

PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT

PROJECT NUMBER: 3-14-02

RESEARCHER: Steven Ferguson

TITLE: Cumberland Sound Beluga Survey

ORIGINALLY FUNDED: 2014-2015

NWMB FUNDING: \$60,000

PROJECT SUMMARY: The purpose of this study is to provide an updated abundance estimate for the Cumberland Sound beluga population and to use this updated abundance estimate to assess trends in population size since 1990. The resulting assessment will form the basis of Science Advice regarding current population status, size and harvest levels.

FINANCIAL REPORT:

Amount from NWMB:	\$60,000
Amount from Others:	\$235,000
TOTAL	\$295,000
Expenses:	\$294,000
Difference	+ \$1000

COMMENTS: The 2014 aerial survey of beluga whales in Cumberland Sound was completed as planned in August 2014. The survey design included an intensive photographic survey of Clearwater Fiord and visual surveys of the North and West Strata (Figure 1). A total of 96 (12 groups) and 10 (6 groups) belugas were observed on the first and second surveys of the North Stratum, respectively. The dive-corrected estimates of the total number of belugas in the North Stratum were 567 for the first survey and 59 for the second survey. No belugas were observed on the survey of the West Stratum. Analysis of survey photographs in Clearwater Fiord is ongoing, and is estimated to be completed by the end of March 2015. Upon completion of photographic analysis, results will be combined with results from the analysis of the visual surveys to obtain an overall estimate for the Cumberland Sound beluga population. As indicated in the interim financial report, all of the NWRT funding has been spent.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. NWMB Wildlife staff do not have any recommendations for this reporting period. The project leader has met all of the reporting requirements to date. A final financial report will be required by June 30th 2015 as per the NWRT policy. Project results will be captured in the final project report which is required by September 30th, 2015.

CONSULTATIONS: Danica Crystal, Wildlife Management Biologist, NWMB

PREPARED BY: Karla Letto, Wildlife Management Biologist, NWMB

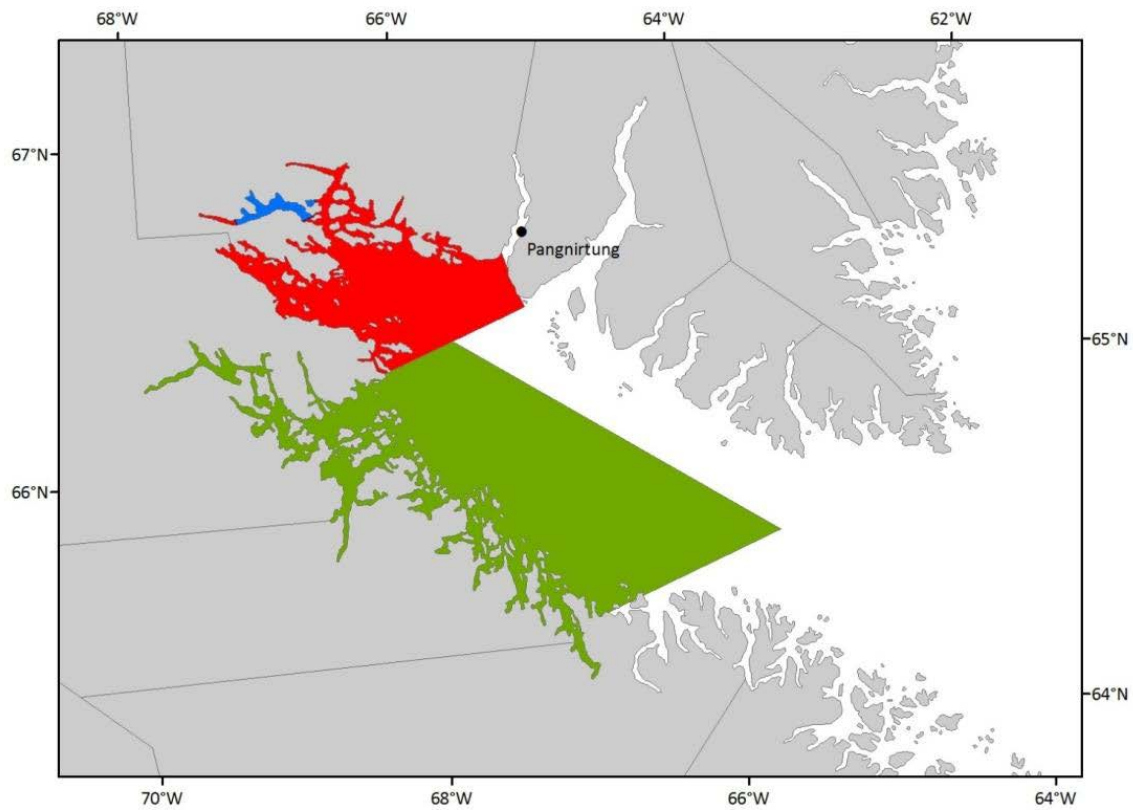


Figure 1. The area covered by the 2014 aerial survey of beluga whales in Cumberland Sound was divided into three strata: the Clearwater Fiord stratum (blue), the 'North' Stratum (red), and the 'West' Stratum (green).