

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, SSC and AP Members

FROM: Clarence G. Pautzke
Executive Director



DATE: November 27, 1991

SUBJECT: Seabirds

ACTION REQUIRED

1. Receive status report on the petition to list the Spectacled and Steller's Eiders as endangered species.
2. Review and comment on the USFWS draft Alaska Seabird Management Plan.

BACKGROUND

Steller's and Spectacled Eiders

On December 10, 1990 the US Fish and Wildlife Service received a petition to list the Steller's eider (Polysticta stellri) and the spectacled eider (Somateria fischeri) as endangered species. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has reviewed this petition and is in the process of determining whether these species should be listed as endangered. Item C-4(a) is the 90-day finding on this petition and provides more information on this issue. Jean Cochrane of USFWS will be at the December meeting to provide the Council with information on this issue.

Draft Alaska Seabird Management Plan.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service is requesting comments on their recently published draft Alaska Seabird Management Plan (Plan). Deadline for comments was November 29, 1991. However, if the Council wishes to submit comments, the USFWS is willing to delay this deadline. Staff will have copies of the Plan available at the Council meeting. In addition, Kent Wohl of the USFWS will be available to present the plan to the Council.



Your Information
United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
 1011 E. TUDOR RD.
 ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99503

IN REPLY REFER TO:

WAES/DOS
 FWS/R7/CCU #90-6682

FEB 19 1991

Memorandum

To: Director (D), FWS
 Main Interior Building, Room 3012
 Washington, D.C.

From: Deputy Regional Director
 Region 7

John G. Hogan

Subject: Administrative 90-day Finding on Petition to List the Steller's and Spectacled Eiders as Endangered

On December 10, 1990, the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) received a petition from Mr. James G. King to list the Steller's eider (*Polysticta stelleri*) and spectacled eider (*Somateria fischeri*) as endangered species. The petition and supporting documentation have been reviewed to determine if substantial information has been presented indicating the requested action may be warranted. This memorandum constitutes the 90-day finding of substantiality for the petition, in accordance with Section 4(b)(3)(A) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended.

The petition includes biological, distributional, and historical information, and cites scientific articles in support of listing. The petition describes these species as imperiled because of a perceived significant reduction in population sizes over the past several decades, and potential threats throughout their ranges.

Unlike most hunted species of North American waterfowl, little emphasis has been placed on tracking the population status of Steller's and spectacled eiders. With the exception of data collected for spectacled eiders on the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (Yukon Delta), and winter surveys for Steller's eiders on the Alaska Peninsula, information regarding the populations and distribution of these species is chiefly from historical and incidental observations.

The center of nesting for Steller's eider is the Siberian arctic. In Alaska, the Steller's eider primarily nested along the coast of the Yukon Delta, and near Barrow, Alaska. A historical account from 1924 indicates that Steller's eiders were locally "common" on the Yukon Delta, although relatively few nesting records have been documented there. In recent years, three nests were found during waterfowl investigations in 1969, and the last recorded nesting on the Yukon Delta was a single nest in 1975.

No population estimate is available for Steller's eiders nesting near Barrow. Historical accounts beginning over 100 years ago suggest that the species was a rare, but regular, nester in the Barrow area. A total of 17 nests were recorded between 1975 and 1980, but no nests have been reported over the last decade.

The majority of the world population of Steller's eider winters along the north side of the Alaska Peninsula. Banding data collected since 1961 show that the majority of Steller's eiders wintering in Alaska are from Siberia, and winter survey data collected over the past 16 years show a decline of over 50 percent in the number of wintering birds. This coincides with nesting population declines reported in Siberia, where the species is now considered rare (Red Book, Category 3).

The Yukon Delta coast is the world's primary breeding location for the spectacled eider, and it apparently nests in low numbers across the arctic coastal plain. In the remainder of coastal Alaska, north and east of the Yukon Delta, the species is considered a rare nester. Nesting concentrations also occur along the northern coast of Siberia.

It is estimated that the Yukon Delta supported between 50,000 and 70,000 pairs of nesting spectacled eiders during the early 1970's. Since then, an estimated yearly decline of 13 percent has been reported, resulting in a total decline of approximately 94 percent. Although based on relatively few study plots on the Yukon Delta, these estimates correspond to the results of greater than 30 years of aerial breeding-pair surveys in western Alaska.

The wintering locations of the spectacled eider are unknown, although it is suspected that the population winters off shore in the Bering Sea along the edge of the pack ice. Consequently, no survey of wintering spectacled eiders has been accomplished.

Although the causes of Steller's and spectacled eider population declines are not known, potential threats to both species include: increased predation, habitat loss, oil pollution, subsistence hunting, industrial pollution, fish-net mortalities, and changes in marine ecology.

The petition has been reviewed by staff at the Ecological Services Anchorage field office, and the Anchorage Regional Office. The Service finds that the petition presents substantial information indicating that the requested action may be warranted. This decision is based on scientific and commercial information contained in the petition, referenced in the petition, and otherwise available to the Service at this time. A notice announcing this finding and initiating a status review for publication in the Federal Register will soon be submitted through the normal surname route.

APPROVE _____ DISAPPROVE _____

Date _____ Date _____