

**AGENDA B-6  
FEBRUARY 2008**

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**  
February 6, 2008

**Northern Sea Otter:** Next recovery team meeting is scheduled for April 16-18, 2008, in Anchorage, AK. The Team as have begun work on designation of critical habitat for sea otters in Southwest Alaska. As previously noted, the Fish and Wildlife Service has a court-ordered deadline to either propose critical habitat or make a "not prudent" finding regarding critical habitat by November 30, 2008. The Service will also publish a Final Rule by October 1, 2009. The Team's webpage is:  
<http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mmm/seaotters/recovery.htm>

**Pacific Walrus:** The re-analysis of the U.S. airborne thermal imagery has been completed, and the data have been provided to the U.S. Geological Survey for statistical analysis. The Fish and Wildlife Service plans to meet with our Russian colleagues in St. Petersburg in late June 2008 to discuss preliminary results. We hope to have a population estimate ready for public dissemination by the end of 2008.

**Kodiak Bald Eagles:** On Friday, January 11 more than 50 bald eagles descended upon an uncovered truck loaded with fish processing waste outside of the Ocean Beauty fish processing plant on Kodiak Island. In the resulting feeding frenzy, 20 birds were forced beneath the surface of the waste and died before the truck could be unloaded and the remaining living eagles, most of which were covered in fish oil and related waste, could be removed. Kodiak Refuge staff and local veterinarian Jeff Johnson responded to the incident. The surviving 32 birds were removed from the slurry truck and transported to the Refuge shop facility. Due to the lack of holding facilities, the birds were kept in the beds of pickup trucks covered with tarps and parked inside the heated shop. Two birds died Friday night in the Refuge shop facility. The remaining 30 oiled birds were washed once and dried by refuge staff and the local veterinarian. These birds were later moved by air to Bird Treatment and Learning Center in Anchorage, where one more has died during treatment. When the birds are fully recovered, the Service intends to return them to Kodiak for release, as has been requested by numerous members of the Kodiak public.

**M/V *Selendang Ayu*/Aleutian Islands Risk Assessment:** The natural resource trustees in the M/V *Selendang Ayu* incident are continuing to work on assessment of natural resource injuries from the Unalaska spill. A cooperative seaduck survey will be conducted this winter. This spring, trustee representatives plan to visit Unalaska/Dutch Harbor to update residents on preliminary findings and to solicit restoration ideas.

**Yukon River Salmon Management:** The Yukon River Chinook and fall chum salmon returns in 2007 were less than expected. The low returns resulted in increased difficulty for Alaskan federally qualified subsistence fishermen to reach their harvest goals and in some cases they did not reach their goals. Of particular concern was the shortfall of Chinook salmon to the Canadian border which resulted in no commercial fishery, no

domestic fishery, a closure of the sport fishery, and an aboriginal harvest about half of average.

The outlook for the 2008 Yukon River Chinook salmon return is anticipated to be similar in run abundance to the 2007 return. This means that a decision, by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, in consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service, to prosecute a directed Chinook salmon commercial fishery in the Lower Yukon River will be delayed until near the mid-point of the run and that subsistence fishermen will likely be restricted via the "windowed" subsistence fishing schedule for a greater time period. The Service is very concerned about the high levels of Chinook salmon bycatch in the groundfish fisheries because of the increasing difficulty of meeting our domestic agency responsibilities in Title VIII of ANILCA. All sixteen National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska were established in part for the purpose of conserving fish and wildlife populations in their natural diversity. The Service is also responsible to provide for the continuation of subsistence opportunities and uses for federally qualified fishermen on federal waters. We recognize that NOAA Fisheries and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, through the Council, are responsible for minimizing salmon bycatch. Decreased salmon bycatch would improve spawning ground natural diversity, increase the potential that salmon escapement targets are met, and decrease the time subsistence harvests are restricted.

**North Pacific Research Board/Bering Sea Integrated Ecosystem Research Program:**

The NPRB recently approved an additional study component under the BSIERP, an examination of Dynamics at Bogoslof Island for approximately \$2.2 million. This study site will serve as a comparison to the Patch Dynamics Study at the Pribilof Islands (already funded), and will examine predator-prey relationships for northern fur seals, two species of seabirds (Common Murre and Black-legged Kittiwake), and forage species. Andrew Trites of the University of British Columbia is the lead Principal Investigator. Seabird components will be conducted by Fish and Wildlife Service (David Irons, Kathy Kuletz), Oregon State University (Daniel Roby), and the University of Alaska - Fairbanks (Alexander Kitaysky).