

Role and Importance of Bowhead Whaling in the Alaskan Arctic Subsistence Economy

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Subsistence fishing and hunting are a principal characteristic of the rural Alaskan economy. In the Alaskan Arctic, over 4,657 ton of wild food is harvested annually, which is considered to be over US\$82 million of “replacement monetary value.” In 2012-2015, as one of the principle investigators at the Alaska State Government research institution, I participated in comprehensive subsistence surveys in five out of the six bowhead whaling communities on the Alaskan North Slope. The project collected information about their harvest, sharing, and use of more than 100 species of fish, land and marine mammals, birds, and wild plants, as well as food security, food networks, and mapping areas used by community residents for subsistence fishing and hunting. By focusing on Barrow, the largest whaling community in Alaska where approximately 25 edible ton of bowhead whale has been consumed annually, this presentation explores the role and importance of bowhead whaling in the Alaskan Arctic subsistence economy.