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**The Energy of Borders:
Ecology, Walrus Hunting, and Sovereignty at the Bering Straits**

At the Bering Straits, northeastern Russia and northwestern Alaska are separated by a mere fifty miles of ocean. While the terrestrial habitats of the region are defined by a scarcity of biological energy, the waters of the Straits are some of the most productive on earth, including hundreds of thousands of Pacific walrus. Along the Bering Strait coastline these marine mammals have supported human life for thousands of years, their energy shaping the spiritual worlds and technological adaptations of a succession of indigenous societies - most recently the Yupik, Inupiat, and Chukchi. This paper traces how two industrial states - the Soviet Union and the United States - came to use and rely upon the marine energy concentrated in walrus fat in their efforts to extend sovereignty into the far north. Drawn from part of my dissertation, which explores the history of energy use in the Bering Straits from the 1840s-1980s, the paper examines how state use of walrus calories enabled the transformation of the region from an integrated ecological and social unit in 1900 into separate sovereign territories by the 1950s. I argue the ability to control who killed what animals where and for what purpose was a mark of state authority and helped reinforce ideological and jurisdictional borders. Using the ocean to feed the state asserted the reality of both nations. But both states were also dependent on a sustainable supply of energy in the far north, lest their indigenous subjects become dependent on expensive calories shipped in from further south. The result, by the 1960s, were independent programs of walrus conservation - programs that essentially acknowledged the dependency of Soviet and American sovereignty on the walrus energy that fed the local population.