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## United States Department of the Interior

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

1011 East Tudor Road

Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199

APR 04 2014



FWS/AFES

Agenda Item B-6: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Report  
April 4, 2014

### Endangered Species Act Issues:

#### *Steller's Eiders:*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to reintroduce Steller's eiders to the central coast of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta (Y-K Delta). In 1997, the Alaska-breeding population of Steller's eiders was listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act based on a contraction of the species' breeding range in Alaska and the resulting increased vulnerability of the remaining breeding population to extirpation. Steller's eiders were once considered common nesters in local areas of the Y-K Delta, but only three nests have been found there in the last decade. A healthy breeding population on the Y-K Delta is considered necessary for recovery of the Alaska-breeding population, and it is unlikely that a population will be re-established without intervention such as reintroduction. The proposed project involves releasing captive-bred Steller's eiders to former breeding areas on the Y-K Delta, and could proceed as soon as summer 2015. If successful, we anticipate reintroduced birds will migrate to and use the same non-breeding areas currently used by Steller's eiders that breed in other parts of Alaska and Russia (coastal areas of Bristol Bay, the Alaska Peninsula, eastern Aleutian Islands, lower Cook Inlet and Kodiak).

The USFWS is currently requesting comments on the proposal so we can determine the scope of issues to be considered in an environmental assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act. The scoping period is March 3 - April 15, 2014, and a scoping meeting will be held on April 9, 2014, at the USFWS Regional Office in Anchorage, Alaska from 4-7pm. Additional public comments will be sought after a draft environmental assessment is completed later in 2014. For more information see the USFWS's web site:

[http://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/endangered/species/stellers\\_eider\\_reintroduction.htm](http://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/endangered/species/stellers_eider_reintroduction.htm)

or on Facebook: <http://on.fb.me/1bmPEmy>

For further information, contact Kate Martin, Eider Recovery Coordinator, at Kate\_Martin@fws.gov, or (907)-456-0215.

## **Marine Mammals:**

### *Pacific Walrus:*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Marine Mammals Management office partnered with Dr. Lori Polasek of the Alaska Sea Life center to expand her remote camera disturbance data collection project to the walrus haulout on Hagemeister Island. The overall project is designed to study disturbance impact and recovery on both historic (males) and emerging (primarily females and calves) walrus haulouts. The Hagemeister Island portion of the project will focus on using still images to better document haulout use and the potential for anthropogenic disturbance events related to marine vessel traffic. Disturbance monitoring has been conducted at Round Island, Cape Peirce, Cape Newenham, and Cape Seniavin in previous years. There is a substantial amount of marine vessel traffic transiting Hagemeister Strait and managers have no information on frequency, severity, or cause of disturbance events at the Hagemeister haulout. The U.S. fish and Wildlife Service has recently issued guidelines to reduce the potential for disturbance of hauled out walrus from marine vessel traffic in Bristol Bay. Results from this investigation will help managers and mariners to evaluate the effectiveness of these guidelines.

To record disturbance events, three time-lapse cameras and one acoustic monitor were deployed on the southwest coast of Hagemeister Island during May-June 2013. Image analysis is not yet complete; however, USFWS has provided personnel to assist. A preliminary review indicates that Between May 6 and May 28, walruses were observed using the haulout on several days. Various classes of marine vessels were also photographed during each of the five study weeks, although none were photographed while walruses occupied the haulout. Numerous vessels were observed within one nautical mile of the beach, which suggests that had walrus been present, the potential for disturbance existed.

Partial funding was provided by Alaska Seafood Cooperative, Glacier Fish Company, American Sea Foods, and the Pacific Walrus Conservation Fund.

For further information, contact Jonathon Snyder, Wildlife Biologist at (907) 786-3819 or [Jonathon\\_Snyder@fws.gov](mailto:Jonathon_Snyder@fws.gov).