We apply two knowledge systems for a more holistic view of the environment and greater awareness of potential impacts of resource decision-making. In one project, we collaborated with local whalers to examine the impacts of vessel traffic on indigenous hunting. This 12-year study included outfitting whalers from Nuiqsut, Alaska with GPS units to record offshore whaling activities. The combination of indigenous knowledge with GPS data analysis documented the importance of specific areas for hunting. This information then allowed us to make decisions in a way that reduced potential interference with whaling practices.

Over time, BOEM has developed a decision-making process that strives to use both science and Alaska Native traditional knowledge. We do this to better understand the local environment and potential impacts of proposed activities. Here we highlight our partnership with Nuiqsut whaling crews. Each fall, they travel to camp at Cross Island to look for whales to bring home to their community. Working with whaling captains and an anthropologist, BOEM sponsored a 12-year project that combined the whalers’ knowledge of the hunt with GPS technology. Our study recorded whalers’ observations and documented the importance of hunting areas. Applying the traditional knowledge of our Alaska Native partners in the decision-making process provides a more complete view of the environment. BOEM gains a greater understanding of the potential impacts of proposed projects and learns how to prevent possible conflicts with subsistence practices. BOEM is looking for more partnerships with Alaska Native communities and new ways to apply traditional knowledge to reach better decisions.

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