



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Anchorage Fish & Wildlife Field Office  
605 West 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Room G-61  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2249



B-5

In reply, refer to:  
AFWFO

Agenda Item B-5: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
October 1, 2008

### **Short-tailed Albatross Recovery Plan**

The final Short-tailed Albatross Recovery Plan was signed by the Regional Director for the USFWS in Alaska on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The final plan differs from the draft in its inclusion of information gathered on this species and on seabird bycatch issues since 2005. In addition, recovery criteria have been revised. Low resolution digital copies of the plan are available now upon request. Hard copies will be available soon. Those interested in obtaining copies of this plan prior to its posting on the FWS website should contact Greg Balogh at [Greg\\_Balogh@fws.gov](mailto:Greg_Balogh@fws.gov).

### **Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP)**

The 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the ACAP Advisory Committee (AC) met in South Africa during August, 2008. Representatives from the USFWS and NOAA Fisheries were present. USFWS representatives Maura Naughton and Greg Balogh made presentations to the AC on the current status of all three North Pacific Albatrosses. The presentations assisted the AC in determining whether to recommend inclusion of the three North Pacific Albatross species under this international conservation treaty. The AC determined that addition of these three species would be prudent, and will recommend their inclusion at the next meeting of the parties to this treaty, to be held in 2009.

President Bush transmitted The Agreement for the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) to the Senate Friday (September 26th) for approval. ACAP is an international treaty between fishing nations for the protection of albatrosses and petrels, wide-ranging seabird species, many of which are threatened with extinction due to poor fishing practices, pollution, and invasive species on their breeding islands. Member countries of ACAP agree to take actions necessary to conserve these birds.

The Senate Foreign Relations committee must now approve the treaty before it goes to the full Senate for ratification, which requires a two-thirds majority. An accompanying legislative package to implement the agreement will also need to be approved by both the House and Senate. Votes on the treaty and implementing legislation are not expected until next year.

Eleven countries (Argentina, Australia, Chile, Ecuador, France, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, South Africa, Spain, and the United Kingdom) have signed and ratified the treaty, which went into effect in 2001. Brazil and Uruguay have both passed national legislation to enable their countries to become Parties to the Agreement.

The United States is already in compliance with the provisions of the treaty, but U.S. participation offers an important opportunity to engage other countries in the protection of seabirds when they range outside of U.S. waters. Doing so will help level the playing field for American fishermen, who must currently

observe U.S. regulations that are far more stringent than the laws that govern the actions of many of their foreign competitors.

### **Bering Sea Integrated Ecosystem Research Program**

Broad-scale USFWS seabird and marine mammal surveys were conducted throughout the summer, as part of the Bering Sea Integrated Ecosystem Research Program (BSIERP) funded by NPRB. Seabird observers joined research cruises onboard NOAA ships and USCG icebreakers. In July and August we also conducted surveys in conjunction with forage fish and fur seal studies, and colony-based seabird work, as part of the Patch Dynamics Study (PDS) around the Pribilof Islands. The PDS will examine predator-prey dynamics within 200 km of the Pribilofs, with a focus on fur seals, thick-billed murres, black-legged kittiwakes, juvenile Pollock and other forage fish. The PDS is part of BSIERP, also funded by NPRB. As another component of the PDS, we conducted a reconnaissance survey at Bogoslof Island, in preparation for the 2009 field season. Progress reports on these projects are available via the NPRB web site. All of the BSIERP principal investigators will be meeting in Girdwood for coordination meetings Oct. 13-16.

### **Kittlitz's Murrelet**

The Pacific Seabird Group approved formation of the Kittlitz's Murrelet Technical Committee, and the first official meeting of the KMTC will be held during the PSG meeting in February, 2009 at Hokkaido, Japan. The committee will facilitate information exchange, research priorities, and conservation issues.

Several studies of Kittlitz's murrelet nesting habitat were successful at locating nests this summer. These studies were collaborative efforts by USFWS, NPS, and USGS, and were conducted on Adak Island, Kodiak Island, Kenai Fjords, and Icy Bay in southeast Alaska.

### **Walrus Disturbance at Hagemeister Island**

The Qayassiq Walrus Commission (QWC) & Bristol Bay residents have made the Service aware of their concerns about yellowfin sole trawl boats operating in state waters on the west side of Cape Constantine, Kulukak, Metervik, and Togiak Bays, as well as the west side of Hagemeister Island, where they threaten to disturb a growing haul-out of Pacific walrus on the west side of Hagemeister Island. QWC is making several proposals to NPFMC and they plan to ask the State Board of Fish to amend conflicting regulations to close state waters to trawl fishing in those areas. This proposed closure would expand the current exclusionary zone around Cape Pierce and Round Island to include Hagemeister Island. This zone excludes federally permitted fishing vessels between April 1 and Sept 30. The FWS believes that increasing protective measures in the area as suggested by QWC would provide a conservation benefit to walrus. During the summer of 2008 large numbers of walrus hauled out on the west side of Hagemeister Island. Togiak NWR had conducted several aerial surveys this summer and recorded a high count of 2,941 walrus on 8/18/08. Neither Round Island nor Cape Peirce held that many walrus this year. We understand that yellowfin sole trawl boats are using waters on the west side of Hagemeister to offload catches to floating processors. Togiak residents say they can hear these activities from their village several miles away. Togiak NWR is supportive of any measures that provide additional protection to walrus in the area. Other proposals are explained in QWC's August 28, 2008 letter to the Council.