

I, Gordon Brower, hereby declare as follows:

1. I am the Land Management Regulation manager at the Department of Planning and Community Services at the North Slope Borough (NSB). I have worked for the NSB for about 15 years. The Department of Planning is responsible for, among other things, permitting oil and gas activities within the NSB's jurisdiction and for enforcing the NSB's policies. Many of the policies seek to protect the NSB residents' subsistence and culture.
2. I am also a bowhead whale hunter. I have been whaling since I was 12 years old. Now I am 43 years old.
3. Subsistence hunting is a central part of the Inupiat culture, as it has been for thousands of years. While new elements have been incorporated into our practices and lifestyles, many aspects of the way we live and survive are a continuation of ancient traditions. Subsistence activities are an important part of our economy and our identity. The animals provide food and important materials, such as skins and furs. Our subsistence lifestyle is very important to our culture.
4. We spend the entire year preparing for the bowhead whale hunt, which is the most important hunt to our culture. For example, in the late summer, we hunt bearded seals. We prepare the meat. See Photo A, Attachment. We scrape the skins. They are then rolled up and put away until the oil renders the fur. Then we have to scrap of the fur in February. See Photos B and C. We use the skins of these seals for our spring whaling boats.
5. In the fall, when we are not bowhead whale hunting, we go hunting for caribou and then we go fishing. See Photos D and E. We put fish nets under the ice to catch the fish. We use this food to feed the bowhead whaling crew members.
6. The start of the whaling season is a time of great happiness in our communities. Photo F. In the spring, we hunt the bowhead along the ice edge in sealskin boats. The women sew the skins of the seals together and stretch them across a wooden frame. These boats are called umiaks. Photo G.
7. We stay at our camps on the ice edge with our crews usually for a few weeks or a month. First we must make the trail to the camp, and this lasts from mid March to mid April. It is a lot of work to make the trail through the snow and ice, out to the ice edge. Then we camp out on the ice for a month. We stay in white canvas tents. It is important to be very quiet at the camp, because the whales have a very good sense of hearing. Snow machines must park a ways in the distance from the camp, and we limit snow machine use as much as possible. The whales have a good sense of sight, as well. The white boats and the white jackets we wear act as camouflage, blending in with the ice. We also camouflage the edge of the ice with snow blocks so the whales can't see us moving around. Photo G.

8. In the spring, the water is very icy. Photo H. The hunt is dangerous, because we must get very close to the whale in these icy waters and in our small boats.
9. In the fall, the water is too rough for the umiaks, so we hunt from small boats with outboard motors. Most of our boats are eighteen footers. There are some twenty footers and a few twenty-four footers. Most of these are open boats.
10. After a whale is caught, we must be very careful and work very hard to ensure that it does not escape. It is a lot of work, just to get the whale to the ice edge. Photo I. Once we've landed the whale, the crew calls for help on the radio. People from town come out to help pull the whale onto the ice. Photo J.
11. Then, the whale must be cut up quickly. Photos K, L, and M. The heat of the whale can cause the meat to spoil, so everyone helps to cut the whale and carry the pieces back to town. The pieces of whale are brought to the home of the captain who struck the whale, and the women prepare a meal. The entire community is invited to come and share the meal. These practices enforce our important Inupiat values of sharing and cooperation. The hunt therefore not only provides us food, but also strengthens our family and community ties.
12. Some of the whale is eaten when it is caught, but much of it is saved for other important celebrations throughout the year. The most important celebration is Nalakataq, in the end of June. We call it the blanket toss festival. We celebrate the whale harvests and honor the crews who were successful. Photos N and O.
13. The permitted offshore exploration threatens our way of life. The noise from the drill ships and support vessels will deflect the bowhead and other marine mammals.
14. A few years ago, I observed the whales being deflected from an oil support company barge that was traveling to Cape Simpson. During the 1980s and 1990s, there were many times that drilling and seismic activity deflected the whales and made it more dangerous and difficult to hunt the bowhead whale. When the whale was caught too far away from town, it would spoil before it could be towed back.
15. The noise from aircraft going back and forth to the vessels will also threaten our subsistence hunt of waterfowl and caribou. The caribou are sensitive to helicopter noise in particular. Caribou is also a very important subsistence resource in our communities.
16. In my job at the Planning Department, I have heard of many incidents where helicopter noise has disturbed the caribou. Once, a hunter was stocking the caribou, and a helicopter got too close. The caribou moved and the hunter was unsuccessful in his hunt.

I DECLARE UNDER PENALTY OF PERJURY THAT THE FOREGOING IS TRUE AND CORRECT.

5/15/07  
Date

  
Gordon Brower



Photo A

Seal meat preparation – Vera Williams and Arnold Brower, Sr.

Photo B

Scraping the seal skins – Joshua Okpik, Ned Aery, and Gordon Brower.



Photo C

Scraping the seal skins – Joshua Okpik, Ned Aery, and Gordon Brower.



Photo D

Gordon Brower and Arnold Brower, Sr. fishing.

Photo E

Gordon Brower, Barrow Brower, and Gordon Brower, Jr., on a hunting trip for caribou and fish.



Photo F

Celebrating a successful hunt.



Photo G

Gordon Brower and his father, Arnold Brower, Sr., standing in front of a seal-skin spring whaling boat at the whaling camp on the ice edge.

Photo H

Whalers paddle through the icy waters.



Photo I

Gordon Brower and family members preparing the whale to be hauled in.



Photo J

The whole community joins in to help pull the whale to shore.

Photo K

Butchering the whale.



Photo L

Whale baleen.

Photo M

Butchering the whale.



Photo N

Nalukataq 2005.

Photo O

The whaling crews are honored at Nalukataq.

