The northern fur seal (Callorhinus ursinus)
Northern fur seals are found in the North Pacific and Bering Sea. They forage on a variety of fish and squid, occasionally at depths exceeding 200 m (656 ft). Newborn fur seal pups weigh about 4.5-5.5 kg (10-12 lbs), adult females are approximately 10-12 kg (66-110 lbs), and the weight of mature males ranges from 183-271 kg (403-600 lbs). Their rich pelage led to the commercial harvest of this species, starting in the 1700s and ending in 1964. Historically, pelagic sealing and harvests of females have caused significant fluctuations in the world population of this species.

Changes in population size
Owing largely to pelagic sealing, the population of fur seals dropped to an extreme low in the early 20th century. International protection allowed the population to increase and the Pribilof Islands population reached a peak, of approximately 2.2 million, lasting through the 1940s to the early 1950s. Following this peak, an overall decline has been observed (Fig. 1) only partially explained by a commercial harvest of females (1956-1968). In 1988, the northern fur seal was designated as “depleted” under the Marine Mammal Protection Act because population levels continued to decline and reached levels less than 50% of those observed in the late 1950s despite the absence of commercial harvesting. The decline appears to continue as the fur seals’ ecosystem changes.

References