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# United States Department of the Interior

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
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FWS/AFES

Report # B-5: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Report to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council

The following information is a summary of major issues the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is involved in that are related to the affairs of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (Council). The information is either updates on significant, ongoing issues the Council has been briefed on previously, or an initial briefing. The summaries are presented according to the Service's program that is coordinating efforts for the issue.

## **I. Endangered Species Act Issues:**

### *Short-tailed albatross and Steller's eider*

The Service completed formal consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in December 2015, on the effects of the fishery management plans for the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands groundfish fisheries and the State of Alaska parallel groundfish fisheries on the endangered short-tailed albatross and the threatened Alaska-breeding population of the Steller's eider. The new biological opinion authorizes reported take of six observed short-tailed albatross over a 2-year period within the longline and trawl fisheries. The Service concurred with the NMFS that the actions may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect Steller's eider.

For further information, contact Erin Knoll, Endangered Species Biologist, Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Office, at [erin\\_knoll@fws.gov](mailto:erin_knoll@fws.gov), or (907) 271-3063.

## **II. Migratory Bird Management Issues:**

### *Update on Seabird Mortality Events – Common Murres*

The Service provided a report to the Council in the February 2016 B-Report, wherein we described unusually high seabird mortality from March 2015 to January 2016. Thousands of seabirds, primarily Common Murre, washed on shore at sites throughout northern Gulf of Alaska. The die-off continued through February and March, although perhaps at reduced level. The 2015-2016 murre wreck is the longest-lasting and most geographically extensive murre die-off event on record, with greater than 38,000 carcasses counted. No estimate of total mortality is yet available, but potentially hundreds of

thousands of marine birds may have died. Based on over 120 seabird carcasses examined by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) National Wildlife Health Center and approximately 100 field necropsies, birds were emaciated and died of starvation, often associated with strong winter storms. The direct mechanisms causing murre starvations remain uncertain. Tests are ongoing for toxins and diseases, however, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration fisheries surveys in fall 2015 indicated low abundance of juvenile walleye Pollock (a common prey item of seabirds) in the Gulf of Alaska, coincident with anomalously warm ocean waters.

Two recent large-scale reports of seabird die-offs include: (1) in mid-February a local pilot estimated approximately 8,000 murre carcasses on approximately 11 miles of beach on the west end of Lake Iliamna. Local residents reported thousands of live murrelets in the inland lake, which is unprecedented; (2) from March 13-19 the National Park Service, with assistance from the Service and the USGS, surveyed the Katmai National Park coast and counted more than 2,000 seabird carcasses (primarily murrelets) on 19 segments and two islands totaling approximately 10.5 miles of beach. Most carcasses were more than 1.5 months old, heavily scavenged, and every beach visited had carcasses present.

For further information, contact Kathy Kuletz, Seabird Coordinator, at [kathy\\_kuletz@fws.gov](mailto:kathy_kuletz@fws.gov), (907) 786-3453, or Robb Kaler, Seabird Specialist at [robert\\_kaler@fws.gov](mailto:robert_kaler@fws.gov), (907)-786-3984.