U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Region 7 - Alaska
1011 East Tudor Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

News

For Immediate Release
January 12, 2001

Contact Karen Boylan
(907)786-3309 or
LaVerne Smith
(907)786-3892 or
Greg Balogh (907)271-2778

Service Designates Critical Habitat for the Spectacled Eider

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has designated approximately 39,000 square miles of critical habitat for the spectacled eider in Alaska in four different locations: in the Bering Sea between St. Lawrence and St. Matthew islands; in Norton Sound east of Nome; in Ledyard Bay between Cape Lisburne and Icy Cape; and on the coastal fringe of parts of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

More than 97 percent of spectacled eider critical habitat is in marine waters seldom used by commercial fishermen. Of the portion on land, more than 95 percent is within areas managed by the Federal government. Less than 1 percent of the designation falls on Native lands. The remaining 4 percent are along shorelines where the water is managed by the State of Alaska.

"The designation will help focus attention on the habitat needs of this threatened sea duck," said David B. Allen, the Service's regional director for Alaska.

"We have learned a lot about the habitat needs of this species during the last few years," Allen said. "Designating critical habitat in the areas we now know are essential to spectacled eiders will help us highlight their importance in the recovery of the species."

Under the Act, critical habitat refers to specific geographic areas that are essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations. A designation does not set up a preserve or refuge and only applies to situations where Federal funding or a Federal permit is involved. It does not affect landowners taking actions that do not involve Federal funding or permits, nor does it allow either government or public access to private lands.

Specifically, the Act requires Federal agencies to consult with the Service to ensure that activities they fund, authorize, or carry out do not jeopardize threatened or endangered species or adversely modify or destroy their critical habitat. Under another provision of the Act, however, Federal agencies already have been required to consult with the Service on activities that may affect spectacled eiders since the Alaska-breeding population was listed as threatened in 1993.

"Federal agencies in Alaska will likely see few, if any, effects of this action because the Service has been working with them for the last seven years to analyze the effects of their projects on spectacled eiders and their habitat," said E. LaVerne Smith, the Service's assistant regional director for fisheries and ecological services in Alaska. "The designation of critical habitat will not alter the cooperative relationships we've developed over that time; nor will it affect the end results, since habitat needs have already been addressed."

The designation of critical habitat for spectacled eiders stems from an out-of-court settlement of a lawsuit filed by the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity and the Christians Caring for Creation. These organizations challenged the Service's 1993 decision to not designate critical habitat for spectacled eiders. At the time when the spectacled eider was listed as threatened in 1993, the Service generally did not designate critical habitat because it believed that most conservation benefits for the species accrued as a result of

listing, and that species received little or no additional benefit from the designation of critical habitat. Furthermore, when the spectacled eider was listed as threatened, the Service did not know enough about the species' conservation needs to designate critical habitat. Scientists now feel more confident in their ability to identify important eider habitat.

In February 2000, the Service published a proposal to designate a total of about 74,600 square miles in nine areas in northern and western Alaska as critical habitat for the spectacled eider. The Service then received comments on the proposal from the public, eider experts, local and regional governments, and other organizations during a 231-day comment period. After thorough evaluation of this information, the Service designated critical habitat on about 39,000 square miles of eider habitat.

After thorough evaluation of all available information, the Service designated critical habitat on about 38,000 square miles of marine waters where spectacled eiders congregate during molt, winter, or spring staging, and about 1,000 square miles of breeding habitat in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. The Service did not designate critical habitat on the North Slope because the small, primarily educational, benefits of a critical habitat designation on the North Slope were outweighed by the benefits of not including this area in the designation. The available information does not allow us to identify the specific areas of the North Slope that should be designated as critical habitat. Designating critical habitat on the North Slope without a more reliable biological basis would provide inaccurate information about the areas needed by the eider and would undermine ongoing work with partners on the North Slope to carry out conservation efforts. After weighing these factors the Service chose not to designate critical habitat on the North Slope.

The spectacled eider is a large sea duck, one of three species in the genus Somateria found in the United States. In the winter and spring, adult males are in breeding plumage with a black chest, white back, and pale green head with black-rimmed white spectacle-like patches around the eyes. During the late summer and fall, males are mottled brown. Females and juveniles are mottled brown year-round with pale brown eye patches.

The species suffered a 96 percent decline on the Y-K Delta in recent decades, dropping from 96,000 birds in the 1970s to fewer than 5,000 in 1992. Biologists estimate that as of the summer of 2000, there were about 7,500 breeding spectacled eiders left on the Y-K Delta, and about 9,500 birds left on the North Slope. The cause of the Y-K Delta decline remains a mystery, but biologists believe that current threats to the bird include lead poisoning from eating spent lead shot; predation by foxes, gulls and jaegers; and hunting and other human disturbances.

Biologists don't know if the species declined on the North Slope between the 1970s and 1990s, but survey data suggests the eiders may have experienced a slow decline throughout the 1990s. No one knows what threats the eider faces at sea, but many scientists believe the birds may be victims of fundamental ecosystem changes that seem to be occurring throughout the Bering Sea.

A backgrounder web page for the media is available by going to: http://alaska.fws.gov/ and clicking on "Spectacled Eider" under issues of importance.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 530 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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(907) 786-3309 or LaVerne
Smith (907) 786-3892 or
Ted Swem (907)456-0441

Service Designates Critical Habitat for the Steller's Eider

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today designated approximately 2830 square miles as critical habitat for the Steller's eider in Alaska in five units: the Kuskokwim Shoals in northern Kuskokwim Bay, the Seal Islands, Nelson Lagoon (including portions of Port Moller and Herendeen Bay), and Izembek Lagoon on the north side of the Alaska Peninsula; and intertidal zone lands between the Askinuk Mountains and Nelson Island in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Approximately 65 percent of this area consists of Federal lands or waters, about 25 percent consists of State waters and the remaining 10 percent consists of Native lands.

"As a threatened species, Steller's eiders are protected under the Endangered Species Act wherever they occur, but the designation of critical habitat focuses additional attention on the need to protect the birds' vital habitat," said David B. Allen, the Service's regional director for Alaska. "The areas we are designating today are used by large flocks of Steller's eiders during breeding, molting, wintering and staging for their spring migration."

Under the Act, critical habitat refers to specific geographic areas that are essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations. A designation does not set up a preserve or refuge and only applies to situations where Federal funding or a Federal permit is involved. It does not affect landowners taking actions that do not involve Federal funding or permits, nor does it allow either government or public access to private lands.

The Act requires Federal agencies to consult with the Service to ensure that activities they fund, authorize, or carry out do not jeopardize threatened or endangered species or adversely modify or destroy their critical habitat. Under another provision of the Act, however, Federal agencies already have been required to consult with the Service on activities that may affect Steller's eiders since the Alaska-breeding population was listed as threatened in 1997.

"Federal agencies in Alaska will likely see few, if any, effects of this action because the Service has been working with them for the last three years to analyze the effects of their projects on Steller's eiders and their habitat," said LaVerne Smith, the Service's assistant regional director for fisheries and ecological services in Alaska. "The designation of critical habitat will not alter the cooperative relationships we've developed over that time, or affect the end results, since habitat needs have already been addressed."

The designation of critical habitat for Steller's eiders stems from an out-of-court settlement of a lawsuit filed by the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity and the Christians Caring for Creation. These organizations challenged the Service's 1997 decision to not designate critical habitat for Steller's eiders. When the Steller's eider was listed as threatened in 1997, the Service generally did not designate critical habitat because it believed that most conservation benefits for the species accrued as a result of listing, and that species received little or no additional benefit from the designation of critical habitat.

In March 2000, the Service proposed to designate about 25,400 square miles in nine areas in northern,

southwestern, and southcoastal Alaska as critical habitat for Steller's eiders. The Service received 344 comments on the proposal from the public, local and regional governments, other organizations, and eider experts during a 197-day comment period.

After thorough evaluation of all available information, the Service designated critical habitat on about 2830 square miles of lands and waters where Steller's eiders congregate during breeding, molting, wintering, and spring staging. The Service did not designate critical habitat on the North Slope because the small, primarily educational, benefits of a critical habitat designation on the North Slope were outweighed by the benefits of not including this area in the designation. The available information does not allow the Service to identify the specific areas of the North Slope that should be designated as critical habitat. Designating critical habitat on the North Slope without a more reliable biological basis would provide inaccurate information about the areas needed by the eider and would undermine ongoing work with partners on the North Slope to carry out conservation efforts. After weighing these factors the Service chose not to designate critical habitat on the North Slope.

One of four eider species, the Steller's eider is the only species in the genus *Polysticta*. This is the smallest eider, with individuals of both sexes averaging about 17 inches long. Males in breeding plumage are striking, with a white head with black eye patches and light green tinging on the back of the head and near the eyes. The breast and belly are chestnut, the rump black, the back is black and white striped longitudinally, with a blue patch (speculum) in the wing. Females and non-breeding males are largely mottled brown, with a blue speculum.

The Steller's eider occurs at such low densities in Alaska during the breeding season that precisely determining population size is currently impossible. Biological estimates of the numbers of birds occupying the North Slope breeding grounds range from the hundreds to the low thousands. Population size on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta is also difficult to estimate. However, only six nests have been found there in recent decades so it is likely that the population is very small. Historical population size and distribution are poorly understood, but it is thought that the species' breeding range has shrunk considerably in Alaska in the last century and that abundance has also decreased. Causes of the decline are unknown. Steller's eiders are still numerous on their molting and wintering grounds in Alaska; however, most of these birds are from the Russia-breeding population, which is not protected by the Endangered Species Act.

The five areas included in the critical habitat designation are:

- Unit 1. Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. This unit includes the vegetated intertidal zone of the central delta from the Askinuk Mountains to northern Nelson Island. It encompasses 989 square miles.

- Unit 2. Kuskokwim Shoals. This unit includes a portion of northern Kuskokwim Bay from the mouth of the Kolavinarak River to near the village of Kwigillingok, extending approximately 11-24 miles offshore. It encompasses approximately 1,472 square miles of marine waters and about 115 miles of shoreline.

- Unit 3. Seal Islands. This unit includes all waters enclosed within the Seal Islands lagoon and marine waters 1/4 mile offshore of the islands and adjacent mainland. It encompasses 24 square miles and 65 miles of shoreline. This unit was originally proposed as a subunit of the North Side of the Alaska Peninsula unit but is now identified separately.

- Unit 4. Nelson Lagoon. This unit includes all of Nelson Lagoon and portions of Port Moller and Herendeen Bay and marine waters 1/4 mile offshore of the islands and adjacent mainland.. This unit encompasses 205 square miles and 149 miles of shoreline. This complex was originally proposed as a subunit of the North Side of the Alaska Peninsula unit but is now identified separately.

- Unit 5. Izembek Lagoon. This unit includes all waters of Izembek Lagoon, Moffett Lagoon, Applegate Cove, and Norma Bay and marine waters 1/4 mile offshore of the islands and adjacent mainland. It encompasses 140 square miles of marine waters and 186 miles of shoreline. This unit was originally proposed as a subunit of the North Side of the Alaska Peninsula unit but is now identified separately.

A backgrounder web page for the media is available by going to: http://alaska.fws.gov/ and clicking on "Steller's Eider" under issues of importance.

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DESIGNATION OF CRITICAL HABITAT
for
SPECTACLED EIDERS AND STELLER'S EIDERS

Summary

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has designated critical habitat in Alaska for the spectacled eider and Alaska-breeding population of the Steller's eider. Both species are listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (Act). Total area designated as critical habitat is 40,833 mi^2.

For the spectacled eider, critical habitat has been designated in molting areas in Norton Sound and Ledyard Bay, breeding areas in central and southern Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, and wintering area in waters south of St. Lawrence Island. A total of 38,991 mi^2 is designated as critical habitat for spectacled eiders.

For the Steller's eider, critical habitat has been designated in breeding areas on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, staging area in the Kuskokwim Shoals, and molting areas in waters associated with the Seal Islands, Nelson Lagoon, and Izembek Lagoon in Southwestern Alaska. A total of 2,830 mi^2 is designated as critical habitat for Steller's eiders.

Proposed rules to designate critical habitat were published on February 8, 2000 (spectacled eider) and March 13, 2000 (Steller's eider). The comment periods following publication of the proposed rules were lengthy: 231 days for spectacled eiders, and 197 days for Steller's eiders. During these comment periods we conducted an extensive outreach effort to solicit comments and additional information from individuals, groups, and communities interested in or affected by the proposed designations. We specifically sought input from Alaska Natives with traditional ecological knowledge of eiders and their habitats, eider experts, and peer reviewers. The comment period closed September 25, 2000. Following closure of the comment period we evaluated all comments and developed the final critical habitat determinations. In accordance with the terms of the settlement agreement obligating us to review the critical habitat determinations, the final determinations were signed January 10, 2001.

When the Service first developed the proposals to designate critical habitat we believed that critical habitat designation should broadly identify those areas that we believe are essential to the conservation of the species. In response to comments received during the public comment period, in addition to further scrutiny of the best available information, we have refined the final designations to more specifically and precisely identify the areas we believe are essential to the conservation of these two species.

Although we believe some portion of the North Slope is essential for the conservation of both eider species and therefore meets the definition of critical habitat, we have not designated critical

habitat on the North Slope. The Act provides that an area essential to the conservation of listed species can be excluded from critical habitat designation if the benefits of excluding the area outweigh the benefits of designating the area as critical habitat, provided that exclusion does not result in the extinction of the species. There are few, if any, benefits of designating critical habitat on the North Slope at this time. Federal agencies already consult with us on activities they are associated with on the North Slope. Our experience with these consultations is that it is unlikely that critical habitat designation will change their outcome. Moreover, those wishing to carry out activities on the North Slope are already aware of the importance of the North Slope to breeding spectacled and Steller's eiders, so there is no informational benefit of designating critical habitat. There are disadvantages of designating critical habitat on the North Slope. We believe that some portion, though not all, of the North Slope is essential to the conservation of spectacled eiders and Steller's eiders, yet the available information does not allow us to discern which specific areas should be designated as critical habitat. While a subset of the North Slope could be designated as critical habitat, we believe that to designate such an area without a more reliable biological basis would convey an inaccurate message about the size and location needed for recovery and may undermine ongoing cooperative efforts to carry out conservation efforts. We have therefore determined that the benefits of excluding the North Slope from critical habitat designation outweigh the benefits of delineating critical habitat on the North Slope, and this exclusion will not result in the extinction of either eider species.

We eliminated proposed critical habitat areas that the best available information indicates are not essential to the conservation of the species. With regard to the spectacled eider we eliminated the following proposed units: North Slope-offshore, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta-marine, and North Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. With regard to the Steller's eider we eliminated the Nunivak Islands, Eastern Aleutians, Alaska Peninsula-south side, Kodiak Archipelago and Kachemak Bay/Ninilchik, and most of the North Side of the Alaska Peninsula. While these areas are not designated as critical habitat they still contain important habitat for eiders, and the protections afforded by the Act still apply to spectacled eiders and Steller's eiders occurring outside of designated critical habitat.

We reduced the area of some proposed critical habitat units to more precisely delineate only those areas that are essential for the conservation of the species. With regard to the spectacled eider, critical habitat boundaries of the Central and South Yukon-Kuskokwim units were revised to exclude upland areas unsuitable for eider habitat nesting. Critical habitat boundaries for the Norton Sound and Ledyard Bay units were revised to exclude areas in which water depth and sparse sightings of eiders suggest the areas are not essential for molting. With regard to the Steller's eider, critical habitat boundaries for the Yukon-Kuskokwim unit were revised to exclude habitat not suitable for breeding. The Kuskokwim Shoals unit is a reduction of the proposed Kuskokwim Bay unit and includes only the area where large concentrations of Steller's eiders and sightings of Alaska-breeding eiders have occurred.

The only regulatory effect of critical habitat designation is that federal agencies must consult with the Service for activities it permits, funds, or carries out in critical habitat. The purpose of

consultation is to ensure that these activities do not adversely modify critical habitat. Agencies must already consult with the Service on their activities where spectacled and Steller's eiders occur to ensure that the activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of the eiders. The definitions of "adverse modification" and "jeopardy" are virtually the same, and based on our previous experience with consultations in areas where eiders occur it is not likely that the consultation process or the results of consultations will change as a result of critical habitat designation. Critical habitat designation has no regulatory impact on activities conducted on non-federal lands if there is no federal nexus with those activities.

The Service agreed to reevaluate critical habitat designations for the spectacled eider and Steller's eider as part of a settlement agreement in a lawsuit filed in March 1999 by the Center for Biological Diversity and Christians Caring for Creation. These organizations challenged our earlier decisions to not designate critical habitat for spectacled and Steller's eiders when they were listed in 1993 and 1997, respectively. Until recently the Service has generally not designated critical habitat for listed species because we believed that critical habitat afforded few, if any, protections beyond those conferred by listing. For example, when a species is listed it is protected from taking, federal agencies must consult with the Service on activities that may affect the species, and recovery planning must begin. The Service felt that appropriate habitat considerations were incorporated through management actions other than critical habitat designation, and thus generally opted to not spend its limited listing resources on designating critical habitat. However, federal courts have overwhelmingly disagreed with this approach, and in case law established over the last several years the courts have made it clear that critical habitat must generally be designated for listed species.

There is still much to learn about the ecology and biology of spectacled eiders and Steller's eiders. Identification of critical habitat needs for Steller's eiders in particular is hindered by the absence of a recovery plan and information on key aspects of the species' population biology. Congress has appropriated $600,000 in FY 2001 to be used by the Alaska Sea Life Center for research related to recovery needs for spectacled and Steller's eiders.

The Service will convene the Steller's Eider Recovery Team in 2001 to continue development of a draft Steller's Eider Recovery Plan. The Recovery Plan will identify actions to achieve recovery of this species. In addition, the Service will initiate or continue research to answer the many unresolved questions concerning this species. Examples of research include identification of North Slope breeding habitat essential to the species' conservation; evaluation of predation effects on North Slope breeding eiders; determination of migration pathways; identification of specific wintering locations; identification of distribution and density of eiders on North Slope; determination of annual variability in distribution on non-breeding range; identification of factors causing population decline; comparison of current and historical population status.

The Service will convene the Spectacled Eider Recovery Team in 2001 to begin revision of the Spectacled Eider Recovery Plan. In addition, the Service will initiate or continue research to address unresolved questions concerning this species. Examples of research include

identification of factors limiting recovery of this species; identification of population trends; development of a visibility correction factor for population surveys on the North Slope, determination of breeding density and nesting success outside of currently developed areas on the North Slope; identification of effects of contaminants on eider biology and ecology.

SPECTACLED EIDER CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATION

Final Critical Habitat Total final area: 38,991 mi^2 Total proposed area: 74,539 mi^2

Unit	Area	Reason for Designation	Changes from Proposal
Central Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta	988.6 mi^2; lands inundated by tidal waters between Askinuk Mtns. & Nelson Island.	Breeding area; presence of lead shot in environment poses continuing threat.	16% reduction - eliminated unsuitable habitat.
South Yukon-Kuskowkim Delta	89.7 mi^2; lands inundated by tidal waters between Nelson Island and Chefornak.	Breeding area; presence of lead shot in environment poses continuing threat.	65% reduction - eliminated unsuitable habitat and areas that do not appear to make significant contribution to recovery.
Norton Sound	4087.3 mi^2; Norton Sound east of 162^0 47', excluding specified waters within Norton Bay; marine waters 5-25m deep.	Molting area; high, consistent use during flightless molting; the only molting area known to be used by breeding females from YK Delta; high gastropod biomass; shipping activities may pose threat.	40% reduction - removed areas that water depth and sparse sightings of eiders suggest areas are not essential for molting.
Ledyard Bay	5,390.0 mi^2; waters of Ledyard Bay within about 74 km (40 nm) of shore, excluding waters less than 1.85 km (1 nm) from shore; marine waters 5-25m deep.	Molting area; principle molting area for breeding females from North Slope; shipping activities may pose threat.	43% reduction - local observations that eiders don't use $\leq$ 1 nm from shore; excluded waters don't contain features essential to conservation; few or no eiders sighted in excluded portions.
Waters South of St. Lawrence Island	28,436.3 mi^2; U.S. waters south of St. Lawrence Island between the latitudes 61^0 N and 63^0 30' N, and between the longitudes 169^0 W and 174^0 30' W; marine waters $\leq$ 75m deep.	Wintering area; most or all spectacled eiders use some portion of this unit each winter for substantial portion of annual cycle. Flux in Bering Sea ecosystem is cause for concern.	No change in boundary from proposal, but modified primary constituent elements to exclude waters $\geq$ 75m deep.

AREAS REMOVED FROM FINAL SPECTACLED EIDER CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATION

Units removed	Reason for removal
North Slope - land	Entire proposed unit likely not necessary for recovery as specified in recovery plan, though some portion is essential. Available information insufficient to delineate which areas are essential to species. Benefits of exclusion outweigh benefits of designation. Inaccurate representation of critical habitat would negate informational & educational benefits associated with designation. Premature and inaccurate designation would undermine cooperative efforts with local residents to identify and implement recovery efforts.
North Slope - marine	Available information does not support critical habitat designation. Few sightings, short duration of individual use; unable to determine the type of eider use so cannot identify physical/biological features important to the species.
Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Marine Units	Insufficient information about type of use so cannot identify physical and biological features necessary for conservation of species. Limited telemetry information suggests individual use is of short duration each year.
North Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta	Habitat apparently unsuitable for eider nesting; contribution to species recovery is low; area not needed to meet recovery goals.

STELLER'S EIDER CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATION

Final Critical Habitat Total final area: 2,830 mi^2, 852 mi. shoreline Total proposed area: 25,428 mi^2

Unit	Area	Reason for designation	Change from proposal
Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta	989 mi^2 +337 miles shoreline; lands inundated by tidal waters between Askinuk Mtns. & Nelson Island.	Breeding area; recovery plan likely to include re-establishment of YK Delta breeding population; listing based on near-disappearance from YK Delta; increasing abundance on YK Delta will reduce AK-breeding population vulnerability to extirpation. presence of lead shot in environment poses continuing threat.	18% reduction - eliminated unsuitable habitat.
Kuskokwim Shoals	1,472 $miles^2$ + 115 miles shoreline: northern Kuskokwim Bay from the mouth of the Kolavinarak River to near Kwigillingok village, approx. 11-24 miles offshore.	Molting and spring staging area; high concentrations (>5000 Steller's eiders in most years & $\geq$1000 in $\geq$1year) and known use by Alaska-breeding Steller's eiders. Environmental perturbations may pose threat to population.	Subset of proposed Kuskokwim Bay unit - eliminated southern portion of proposed unit and reduced northern portion of proposed unit to more accurately reflect areas used by Steller's eiders.
Seal Islands	24 $miles^2$ + 65 miles shoreline; includes waters within Seal Islands Lagoon and marine waters 1/4 mile offshore of islands and adjacent mainland.	Molting and spring staging area; high concentrations (>5000 Steller's eiders in most years & $\geq$1000 in $\geq$1year) and known use by Alaska-breeding Steller's eiders. Environmental perturbations may pose threat to population.	Unchanged from proposed rule.
Nelson Lagoon complex	205 $miles^2$ + 149 miles shoreline; includes Nelson Lagoon and 1/4 mile offshore, and portions of Port Moller and Herendeen Bay.	Molting and spring staging area; high concentrations (>5000 Steller's eiders in most years & $\geq$1000 in $\geq$1year) and known use by Alaska-breeding Steller's eiders. Environmental perturbations may pose threat to population.	Eliminated portions of Herendeen Bay & Port Moller where Steller's eiders not detected in significant numbers.

Izembek Lagoon	140 miles^2 + 186 miles of shoreline; Includes waters of Izembek Lagoon, Moffett Lagoon, Applegate Cove, Norma Bay, and water 1/4 mile offshore of Kudiakof Islands and adjacent mainland.	Molting and spring staging area; high concentrations (>5000 Steller's eiders in most years & ≥1000 in ≥1year) and known use by Alaska-breeding Steller's eiders.	Unchanged from proposed rule.

AREAS REMOVED FROM FINAL STELLER'S EIDER CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATION

North Slope - land	Entire proposed unit likely not necessary for recovery, though some portion is essential. Barrow area is important, but not enough information to know where to draw critical habitat boundaries to accurately encompass critical habitat. Benefits of exclusion outweigh benefits of designation. Inaccurate representation of critical habitat would negate informational & educational benefits associated with designation. Premature designation would undermine cooperative efforts with local residents to identify and implement recovery efforts.
Nunivak Islands, Eastern Aleutians, Alaska Peninsula-south side, Kodiak Archipelago, Kachemak Bay/Ninilchik, North Side of the Alaska Peninsula	Insufficient information on marine distribution and use to justify designation as critical habitat. Four specific areas with high concentrations of eiders and sightings of at least one Alaska-breeding eider were retained as critical habitat.

Questions and Answers About Critical Habitat for the Spectacled Eider

Q. What is critical habitat?

A. Critical habitat is a term used in the Endangered Species Act (ESA). It refers to specific geographic areas that are essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special management considerations. These areas do not necessarily have to be occupied by the species at the time of designation.

Q. What is the purpose of designating critical habitat?

A. Section 7 of the ESA requires Federal agencies to consult with the Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that may affect threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat. The purpose of consultation is to ensure that Federal actions do not jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat. A critical habitat designation has no effect on situations in which a Federal agency is not involved--for example, a landowner undertaking a project on private land that involves no Federal funding or permit.

Q. What are the effects of critical habitat designation?

Critical habitat only affects Federal lands and activities funded, permitted, or carried out by the Federal government. It has no regulatory impacts on private actions conducted on private lands. Although designation of critical habitat is not anticipated to result in any additional regulatory consequences beyond the existing consultation responsibilities outlined in section 7 of the ESA, actions involving the Federal government may experience increased public scrutiny of proposed development activities in relation to spectacled eider critical habitat.

Q. Do listed species in critical habitat areas receive more protection?

A. Designation of critical habitat provides a means by which habitat essential for the conservation of a listed species can be protected from adverse modification or destruction resulting from Federal activities or projects. Designation of an area as critical habitat does not create a nature preserve or refuge, and does not affect ownership of land in the area. It does not allow Federal or public access to private lands, and does not change the rights of private landowners. It does not limit private, local or State actions unless Federal funding or authorization is involved. Listed species and their habitats are protected by the Endangered Species Act whether or not they are in an area designated as critical habitat.

Q. What protection does a species receive when it is listed as threatened or endangered?

A. The Endangered Species Act forbids the import, export, or interstate or foreign sale of protected animals and plants without a special permit. It also makes "take" illegal – forbidding the killing, harming, harassing, possessing, or removing of protected animals from the wild. Federal agencies must also consult with the Service to conserve listed species on their lands and to ensure that any activity they fund, authorize, or carry out will not jeopardize the survival of a listed species.

Permits may be issued to carry out otherwise prohibited activities involving endangered wildlife species for scientific purposes, to enhance the propagation or survival of the species, or for incidental take in the course of certain otherwise lawful activities.

In addition, the Endangered Species Act requires that Federal agencies not only take action to prevent further loss of a species, but also pursue actions to recover species to the point where they no longer require protection and can be delisted.

Q. Do Federal agencies have to consult with the Service outside critical habitat areas?

A. Yes. Even when there is no critical habitat designation, Federal agencies must consult with the Service to ensure any action they carry out, fund, or authorize is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species.

Q. What is the impact of a critical habitat designation on economic development?

A. The vast majority of human activities that require a consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proceed with little or no modification.

Q. How does the Service determine what areas to designate?

A. Biologists consider physical or biological habitat features needed for life and successful reproduction of the species. These include, but are not limited to:

- space for individual and population growth and for normal behavior;
- food, water, air, light, minerals, or other nutritional or physiological requirements;
- cover or shelter;
- sites for breeding and rearing offspring;
- habitats that are protected from disturbance or are representative of the historic geographical and ecological distributions of a species.

Q. Are all areas within critical habitat boundaries considered critical habitat?

A. Only areas that contain the primary constituent elements required by the species are considered critical habitat. Primary constituent elements are those physical and biological features of a landscape that a species needs to survive. Some areas within the eider critical habitat boundaries may not contain primary constituent elements. Towns and villages, roads, oil platforms, and certain dry uplands are not considered critical habitat.

Q. For how-many species has the Service designated critical habitat?

A. To date, the Service has designated critical habitat for 134 of the 1234 species listed as threatened or endangered.

Q. Why hasn't the Service designated critical habitat for more species?

A. After a Congressional moratorium on listing new species ended in 1996, the Service faced a huge backlog of proposed species listings. At that point, the Service assigned a relatively low priority to designating critical habitat because it believed that a more effective use of limited resources was to place imperiled species on the threatened and endangered species list. Recent court decisions, however, have required the Service to designate critical habitat for an increasing number of listed species.

Q. Why didn't you designate critical habitat when the spectacled eider was listed?

A. When the spectacled eider was listed as threatened in 1993, the Service generally did not designate critical habitat because it believed that most conservation benefits for the species were accrued as a result of listing, and that very few, if any, additional benefits were afforded by designating critical habitat. Consequently, the Service generally opted to focus its limited resources on listing species that were imperiled rather than designating critical habitat. Moreover, at the time the spectacled eider was listed as threatened,

scientists did not know enough about the species' conservation needs and distribution to designate critical habitat. Scientists now feel more confident in their ability to delineate important eider habitat. Additionally, recent federal court rulings have clearly signaled that designation of critical habitat for listed species must be the rule rather than the exception.

Q. Why are you designating critical habitat now?
A. On March 10, 1999, the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity and the Christians Caring for Creation filed a lawsuit in Federal District Court in the Northern District of California against the Secretary of the Department of the Interior for failure to designate critical habitat for five California species and Alaska's spectacled and Steller's eiders. In September 1999, the plaintiffs and the Departments of Justice and Interior entered into an agreement in which Interior agreed to re-evaluate its critical habitat determinations for spectacled and Steller's eiders. We carefully reviewed the best scientific and commercial data available, including new information that had been gathered in the seven years since the species was listed. On February 8, 2000, we proposed the designation of nine areas in northern and western Alaska as critical habitat for the spectacled eider totaling about 74,600 square miles. Following a public comment period of 231 days, and after careful deliberation and consideration of all our information, we have designated critical habitat on about 39,000 square miles of eider habitat.

Q. Where are you designating critical habitat?
A. We are designating critical habitat in five areas. Over 97% of spectacled eider critical habitat is in marine waters seldom used by commercial fishermen. Less than 1% of the designation falls on Native lands, while over 95% is within areas managed by the Federal government. The remaining 4% are near shore waters managed by the state of Alaska.

Unit 1 (Central Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta) is comprised of 15 entire townships and 564 sections within 27 additional townships, encompassing 2,560.4 km^2 (256,041 ha) (988.6 mi^2) of vegetated intertidal zone; a 16 percent reduction of what was proposed.

Unit 2 (Southern Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta) is comprised of 103 sections within 8 townships encompassing 232.4 km^2 (23,243 ha) (89.7 mi^2) of vegetated intertidal zone; a 65 percent reduction of what was proposed.

Unit 3 (Norton Sound) is comprised of marine waters 5-25 m deep (and associated ocean bottom community) east of 162^0 47', excluding Norton Bay. This unit encompasses 10,586 km^2 (4087.3 mi^2); a 40 percent reduction of what was proposed.

Unit 4 (Ledyard Bay) is comprised of marine waters between Cape Lisburne and Point Lay 5-25 m deep (and associated ocean bottom community) within about 74 km (40 nm) of shore, excluding waters less than 1.85 km (1 nm) from shore. This unit encompasses 13,960 km^2 (5390.0 mi^2); a 43 percent reduction of what was proposed.

Unit 5 (Bering Sea Wintering Area) is comprised of U.S. waters up to 75 m deep (and associated ocean bottom community) south of St. Lawrence Island between the latitudes 61^0 N and 63^0 30' N, and between the longitudes 169^0 W and 174^0 30' W. No portion of St. Lawrence Island or Russia is included in Unit 5. Our final designation encompasses 73,650 km^2 (28,436.3 mi^2), the same as what we proposed.

Q. Why did you designate such large areas as critical habitat?
A. Spectacled eiders have had severe declines in Alaska and despite hunting restrictions, their numbers have not rebounded. We still are unsure why this species has declined. In delineating critical habitat, we relied on the best available information from scientific studies, eider experts, residents of areas where spectacled eiders are found, and other sources to identify areas essential to the survival and recovery of spectacled eiders. We designated critical habitat only for those areas we were certain are essential to the conservation of the species.

Q. Why did you designate less critical habitat than you proposed?
A. In determining what warranted designation as critical habitat, we considered scientific information, the opinions of eider experts, traditional Native environmental knowledge, and public comments. We

have refined the final critical habitat designations to more specifically and precisely identify the areas we believe are essential to the conservation of the Alaska-breeding population of Steller's eiders. We eliminated proposed critical habitat areas that the best available information indicates are not essential to the conservation of this species. We did not designate critical habitat on the North Slope. While we believe some portion of the North Slope contains habitat features that are essential to the conservation of Steller's eiders and therefore meet the definition of critical habitat, we did not designate critical habitat here because the benefits of excluding the area from critical habitat designation outweigh the benefits of designating critical habitat.

Q. Are all areas within the eider's critical habitat boundaries considered critical habitat?

A. Only areas within critical habitat boundaries that contain "primary constituent elements" are considered to be critical habitat. Primary constituent elements are those aspects of habitat that are essential to the conservation of a species. On the Y-K Delta, spectacled eiders nest in the vegetated intertidal zone, the vegetated fringe of tundra that is periodically flooded by tides. Patches of elevated, well drained tundra unimportant to eiders are probably included within our critical habitat borders on the Y-K Delta. But these areas are not considered to be critical habitat because they do not contain the primary constituent elements important to eiders. Land that has already been developed is not considered to be critical habitat, even if it is within a critical habitat boundary, because it is not important to eiders.

Q. Are there other populations of spectacled eiders outside the U.S.? If so, then why do we need to protect them in the United States?

A. Biologists estimate that at least 40,000 pairs of spectacled eiders nest in arctic Russia. However, there are several reasons for protecting spectacled eiders in Alaska. First, spectacled eiders have been nesting in Alaska for hundreds, probably even thousands of years. They have been, and remain, an important part of the Native heritage in this state. Future generations have a right to continue to enjoy these birds. Second, the three breeding populations of spectacled eiders (two in Alaska, one in Russia) have been found by scientists to be genetically distinct. If we don't protect our Alaskan birds, the species could lose the genetic diversity that may help it survive environmental changes. Third, we can do little to control hunting pressure, pollution, and development in Arctic Russia. If we do not protect our birds, the entire species could go extinct.

Q. How many spectacled eiders breed in Alaska?

A. The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta breeding population is approximately 3,700 pairs (aerial survey data adjusted for detection bias). This population has been stable to slightly increasing over the last 10 years. The most recent (1999) population estimate for spectacled eiders on the North Slope was 4,744 $\pm$ 907 pairs (aerial survey data not adjusted for detection bias). This population shows a downward trend of 2.6 percent per year, which is bounded by a 90 percent confidence interval ranging from a 7.7 percent decline per year to a 2.7 percent increase per year. For comparison, in the 1970's there were about 48,000 pairs in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

Q. Why did spectacled eiders decline?

A. Although several potential threats to spectacled eiders have been identified on land and sea, no clear links to the dramatic decline in the YKD population have been established. Scientists believe that the main threats to spectacled eiders on the breeding grounds include: 1) lead-poisoning from eating spent lead shot; 2) predation by foxes, gulls, and jaegers; and 3) hunting and other human disturbance. There is some preliminary information suggesting that preferred food supplies on the eiders' wintering grounds may be declining.

Q. Where do you find spectacled eiders?

A. Nesting: Spectacled eiders nest in Russia and North America. In the United States, spectacled eiders historically nested discontinuously from the Nushagak Peninsula of southwestern Alaska, north to Barrow and east nearly to the Canadian border. Today, two main breeding populations remain in North America; on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and the North Slope of Alaska.

Molting: Within the United States, spectacled eiders molt in Norton Sound and Ledyard Bay. They also molt in Mechimensky Bay in Russia.

Wintering: During winter, spectacled eiders gather in exceedingly large and dense flocks in openings in the pack ice in the central Bering Sea between St. Lawrence and St. Matthew Islands. Spectacled eiders from all known breeding populations (Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, North Slope, and Arctic Russia) use this wintering area, and no other wintering areas are currently known.

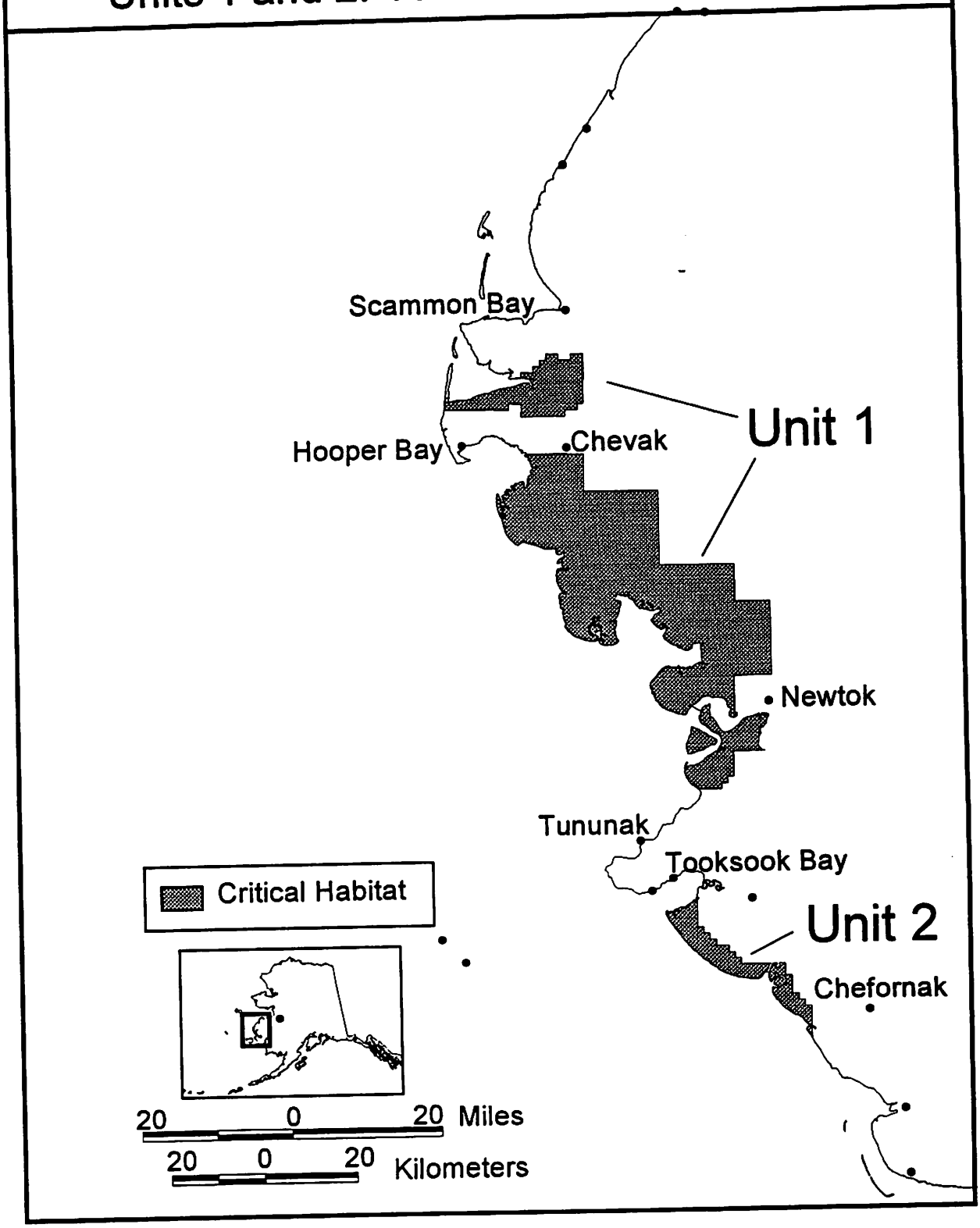
More questions?

Call or write:

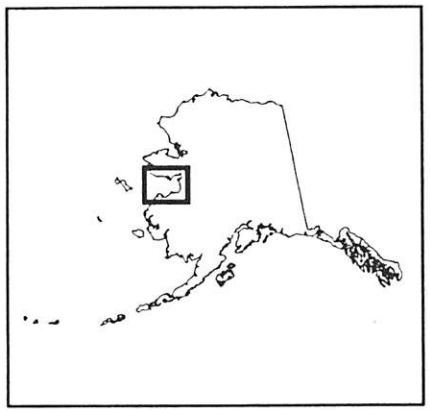
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Ecological Services Anchorage Field Office
605 W. 4th Ave. Rm. G-61
Anchorage, AK 99501

(907)-271-2888 or (800) 272-4174

Spectacled Eider Critical Habitat
Units 1 and 2: Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta



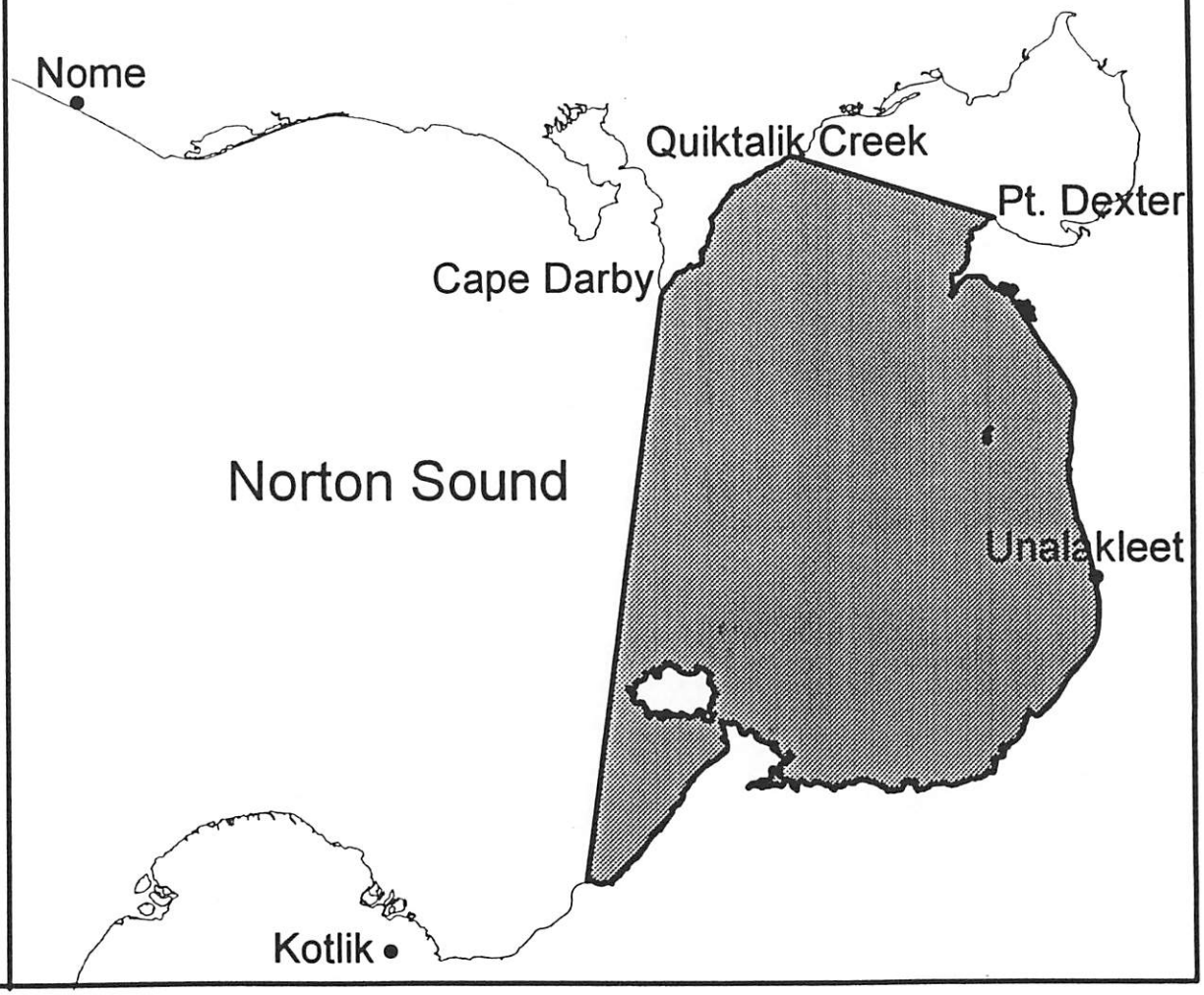
Spectacled Eider Critical Habitat
Unit 3: Norton Sound



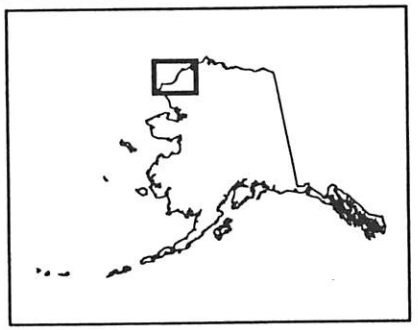
Critical Habitat

10 0 10 20 Miles

10 0 10 20 Kilometers



Spectacled Eider Critical Habitat
Unit 4: Ledyard Bay



10 0 10 20 Miles

10 0 10 20 Kilometers

Critical Habitat

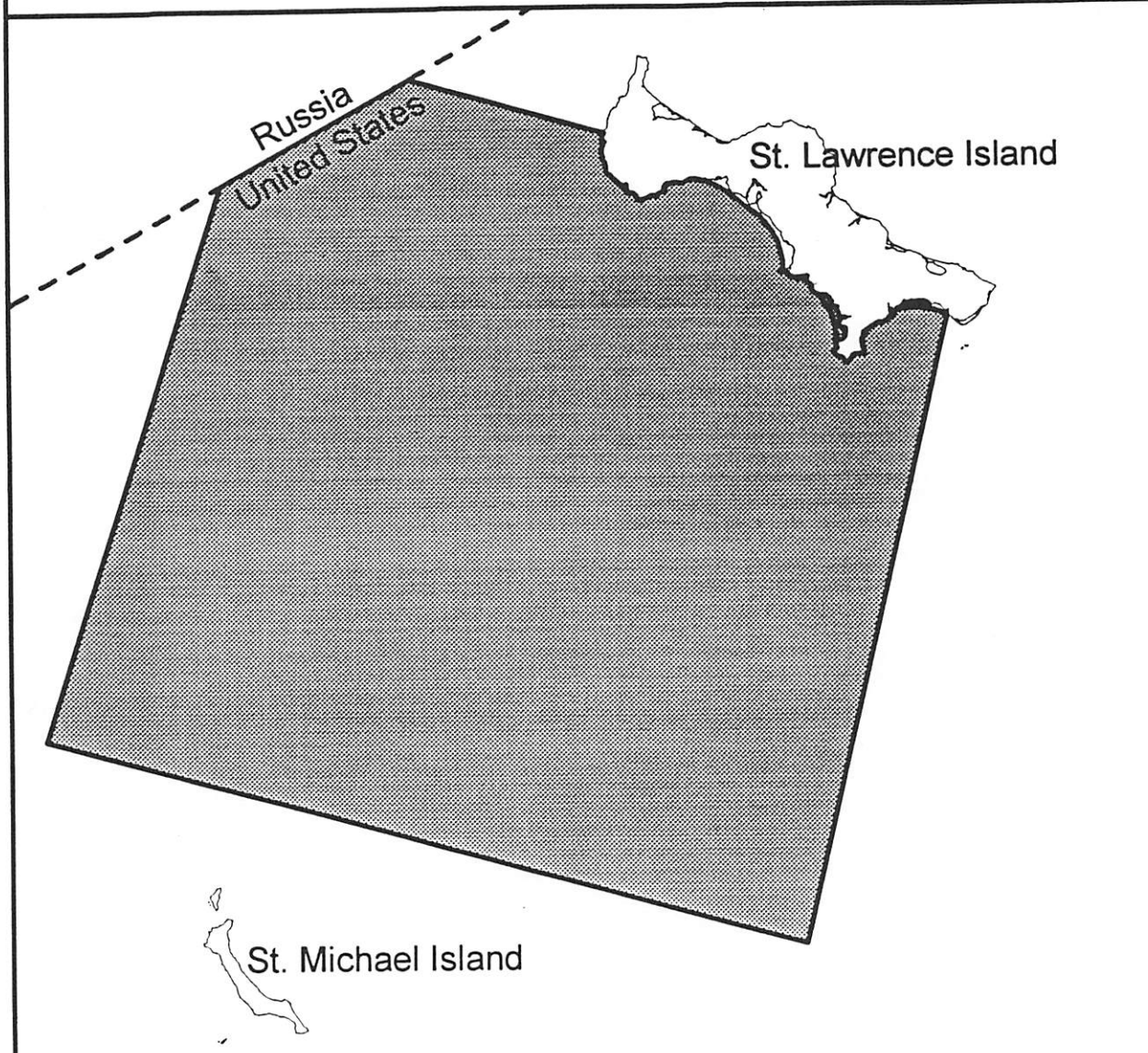
Icy Cape

Point Lay

Ledyard Bay

Cape Lisburne

Spectacled Eider Critical Habitat
Unit 5: Wintering Area



Questions and Answers About Critical Habitat for the Steller's Eider

Q. What is critical habitat?

A. Critical habitat is a term used in the Endangered Species Act (ESA). It refers to specific geographic areas that are essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special management considerations. These areas do not necessarily have to be occupied by the species at the time of designation.

Q. What is the purpose of designating critical habitat?

A. Section 7 of the ESA requires Federal agencies to consult with the Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that may affect threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat. The purpose of consultation is to ensure that Federal actions do not jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat. A critical habitat designation has no effect on situations in which a Federal agency is not involved--for example, a landowner undertaking a project on private land that involves no Federal funding or permit.

Q. What are the effects of critical habitat designation?

A. Critical habitat only affects Federal lands and activities funded, permitted, or carried out by the Federal government. It has no regulatory impacts on private actions conducted on private lands. Although designation of critical habitat is not anticipated to result in any additional regulatory consequences beyond the existing consultation responsibilities outlined in section 7 of the ESA, actions involving the Federal government may experience increased public scrutiny of proposed development activities in relation to spectacled eider critical habitat.

Q. Do listed species in critical habitat areas receive more protection?

A. Designation of critical habitat provides a means by which habitat essential for the conservation of a listed species can be protected from adverse modification or destruction resulting from Federal activities or projects. Designation of an area as critical habitat does not create a nature preserve or refuge, and does not affect ownership of land in the area. It does not allow Federal or public access to private lands, and does not change the rights of private landowners. It does not limit private, local or State actions unless Federal funding or authorization is involved. Listed species and their habitats are protected by the Endangered Species Act whether or not they are in an area designated as critical habitat.

Q. What protection does a species receive when it is listed as threatened or endangered?

A. The Endangered Species Act forbids the import, export, or interstate or foreign sale of protected animals and plants without a special permit. It also makes "take" illegal – forbidding the killing, harming, harassing, possessing, or removing of protected animals from the wild. Federal agencies must also consult with the Service to conserve listed species on their lands and to ensure that any activity they fund, authorize, or carry out will not jeopardize the survival of a listed species.

Permits may be issued to carry out otherwise

prohibited activities involving endangered wildlife species for scientific purposes, to enhance the propagation or survival of the species, or for incidental take in the course of certain otherwise lawful activities.

In addition, the Endangered Species Act requires that Federal agencies not only take action to prevent further loss of a species, but also pursue actions to recover species to the point where they no longer require protection and can be delisted.

Q. Do Federal agencies have to consult with the Service outside critical habitat areas?

A. Yes. Even when there is no critical habitat designation, Federal agencies must consult with the Service to ensure any action they carry out, fund, or authorize is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species.

Q. What is the impact of a critical habitat designation on economic development?

A. The vast majority of human activities that require a consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proceed with little or no modification.

Q. How does the Service determine what areas to designate?

A. Biologists consider physical or biological habitat features needed for life and successful reproduction of the species. These include, but are not limited to:

- space for individual and population growth and for normal behavior;
- food, water, air, light, minerals, or other nutritional or physiological requirements;
- cover or shelter;
- sites for breeding and rearing offspring;
- habitats that are protected from disturbance or are representative of the historic geographical and ecological distributions of a species.

Q. Are all areas within critical habitat boundaries considered critical habitat?

A. Only areas that contain the primary constituent elements required by the species are considered critical habitat. Primary constituent elements are those physical and biological features of a landscape that a species needs to survive. Some areas within the eider critical habitat boundaries may not contain primary constituent elements. For example, towns, villages, roads and oil platforms are not considered critical habitat.

Q. For how many species has the Service designated critical habitat?

A. To date, the Service has designated critical habitat for 134 of the 1,234 species listed as threatened or endangered.

Q. Why hasn't the Service designated critical habitat for more species?

A. After a Congressional moratorium on listing new species ended in 1996, the Service faced a huge backlog of proposed species listings. At that point, the Service assigned a relatively low priority to designating critical habitat because it believed that a more effective use of limited resources was to place imperiled species on the threatened and endangered species list. Recent court decisions, however, have indicated that the Service must in most cases designate critical habitat for listed species.

Q. Why didn't the Service designate critical habitat when the Steller's eider was listed?

A. When the Steller's eider was listed as threatened in 1997, the Service generally did not designate critical habitat because it believed that most conservation benefits for the species were accrued as a result of listing, and that very few, if any, additional benefits were afforded by designating critical habitat. Consequently, the Service generally opted to focus its limited resources on listing species that were imperiled rather than designating critical habitat. However, recent federal court rulings have clearly signaled that designation of critical habitat for listed species must be the rule rather than the exception.

Q. Why are we designating critical habitat now?

A. On March 10, 1999, the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity and the Christians Caring for Creation filed a lawsuit in Federal District Court in the Northern District of California against the Secretary of the Department of the Interior for failure to designate critical habitat for five California species and Alaska's spectacled and Steller's eiders. In September 1999, the plaintiffs and the Departments of Justice and Interior entered into an agreement in which Interior agreed to re-evaluate its critical habitat determinations for spectacled and Steller's eiders. We carefully reviewed the best scientific and commercial data available, including new information that had been gathered since the species was listed. On March 13, 2000, we proposed the designation of nine areas as critical habitat for the Steller's eider totaling about 25,428 square miles. Following a public comment period of 197 days, and after careful deliberation and consideration of all available information, we have identified five areas that we are certain are essential to the conservation of Steller's eiders and may require special management considerations. These five areas consist of approximately 2,830 square miles of lands and waters and 852 miles of shoreline.

Q. Where are we designating critical habitat?

A. We are designating critical habitat in 5 areas. About 65 percent of the designated area is within Federally managed lands or waters, and about 26 percent of the designated area is within waters managed by the State. The remaining critical habitat is on Native-owned lands.

Unit 1. Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta - includes the "vegetated intertidal zone" of the central delta from the Askinuk Mountains to northern Nelson Island. It encompasses 989 square miles of lands.

Unit 2. Kuskokwim Shoals- includes a portion of northern Kuskokwim Bay from the mouth of the Kolavinarak River to near the village of Kwigillingok, extending approximately 11-24 miles offshore. This unit encompasses approximately 1,472 square miles of marine waters and about 115 miles of shoreline.

Unit 3. Seal Islands- includes all waters enclosed within the Seal Islands lagoon and marine waters 1/4 mile offshore of the islands and adjacent mainland. It encompasses 24 square miles and 65 miles of shoreline. This unit was originally proposed as a subunit of the North Side of the Alaska Peninsula unit but is now identified separately.

Unit 4. Nelson Lagoon- includes all of Nelson Lagoon and portions of Port Moller and Herendeen Bay and marine waters 1/4 mile offshore of the islands and adjacent mainland.. This unit encompasses 205 square miles and 149 miles of shoreline. This complex was originally proposed as a subunit of the North Side of the Alaska Peninsula unit but is now identified separately.

Unit 5. Izembek Lagoon- includes all waters of Izembek Lagoon, Moffett Lagoon, Applegate Cove, and Norma Bay and marine waters 1/4 mile offshore of the islands and adjacent mainland. It encompasses 140 square miles of marine waters and 186 miles of shoreline. This unit was originally proposed as a subunit of the North Side of the Alaska Peninsula unit but is now identified separately.

Q. Why did we designate less critical habitat than you proposed?

A. In determining what warranted designation as critical habitat, we considered scientific information, the opinions of eider experts, traditional Native environmental knowledge, and public comment. We have refined the final critical habitat designations to more specifically and precisely identify the areas we believe are essential to the conservation of the Alaska-breeding population of Steller's eiders. We eliminated proposed critical habitat areas that the best available information indicates are not essential to the conservation of this species. We did not designate critical habitat on the North Slope. While we believe some portion of the North Slope contains habitat features that are essential to the conservation of Steller's eiders and therefore meet the definition of critical habitat, we did not designate critical habitat here because the benefits of excluding the area from critical habitat designation outweigh the benefits of designating critical habitat.

Q. Are all areas within critical habitat boundaries considered critical habitat?

A. Only areas within critical habitat boundaries that

contain "primary constituent elements" are considered to be critical habitat. Primary constituent elements are those aspects of habitat that are essential to the conservation of a species. In the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta critical habitat unit the primary constituent elements are lands within the vegetated intertidal zone (lands inundated by tidally influenced water), along with all open-water inclusions within that zone. In the Kuskokwim Shoals critical habitat unit the primary constituent elements include marine waters up to 9 m (30 ft) deep and the underlying substrate, the associated invertebrate fauna in the water column, and the underlying marine benthic community. In the Izembek Lagoon, Nelson Lagoon, and Seal Islands critical habitat units, the primary constituent elements include waters up to 9m (30 ft) deep, the associated invertebrate fauna in the water column, the underlying marine benthic community, and where present, eelgrass beds and associated flora and fauna. There are many areas within Steller's eider critical habitat boundaries that do not contain the constituent elements and are not considered critical habitat. For example, marine waters deeper than 9 meters (30 feet) and existing structures such as docks are not considered critical habitat.

Q. Are all Steller's eiders protected by the Endangered Species Act?

A. No. There are three populations of Steller's eiders. Two breed in Russia and one breeds in Alaska. Only the Alaska-breeding population is classified as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Q. Where does the Alaska-breeding population of Steller's eiders occur?

A. The Alaska-breeding population of Steller's eiders nests in two general areas: on the North Slope where hundreds or low thousands occur; and on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, where an extremely small but unknown number remain. After nesting, Steller's eiders move from their terrestrial nesting areas to shallow, nearshore marine waters, where they spend the remainder of the year.

The range of the Alaska-breeding population during the non-nesting season remains poorly understood. Over a hundred thousand Steller's eiders that nest in Russia move to Alaska and winter in a huge area including the north and south sides of the Alaska Peninsula, the eastern Aleutian Islands, and southcoastal Alaska including the Kodiak Archipelago and parts of southern Cook Inlet. It is believed that the threatened Alaska-breeding population likely also occurs within this area during winter, but it is not known whether they occur in specific portions or throughout this broad range.

Q. Why have Alaska-breeding Steller's eiders declined?

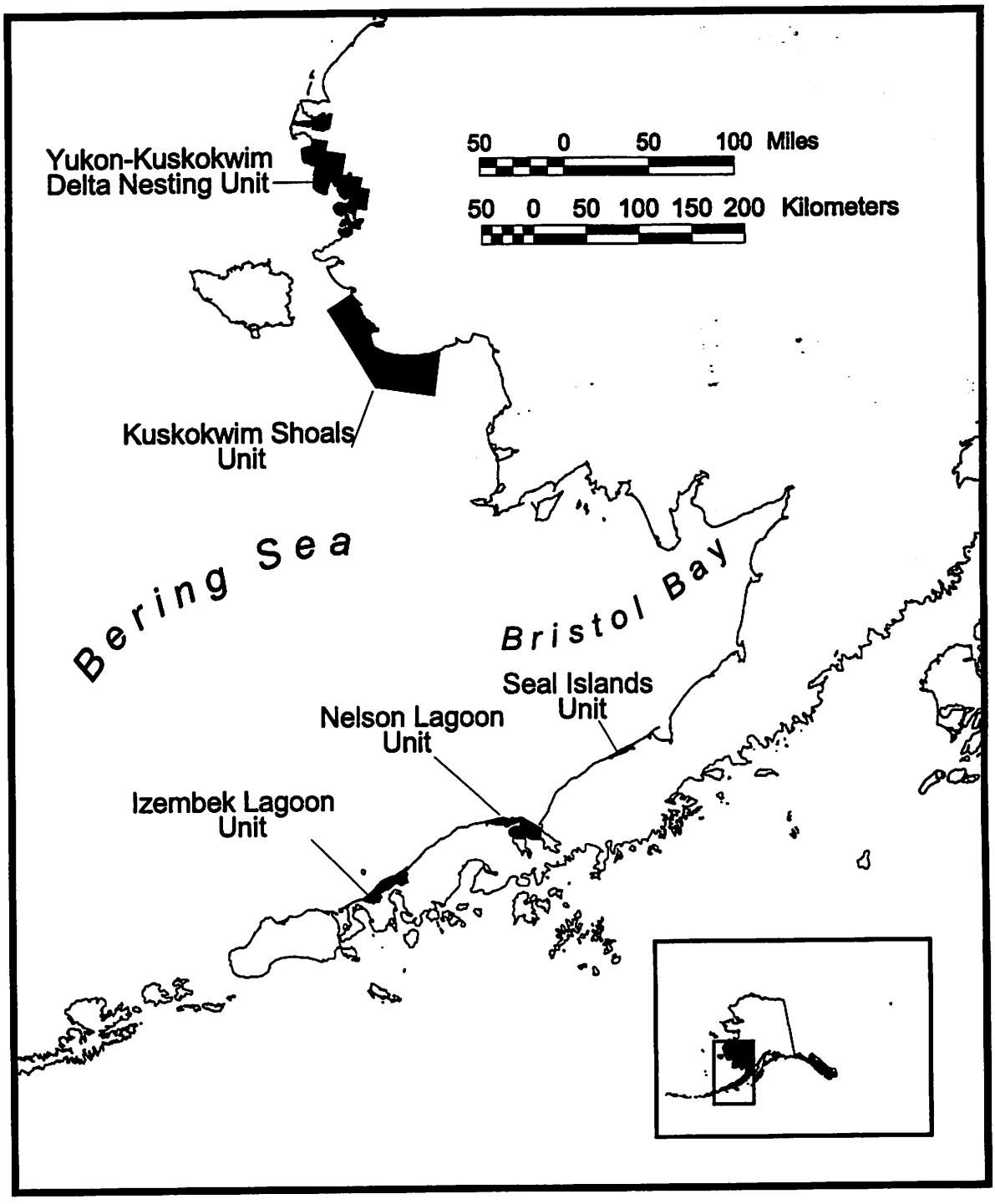
A. The Alaska-breeding population of Steller's eiders was listed as threatened because its range in Alaska contracted substantially and its population size declined, increasing the vulnerability of the remaining population to extirpation. Causes of the decline remain unknown but possible contributing factors include over-hunting, lead-poisoning from ingesting spent lead shot while feeding, changes in the number or diet of predators, and changes in the marine ecosystems where Steller's eiders molt and winter.

More questions?

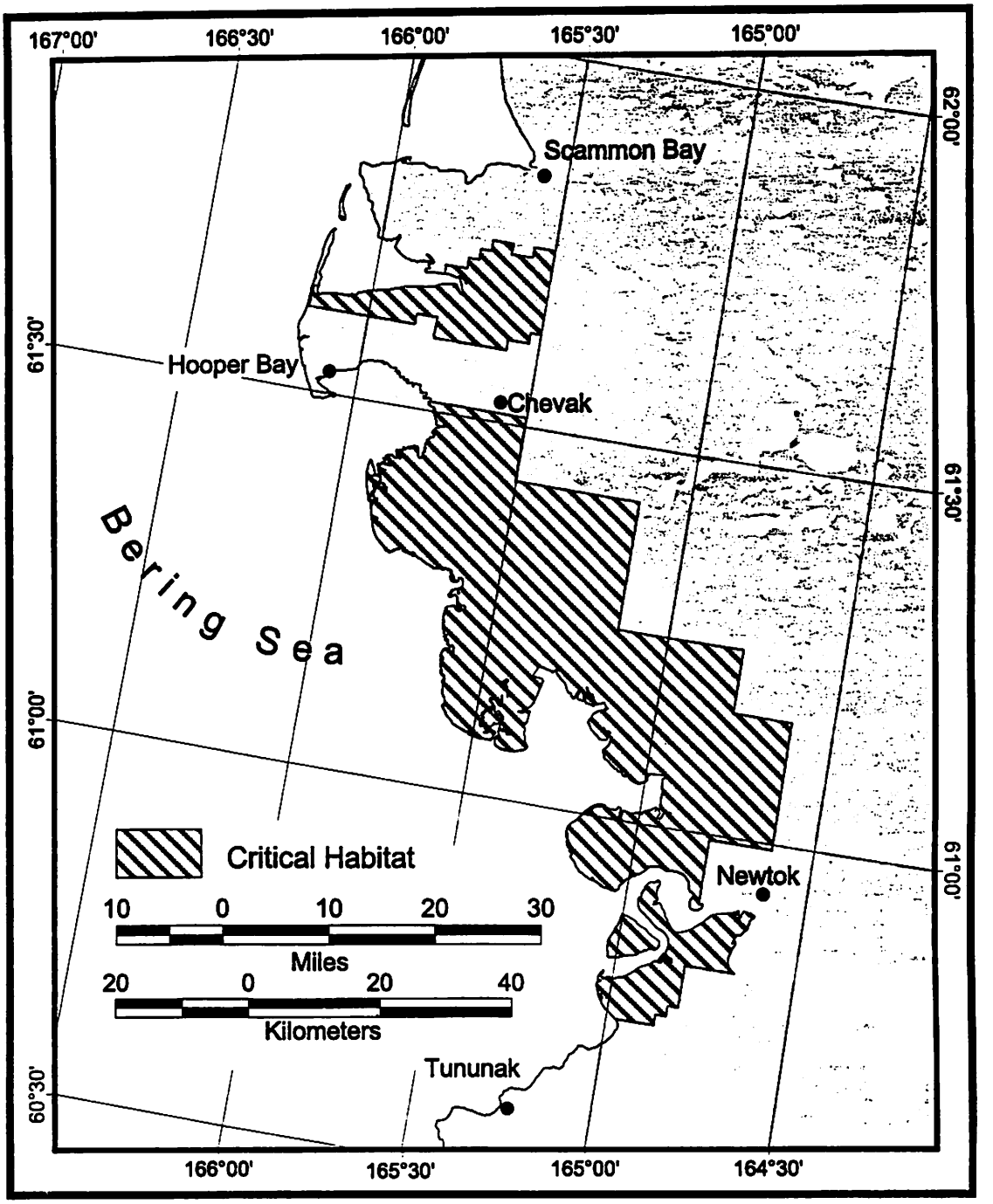
Call or write:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Northern Alaska Ecological Services
101 12 th Ave. Box 19, Room 110
Fairbanks, AK 99701

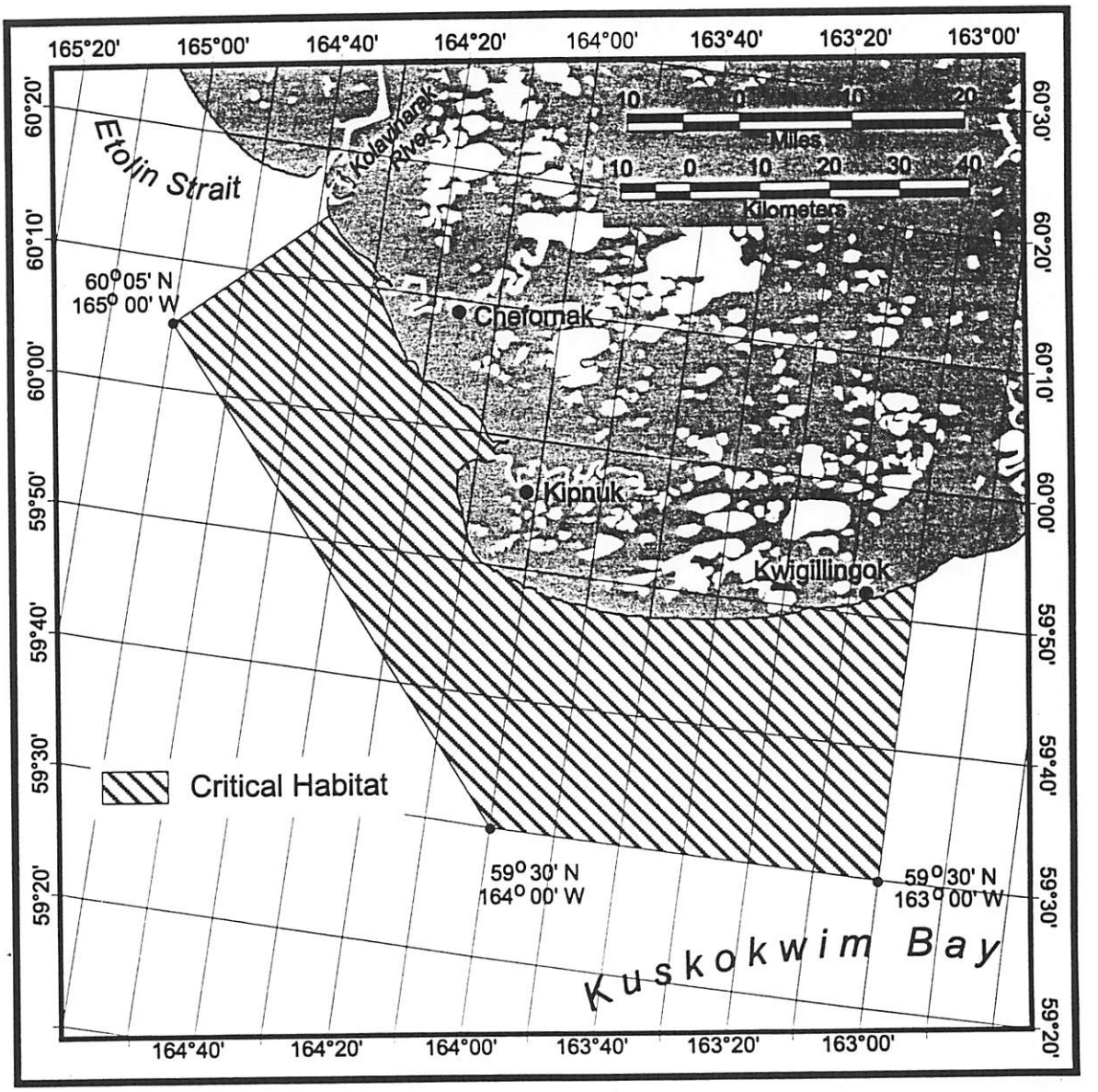
(907) 456-0203



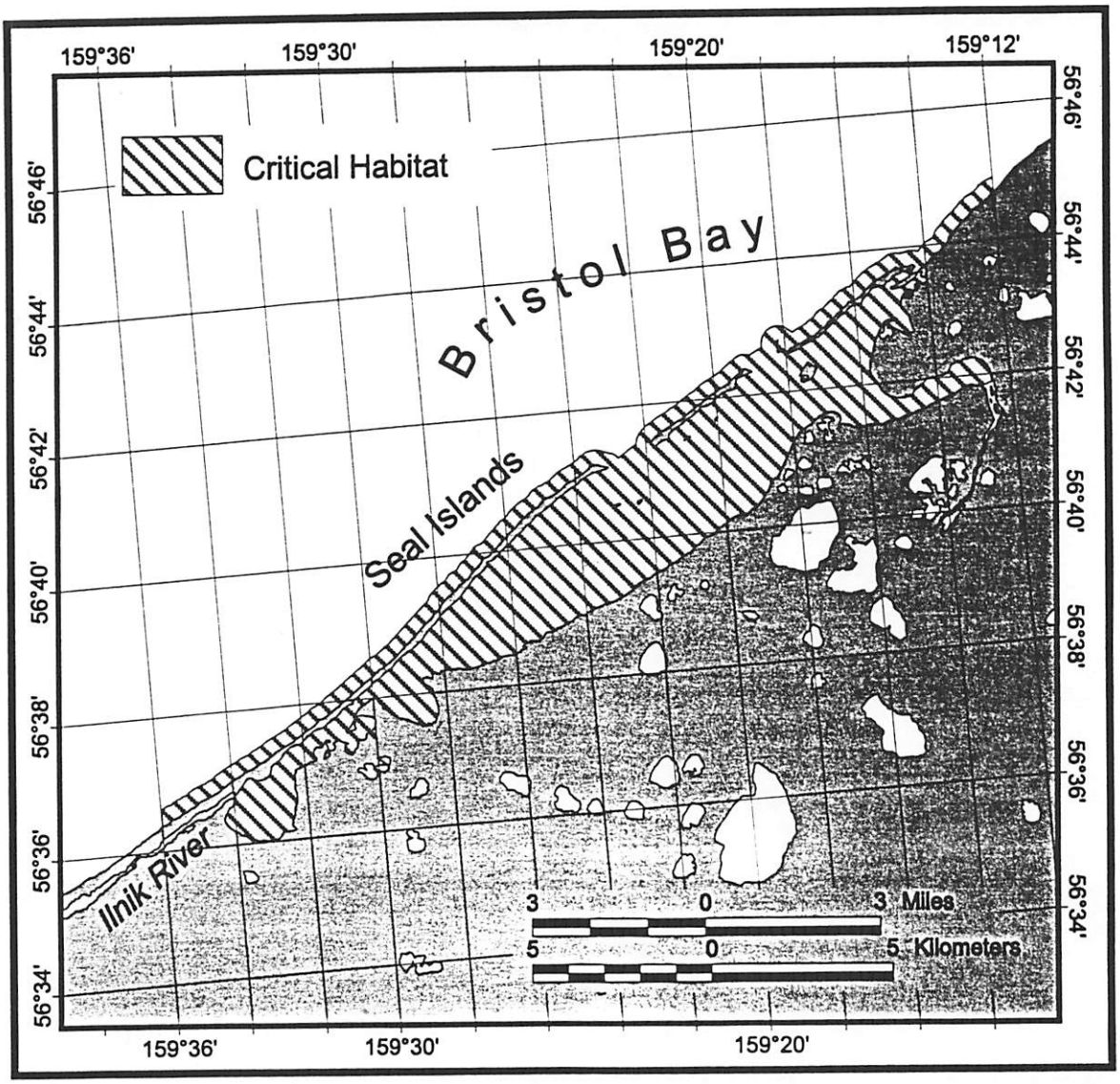
Steller's Eider Critical Habitat - All Units



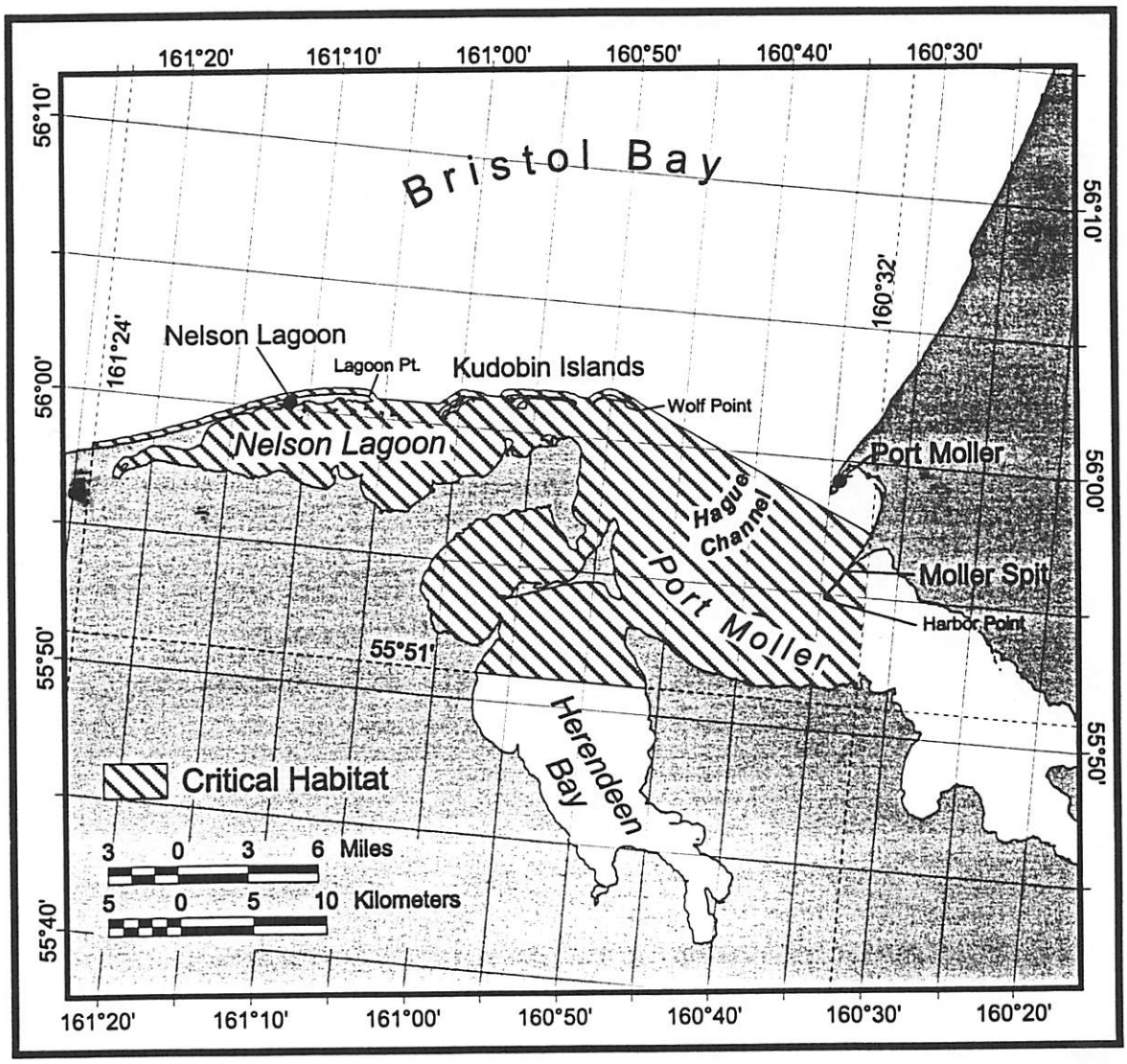
Steller's Eider Critical Habitat
Unit 1: Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta



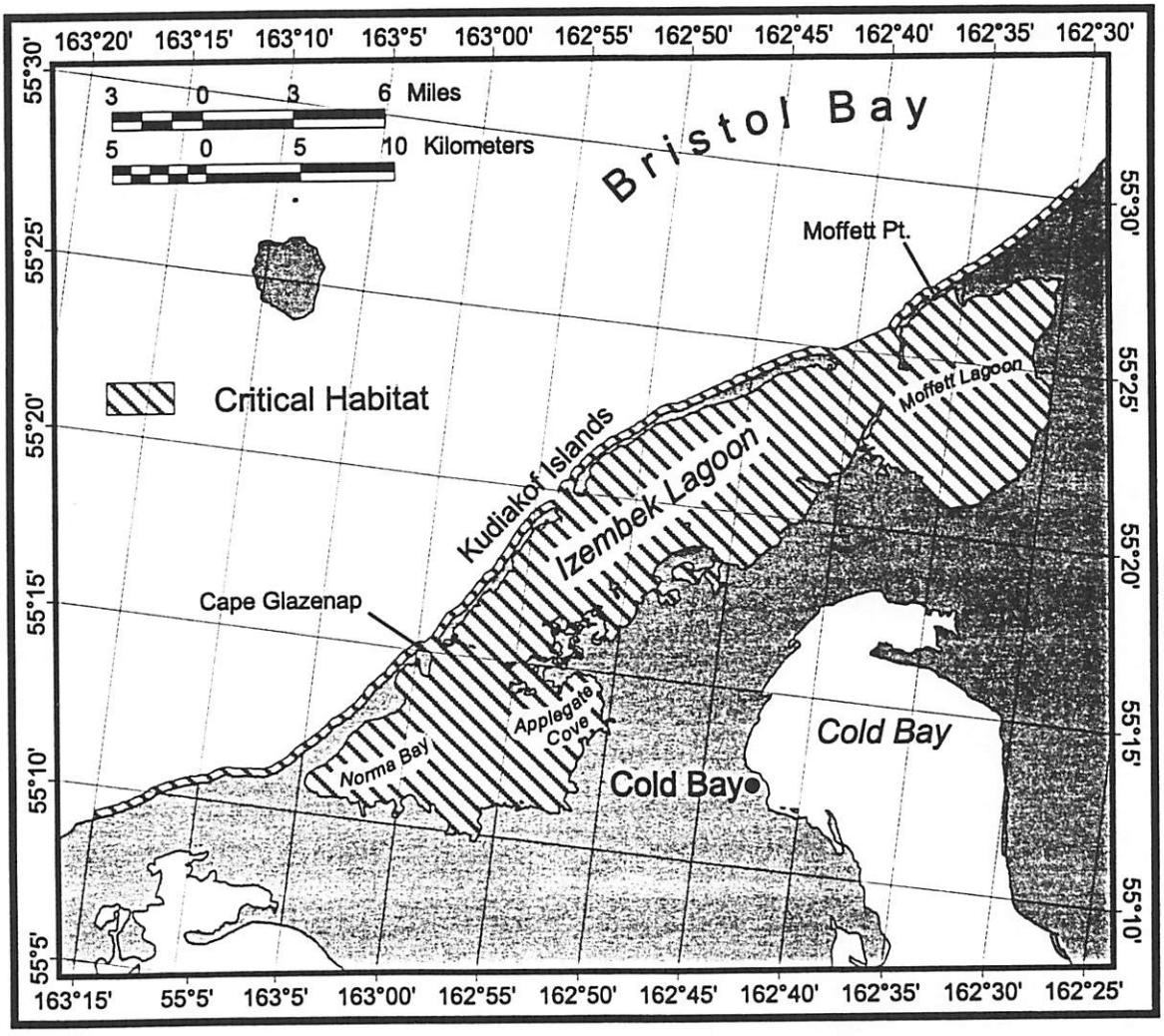
Steller's Eider Critical Habitat
Unit 2: Kuskokwim Shoals



Steller's Eider Critical Habitat
Unit 3: Seal Islands



Steller's Eider Critical Habitat
Unit 4: Nelson Lagoon



Steller's Eider Critical Habitat
Unit 5: Izembek Lagoon