

# Epic walrus gathering on again

August 31 2015

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A large walrus haulout in eastern Russia, August 2015. Credit: Maksim Deminov

On both sides of the Bering Strait, summer sea ice has once more dropped to a level that is driving thousands of walrus onto coastal beaches.

Photos taken in Ryrkaypiy in Chukotka, Russia show an estimated 5,000 walrus hauled out in that spot, while across the strait in the United States, thousands more are hauled out near the village of Point Lay, Alaska. Villagers in both places are working to protect resting walrus herds from curious onlookers, as walrus hauled out in such large

numbers on beaches are prone to being stampeded, killing smaller animals in the crush.

During the late summer and early fall, the Pacific walruses of the Chukchi Sea north of Alaska and of Russia's Chukotka prefer to rest on sea ice over the shallow waters of the continental shelf. In those areas they can readily access food on the seabed. However, in most years since 2007 when Arctic sea ice extent plummeted to a record low, [walruses](#) have been forced ashore because there has been no [sea ice](#) over their preferred shallow feeding areas.

"This past July was the second warmest on record for Alaska," said Pete Ewins, WWF Arctic species specialist. "So it's not surprising that we're seeing these animals on the beaches quite early. While haulouts can be potentially dangerous to the animals gathered on shore, we're concerned about what events such as these mean for the health of the entire Arctic marine system."

The haulouts are also happening just days before US President Barack Obama, foreign ministers and other senior representatives visit the region to attend a US government hosted Arctic meeting known as GLACIER. During their visit, they will discuss the changing climate of the region and the need to come together and support a strong climate deal during the global climate negotiations in Paris.

Provided by WWF

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