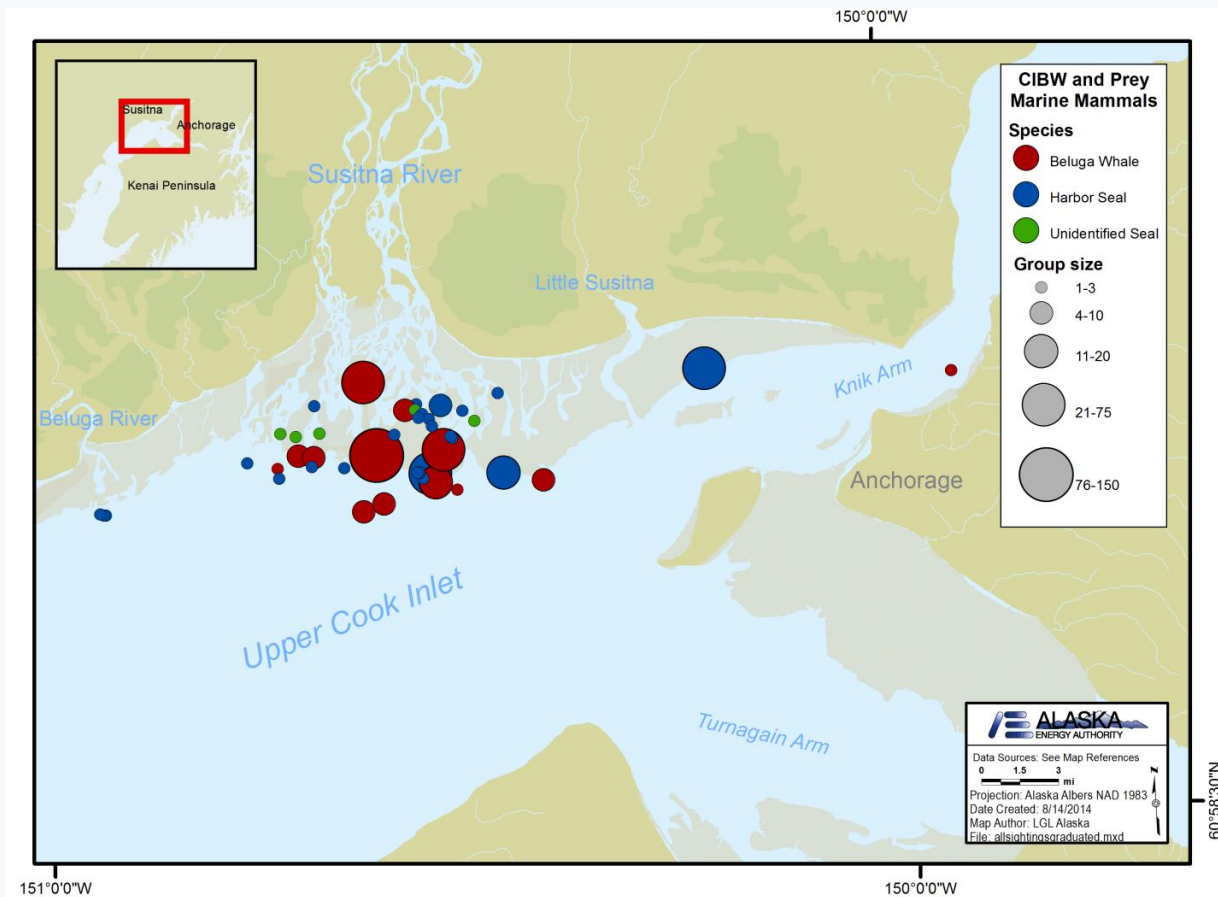
# Summary of Results

(Sept 26, 2014 TM)



# Summary of Results

(Sept 26, 2014 TM)



# **AEA Proposed Modifications**

## **(ISR Part C, Section 7.1 and Attachment 1)**

Aerial surveys would be replaced by **vessel-based incidental observations** (ISR Part C, Section 7.1.2.4.1)

- Eulachon Study (Study 9.16) biologists would look for belugas during transits.
- Record observation effort and CIBW sightings.

Camera stations would be replaced by **land-based observations** (ISR Part C, Section 7.1.2.4.2)

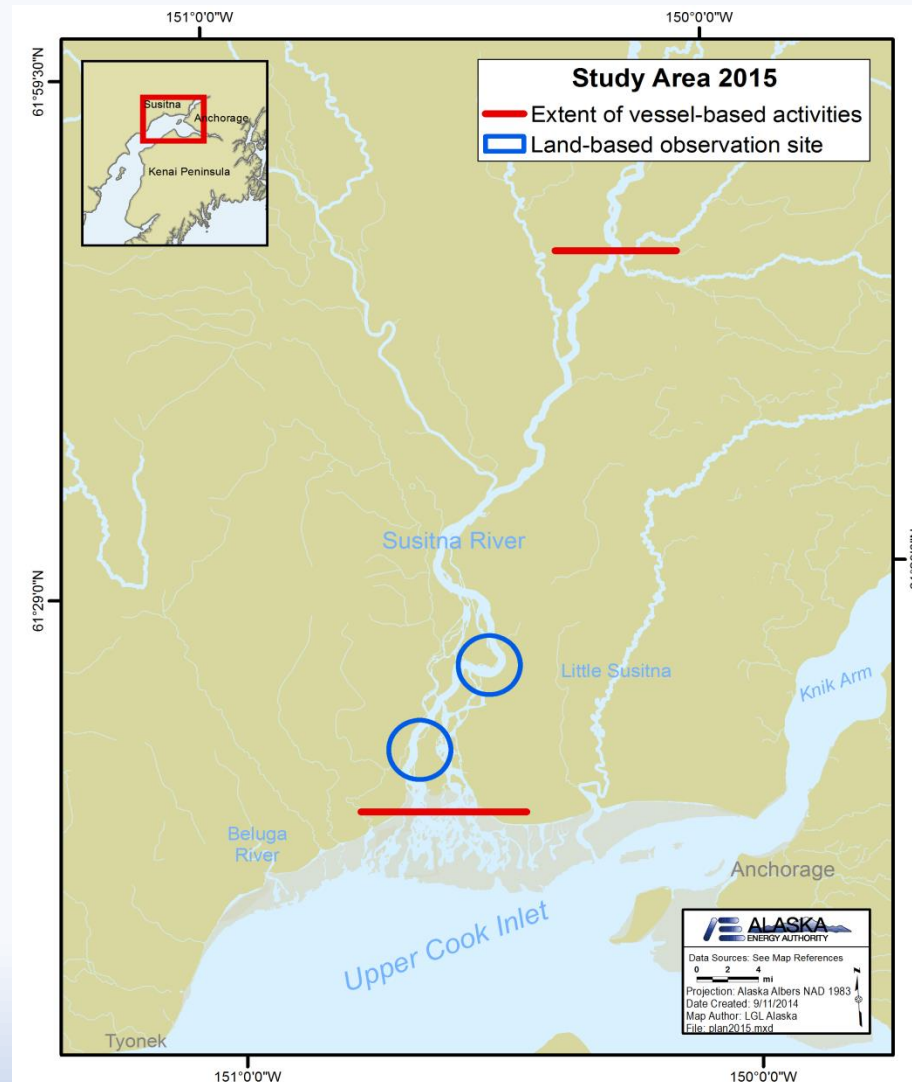
- CIBW surveys would be conducted near the 2013 camera observation stations

Water surface elevation (WSE) model would be replaced by **habitat modeling** (ISR Part C, Section 7.1.2.4.3)

- Use ongoing modeling in the Geomorphology Study (Study 6.6) and Water Quality Study (Study 5.6) to evaluate potential Project effects on CIBW foraging habitat

# AEA Proposed Modifications

(ISR Part D, Section 7.2; 2015 Implementation Plan, September 2014)



## *Current Status and Steps to Complete*

- Land-based observations and vessel-based incidental observations will be conducted to document CIBW use of the Lower Susitna River.
- Data from future year of study will be analyzed and results will be combined with those from 2013 and 2014 to fulfill study objectives.

# *Licensing Participants Proposed Modifications to Study 9.17?*

- Agencies
- CIRWG members and Ahtna
- Public