

Endangered Species in Alaska

Resource Development Council
Annual Conference
November 14 & 15, 2007

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Current Status of Listings in Alaska



Listed Endangered Species

- Short-tailed albatross - USFWS
- Eskimo curlew - USFWS
- Aleutian shield fern - USFWS
- Steller's sea lion (western stock) - NMFS
- Bowhead whale - NMFS
- Fin whale - NMFS
- Humpback whale - NMFS
- Other rare species: North Pacific right whale, Blue whale, Sei whale, and the Leatherback turtle - NMFS



Listed Threatened Species

- Spectacled eider - USFWS
- Steller's eider (AK breeding pop) - USFWS
- Northern sea otter, southwest Alaska DPS - USFWS
- Steller sea-lion, eastern pop. - NMFS



Species currently under consideration

- Polar bear (world-wide) - USFWS
- Black-footed albatross - USFWS
- Yellow-billed loons - USFWS
- Queen Charlotte goshawk – USFWS
- Kittletz's murrelet – USFWS
- Cook Inlet beluga whale - NMFS
- Lynn Canal herring - NMFS





Conservation Agreement for the Yellow-billed Loon

Signed Sept./Oct. 2006 by State & Federal agencies,
North Slope Borough

Goal is to protect loons and their breeding, brood-rearing,
and migrating habitats in Alaska

Role of Recovery Plans

- Recovery plans delineate reasonable actions which are believed to be required to recover and/or protect a listed species.
- They are prepared by the responsible agency, sometimes with the assistance of recovery teams, contractors, state agencies, or others.
- They serve as a guide that delineates and schedules those actions believed necessary to restore the listed species as a viable, self-sustaining element of their ecosystem.



What must be in a Recovery Plan?

- A description of site-specific management actions that may be necessary to achieve goals for conservation and survival of the species.
- Objective measurable criteria that can be used to determine whether a species can be removed from a list.
- Estimates of the time and costs for carrying out actions needed to achieve the plan's goals.



Critical Habitat

- The ESA authorizes the designation of "critical habitat."
- "Critical habitat" is defined as areas essential for the "conservation" of the species in question. "Conservation" is defined as using all means necessary to bring a species to the point it no longer needs the protection of the Act.



Critical Habitat

- The appropriate agency **MUST** designate critical habitat for listed species on the basis of the best scientific data available and after taking into consideration the economic impact, and any other relevant impact, of designating a particular area as critical habitat.
- The agency may exclude an area from designation if the agency determines that the benefits of such exclusion outweigh the benefits of specifying an area as part of critical habitat, unless it is determined, based on the best scientific and commercial data available, that the failure to designate the area will result in the extinction of the species concerned.
- Actions of the Secretary in designating critical habitat are judicially reviewable.



What is the Extent of Critical Habitat?

- For working purposes the agencies define “critical habitat” as:
 - the specific areas within the geographic range occupied by the species at the time of listing, if they contain physical or biological features essential to conservation, and those features may require special management considerations or protection and
 - specific areas outside the geographical area occupied by the species if the agency determines that the area itself is essential for conservation.



Roles of Critical Habitat under ESA

- Designation of critical habitat forces consideration of economic and other effects.
- The critical habitat designation process provides guidance for landowners.
- Designation of critical habitat requires "consultation" on federal actions (Section 7 consultation).



Other Roles of Critical Habitat under ESA

- The designation process also provides necessary information for Section 10 permits and habitat conservation plans.
- The designation process provides information for land acquisition decisions.
- Critical habitat informs the meaning of "harm" in definition of "take".
- The designation process informs development of recovery plans.



How does this work?

- Spectacled Eider
- Northern Sea Otters
- Aleutian Canada Goose



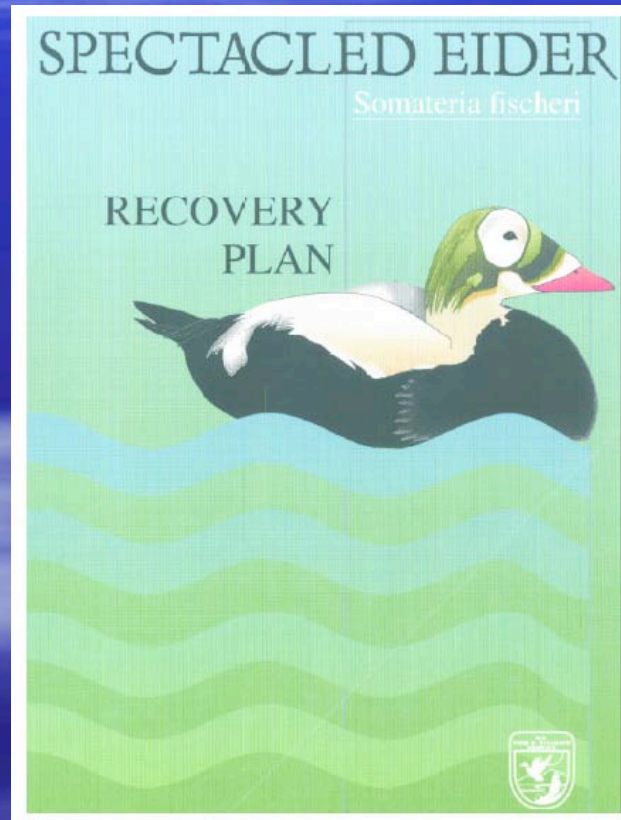
Spectacled Eider

- Listed as threatened under the ESA on May 10, 1993.



Spectacled Eider

- A Recovery Plan was prepared on Aug. 12, 1996.

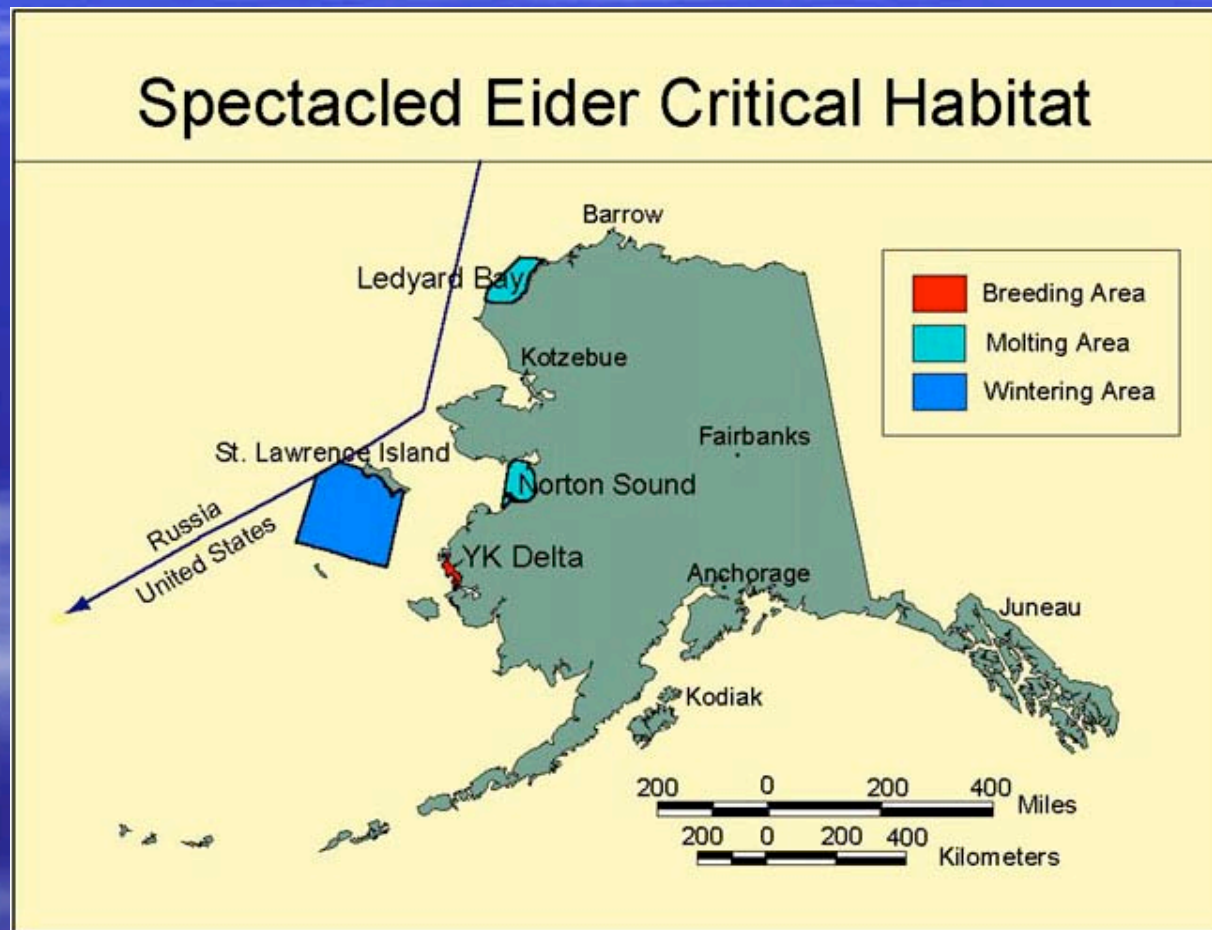


- Established measurable objectives for recovery.
- Identified strategies for recovery.
- Set timelines and costs



Spectacled Eider

- Critical habitat was defined on Feb. 2, 2001.



Spectacled Eider

- Resulted in specific permit stipulations aimed to meet the recovery goals.
- On the state side, specific stipulations aimed to protect Spectacled Eiders were developed.



Northern Sea Otter

- Listed as threatened under the ESA on August 9, 2005.
- Also, protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.



Northern Sea Otter

- A Recovery Team was formed to develop a Recovery Plan.
- The State has representation on the team.



Northern Sea Otter

- Critical habitat has not yet been defined.



Northern Sea Otter

- **Specific permit stipulations are being developed to address the listing.**
- **On the state side, resource development activities are permitted in a manner that minimizes impact to Northern Sea Otters.**



Aleutian Canada Goose

- Listed as endangered under the ESA in 1967.



Aleutian Canada Goose

- A Recovery Plan was adopted in 1974.



Aleutian Canada Goose

- Critical habitat was not defined.



Aleutian Canada Goose

- Reclassified to threatened in 1990.
- De-listed in 2001.



Polar Bear

Listing Process:

- Proposed as threatened 1/9/07
- Comment period reopened until 10/23 to allow public input on USGS reports
- Final decision due Jan. 2008



State Position on Listing



- **Loss of sea ice may have detrimental effects on some subpopulations.**
- **Polar bears have survived past warming trends similar to the current one.**
- **World population is currently at record levels; 3 times higher than the 1970s.**
- **Predicted decline is back to levels observed in the 1970s.**
- **We cannot accurately predict sea ice extent 45 years from now which is the basis for proposed listing.**
- **Polar bears are probably more adaptable than given credit for.**
- **Food sources will change if climate change (sea ice loss) continues.**

Polar bear



- **Cooperative efforts with Alaska Natives on harvest levels**
- **Incidental take regulations for oil & gas activities and numerous avoidance steps**
- **Monitoring project at Kaktovik**
- **Working with Village of Kaktovik to develop a Bear-Human Interaction Plan**

Cook Inlet Beluga Whales



State's Position

- The population was reduced drastically from 1994-1998 by over-hunting.
- Harvest probably targeted mature whales, affecting normal age distribution in the population, reducing recruitment.
- A harvest moratorium was developed at the State's request in 1999 which stemmed the decline.
- Annual surveys 1999-2005 show no statistically significant decline.
- Population estimate increased in 2006. 2007 estimate is expected to show further increase.
- The recovery is beginning as predicted. It is premature to list.

Thoughts on ESA

- The ESA was not designed to consider ecological change. Habitats are expected to remain static under the ESA. They do not.
- Critical Habitat designations are not supposed to include all former range, only essential habitats.
- Recovery plans must have realistic goals and objectives. Population recovery objectives are often set near record high population levels without consideration of natural ecological change and sometimes with irrelevant timelines.