

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
October 5, 2005

Short-tailed Albatross Recovery Plan: The Draft Short-tailed Albatross Recovery Plan will be available for public comment as soon as the notice is published in the Federal Register. Comments will be accepted from the public for 60 days following publication, which should occur in the next month. Instructions for commenters will be included in the notice. In addition to outlining a recovery strategy and an extensive list of recovery tasks, this document sets forth the criteria that must be met in order to downlist this species from endangered to threatened and also to remove this species from the endangered species list.

The short-tailed albatross may be delisted when the following criteria are met:

1. The total breeding population of short-tailed albatrosses reaches a minimum of 1000 pairs; and
2. The 3-year running average growth rate of the population as a whole is >6% for >7 years; and
3. At least 250 breeding pairs exist on at least 2 non-volcanic islands; and
4. A minimum of 10 percent of these (i.e. >25 pairs) occur on a site or sites other than the Senkaku Islands.

There are currently about 2000 birds total and 1000 breeding birds (500 pairs) split 80/20 on one volcanic and one non-volcanic island respectively.

Albatross Satellite Telemetry: In August, investigators from USFWS, Oregon State University, and the University of Massachusetts chartered a longliner to the Seguan Pass-Amlia Island region to capture and affix satellite transmitters to samples of all three North Pacific albatrosses. This activity was funded in large part by a grant from the North Pacific Research Board. Birds were captured in hoop nets tossed from the stern of the chartered vessel. Transmitters were taped to backfeathers of 10 Laysan albatrosses, 2 short-tailed albatrosses, and 10 black-footed albatrosses. Investigators were able to tag 10 black-footed albatrosses that were previously banded, so they will soon learn of these birds' origins. All birds also had blood samples drawn for contaminants analysis. The study will examine distribution of birds relative to fisheries, and how the movement and distribution of birds is influenced by physical and environmental parameters such as bathymetry, primary productivity, and wind speed and direction.

Kittlitz's Murrelet: Probably over 90% of all Kittlitz's murrelets live in Alaska; primarily in four regions: 1) southeast Alaska (48% of the Alaska population), 2) Southcentral Alaska (22%), 3) the Aleutian Islands (16%), and 4) the Alaska Peninsula (14%). The current estimate of Alaska's Kittlitz's murrelet population is just over 16,500 birds. This species is declining at a rate of about 18% per year. The most severe

downward trends have been reported from Prince William Sound, where Kittlitz's murrelets have declined 84% over 11 years. They have declined by about 75% in both the Kenai Fjords and the Malaspina Forelands since the mid 1980's. Models predict that the important Glacier Bay population will be gone within 30 to 40 years. The main threat to this species is probably global climate change, but we know that these birds are also killed in oilspills and commercial gillnets.

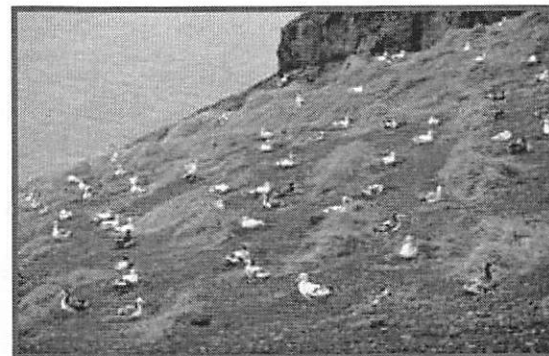
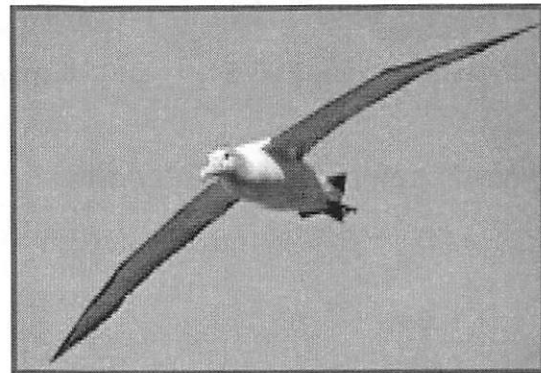
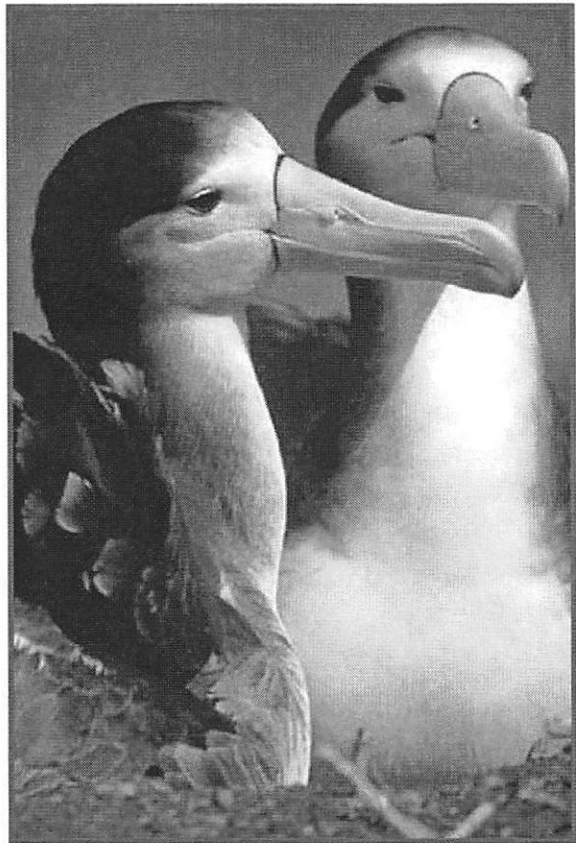
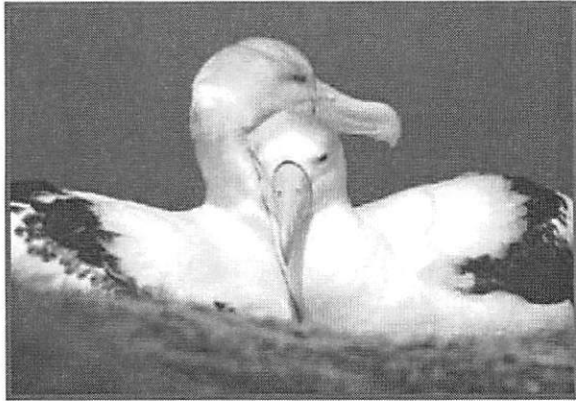
Marbled Murrelet: The marbled murrelet ranges from central California through the Aleutian Islands of Alaska. In 1992, this species was listed as threatened in California, Oregon and Washington as a Distinct Population Segment. In September 2004, the USFWS completed a review of the marbled murrelet in the lower 48 and concluded that the listed population did not satisfy the USFWS criteria as a DPS. As a result, the USFWS will need to conduct a range-wide review of the status of this species. The USFWS has initiated, with the USGS, a review of existing literature relevant to determining current status and trends of the marbled murrelet throughout its range. This task should be completed next spring.

Northern Sea Otter: The Southwestern Alaska (basically, western Cook Inlet and all points west) population of northern sea otter was listed as threatened on August 9, 2005. The listing Rule became effective in September 2005. This population has declined at least 55% to 67% since the mid 1980's. There has been at least a 90% decline in some areas (south Alaska Peninsula offshore areas). While there is the possibility for fishery interactions in shallow offshore areas and as vessels depart and arrive at ports, we expect negligible effects from commercial fisheries on this predominately inshore species. At this time, the major threat is believed to be increased predation by killer whales.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Short-Tailed Albatross

Draft Recovery Plan



Disclaimer:

Recovery plans describe actions which the best scientific information indicates are required to recover and protect listed species. The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, requires Recovery Plans to be prepared for all listed species whose conservation status would benefit by having such a plan. Recovery plans must incorporate: (1) a description of site-specific actions necessary to achieve conservation and survival of the species; (2) objective, measurable criteria, which, when met, would allow removal of the species from the list; and (3) estimates of the time and costs required to carry out the measures in the plan. Plans are published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service, sometimes prepared with the assistance of recovery teams, contractors, state agencies, and others. The recovery plan is an advisory document. It provides a guide, but it does not obligate any party to carry out the actions it describes.

The parties involved will consider their available funds and other priorities when deciding whether to fund the tasks and achieve the objectives presented in this recovery plan. Nothing in this plan should be construed as a commitment or requirement that any agency obligate or pay funds in contravention of the Anti-Deficiency Act, 31 U.S.C. 1341, or any other law or regulation.

Recovery plans do not necessarily represent the views or the official positions or approval of any individuals or agencies involved in the plan formulation, other than the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. They represent the official position of the Fish and Wildlife Service only after they have been signed by the Regional Director. Approved recovery plans are subject to modification as dictated by new information, changes in species status, and the completion of recovery actions. Please check for updates or revisions at the website below before using.

Literature citation should read as follows:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2005. Short-tailed Albatross Draft Recovery Plan. Anchorage, AK, 62 pp.

Recovery plans can be downloaded from:

<http://endangered.fws.gov/recovery/Index.html#plans>

Short-Tailed Albatross

(Phoebastria albatrus)

Draft Recovery Plan

For Public Review

Prepared by the Short-Tailed Albatross Recovery Team for:

Region 7
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Anchorage, Alaska

Approved:

- DRAFT -

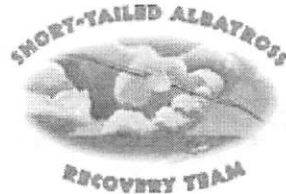
Regional Director, Alaska Region,
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Date:

XX/XX/XX

A Short Primer on Recovery Teams

- A recovery team is a formal advisory group that provides advice on recovery needs and opportunities for species listed as endangered or threatened.
- Recovery teams are not required; they are convened at the discretion of the Regional Director.
- The Service has administrative responsibility for preparing and approving recovery plans.
- The recovery team focuses on recovery plan development and may also be involved with recovery plan implementation.



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Executive Summary

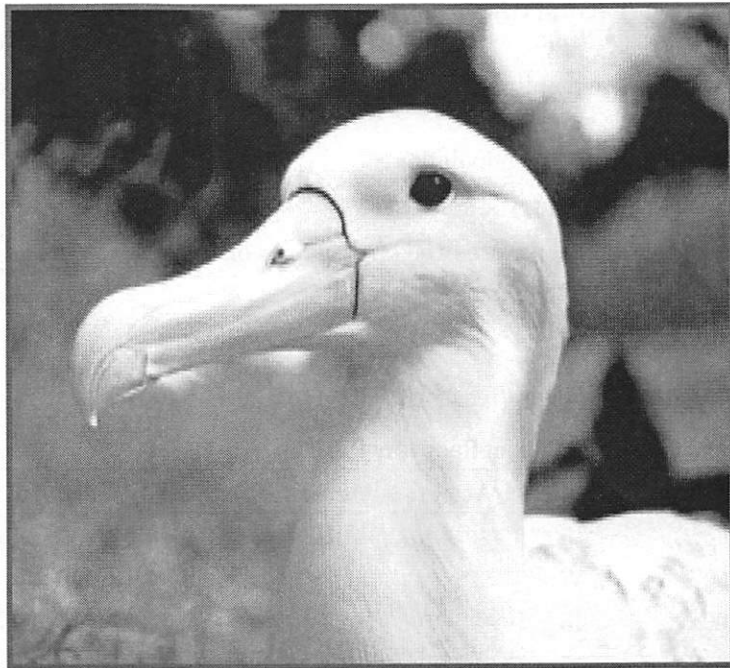
Species' Status

The short-tailed albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*) was federally listed as endangered throughout its range on July 31, 2000 (65 FR 147:46643-46654). Designation of critical habitat is not prudent for this species.

Prior to its exploitation, the short-tailed albatross was possibly the most abundant of the three North Pacific albatross species. Millions of these birds were harvested by feather hunters prior to and following the turn of the 20th century, resulting in the near-extirpation of the species by the mid-20th century. Presently, fewer than 2000 short-tailed albatrosses are known to exist. The species is known to breed on only two remote islands in the western Pacific. Torishima, where 80 to 85 percent of short-tailed albatrosses breed, is an active volcano, and Tsubame-zaki, the natural colony site on this island, is susceptible to mud slides and erosion. An artificial colony has also been set up in another less erosive location on Torishima (Hatsune-zaki). As of the 2004–05 season, four pairs have nested and fledged chicks at the artificial colony site. The remainder of known short-tailed albatrosses breed at a site in the Senkaku Islands, to the southwest of Torishima, where volcanism is not a threat, but political uncertainty and the potential for oil development exist. The Japanese Government designated the short-tailed albatross as a Natural Monument in 1958 and as a Special Bird for Protection in 1972. Torishima is also a Japanese Natural Monument.

Habitat Requirements and Limiting Factors

Short-tailed albatrosses require remote islands for breeding habitat. These birds nest in open, treeless areas with low, or no, vegetation. Short-tailed albatrosses spend much of their time feeding in shelf-break areas of the Bering Sea, Aleutian chain and in other Alaskan, Japanese and Russian waters, as they require nutrient-rich areas of ocean upwelling for their foraging habitat. The major threat of over-exploitation that led to the species' original endangered status no longer occurs. The primary existing threat to the species' recovery is the possibility of an eruption of Torishima, their main breeding site. A minor eruption occurred there in August of 2002, after the end of the breeding season. Other threats include incidental catch in commercial fisheries, ingestion of plastics, contamination by oil and other pollutants, the



potential for competition with non-native species, and adverse effects related to global climate change. These secondary threats will be considered discountable to the recovery of the species if the population is growing at a steady rate, as indicated in the criteria below.

Recovery Criteria

The short-tailed albatross may be reclassified from endangered to threatened when: (1) the total breeding population of short-tailed albatrosses reaches a minimum of 750 pairs; and (2) the 3-year running average growth rate of the population is $\geq 6\%$ for ≥ 7 years; and (3) at least three successful breeding colonies (≥ 5 breeding pairs each) exist, at least two of which occupy non-volcanic (or extinct volcanic) islands.

The short-tailed albatross may be considered for delisting when: (1) the total breeding population reaches a minimum of 1000 pairs; and (2) the 3-year running average growth rate of the population is 6% for 7 years; and (3) at least 250 breeding pairs exist on at least 2 non-volcanic islands; and (4) a minimum of 10 percent of these (i.e. 25 pairs) occur on a site or sites other than the Senkaku Islands. In addition, a post-delisting monitoring plan and agreement to continue post-delisting monitoring must be in place and ready for implementation at the time of delisting.

Executive Summary

Date of Recovery

Assuming new colony establishment is successful, we estimate that the short-tailed albatross may be delisted in the year 2030.

Important Recovery Actions (*for more details see Narrative Outline*):

1. Continue to monitor population and manage habitat on Torishima.
2. Monitor Senkaku population.
3. Conduct telemetry studies.
4. Establish one or more breeding colonies on non-volcanic islands.

5. Continue research on fisheries operations and mitigation measures.
6. Conduct other research.
7. Conduct other management-related activities.
8. Conduct outreach and international negotiations.

Estimated Cost (U.S. Dollars x 1000): Cost estimates reflect costs for specific actions needed to promote short-tailed albatross conservation. Estimates do not include costs that agencies or other entities normally incur as part of their mission or normal operating expenses. The following table provides cost estimates for recovery actions listed in the Implementation Schedule of this document.

Total Estimated Cost of Recovery (\$000's):

Year	Action 1	Action 2	Action 3	Action 4	Action 5	Action 6	Action 7	Action 8	TOTAL
2006	79	90	56	310	50	27	3	10	625
2007	557		289	320	110	47	118	7	1448
2008	45		134	182	175	162	18	17	733
2009	45	50	280	182	70	107	23	14	771
2010	15		55	182	50	72	3	17	394
2011	15			182		2	3	5	207
2012	15	50		182	40	10	3		300
2013	15			50		2		5	72
2014	15			30	40	10	3		98
2015	15	50		30		2		5	102
2016	15			30	20	10	3		78
2017	15			30		2		5	52
2018	15	50		30	10	2	3		110
2019	15			30		2		5	52
2020	15			30	10	2			57
2021	15	50		30		2		5	102
2022	15			30	5	2			52
2023	15			30		2		5	52
2024	15	50		30	5	2			102
2025	15			30		2		5	52
2026	15			30	5	2			52
2027	15	50		30		2		5	102
2028	15				5				20
2029	15							5	20
2030	15				5				20
TOTAL	1041	440	814	2010	600	473	180	115	5673



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Sea Otters in SW Alaska Listed as Threatened

Recent survey data indicate that the southwest Alaska population of northern sea otters (*Enhydra lutris kenyoni*) has undergone a precipitous population decline of at least 56 to 68 percent since the mid-1980s. Based on a thorough review of public comments and best available scientific and commercial information, the Service has published a Final Rule in the Federal Register to list the southwest Alaska Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of the northern sea otter as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Final Rule

Based on the magnitude of the population decline and the fact that more recent surveys conducted in 2003 and 2004 show continuing declines, the Service published the Final Rule in the Federal Register on August 9, 2005, to list the southwest Alaska DPS of the northern sea otter as threatened (70 FR 36366). The Final Rule does not include a proposal for designation of critical habitat for the southwest Alaska DPS of the northern sea otter. Sufficient information to analyze the potential impacts of a critical habitat designation is lacking at this time. Also, the identification of specific areas that contain physical and biological features essential to the conservation of the species, and which therefore may meet a key aspect of the ESA's definition of critical habitat, is complicated by uncertainty as to the extent to which habitat may or may not be a limiting factor for this DPS.

The Final Rule will become effective 30 days after it is published in the Federal Register. Recovery planning will then begin and a draft Recovery Plan will be available for public comment within eighteen months.

Proposed Special Rule

During the 120-day public comment period for the Proposed Rule to list the southwest Alaska DPS as threatened, Alaska Natives, organizations, and tribes expressed concern regarding the prohibition on the export of listed species. Under the MMPA, the Service



currently allows for the export of authentic Native articles of handicraft and clothing for personal, non-commercial purposes. Section 4(d) of the ESA and our implementing regulations at 50 CFR 17.31(c) provide the Secretary with regulatory flexibility regarding the prohibitions and exemptions for threatened species. The Service has determined that the current level and geographic distribution of the subsistence harvest of sea otters in southwest Alaska does not materially and negatively impact the population, therefore regulation of the harvest is not warranted at this time. A proposed Special Rule was concurrently published in the Federal Register that would align the provisions of the ESA relating to the creation, shipment, and sale of authentic Native articles and clothing made from northern sea otters in the southwest Alaska DPS by Alaska Natives with what is already allowed under the MMPA (70 FR 46387).

How does listing the southwest DPS of the northern sea otter impact human activities in southwest Alaska?

The ESA and its implementing regulations include some general requirements, prohibitions, and exceptions that apply to threatened

and endangered wildlife. Once the southwest Alaska DPS of the sea otter is listed as threatened becomes final, actions of Federal agencies will be subject to the consultation requirements under Section 7 of the ESA. Under Section 7, Federal agencies are required to ensure, in consultation with the Service, that an action they authorize, fund, or carry out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a threatened or endangered species (this includes a subspecies or a DPS).

Also, Section 9 of the ESA prohibits take of endangered wildlife. The Service has issued regulations (50 CFR 17.31) that generally apply these prohibitions to threatened wildlife. Once the DPS is listed, these prohibitions on take would come into effect. The ESA defines "take" to mean harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt any of these. However, the Endangered Species Act also provides for the authorization of take and exceptions to the prohibitions. Section 10 of the Act provides for an exemption Alaska Natives that would allow them to continue to conduct traditional subsistence harvesting of sea otters if the DPS is listed. The Service is

concurrently publishing a Special Rule under Section 4(d) of the ESA that would allow for the export of legally purchased articles of Native Alaskan handicraft and clothing made from sea otters from the listed DPS. The articles would have to be exported by their owner as personal effects, and would be subject to existing CITES regulations.

Why was critical habitat not proposed in the Final Rule?

As explained in the Final Rule, critical habitat for this DPS is not determinable at this time. As part of our request for public comments on the Proposed Rule the Service requested information regarding features and specific areas that may meet the definition of critical habitat. We will use that information, along with the best available scientific information, to help us determine whether to propose critical habitat for this DPS. If the Service does propose critical habitat in the future, the public would have an opportunity to comment on such a proposal.

What will be the impact of critical habitat on human activities in southwest Alaska?

Under Section 7 of the ESA, a critical habitat designation would require Federal agencies to ensure, in consultation with the Service, that any action they authorize, fund, or carry out is not likely to result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat. Activities with no Federal nexus are not subject to the critical habitat consultation requirements. For example, oil and gas development within critical habitat would, if federal permitting or federal funding were involved, require consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. However, if no federal permits or funds were involved in such a project, consultation with the Service would not be required.

Would listing or the designation of critical habitat close commercial fishing in southwest Alaska, similar to what happened with Steller sea lions?

We do not anticipate that listing the southwest DPS of the northern sea otter will result in closure of commercial



fishing in southwest Alaska. Although there is some overlap in the range of the Steller sea lion and the sea otter DPS, the two situations are very different. Steller sea lions are fish eaters, and they congregate in large numbers at specific sites known as haulouts and rookeries but feed in open waters. In contrast, sea otters eat primarily benthic (bottom-dwelling) invertebrates; for example, in the Aleutians their diet consists mostly of sea urchins, crabs, octopus, and some benthic fishes. Because of their dependence on benthic prey items, sea otters spend the vast majority of their time in shallow water, quite close to the shore. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently contracted the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to analyze its commercial fishing database. The results indicate that the species which otters most often prey upon have little or no commercial interest, and the areas where they live generally do not overlap with those where most commercial fishing occurs.

Is subsistence hunting a contributing factor in the decline?

Subsistence hunting does not appear to be contributing significantly to the decline. The combined harvest from southwest Alaska villages has averaged fewer than 100 otters per year. Given this relatively low level, we do not believe the subsistence harvest is a significant contributing factor in the decline.

Is subsistence hunting affected by this action?

No. The Endangered Species Act (like the MMPA) has a provision that allows Alaska Natives to conduct subsistence harvesting. The Service would consider enacting rules to regulate subsistence harvest only if it were seen to have a population-level impact upon the southwest Alaska DPS. There is no evidence to date to indicate that such regulation will be required or needed for the conservation of the species.

Is it legal to buy items made of sea otter fur?

Yes. Both the ESA and MMPA contain provisions that allow Alaska Natives to make authentic Native articles of handicraft and clothing from sea otters. These articles may legally be sold to non-Natives within the United States.

Can a foreign tourist buy an item made with sea otter fur and take it home?

Yes. Although export of listed species is prohibited under the ESA, the purpose of the proposed Special Rule (concurrently published in the Federal Register) is to allow for the export of authentic Native articles of handicraft and clothing created from members of the southwest Alaska DPS of the northern sea otter as personal effects for non-commercial purposes.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
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Photo courtesy of Dr. Randall Davis,
Texas A&M University

August 2005

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