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United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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FWS/AFES

DEC 05 2011

ESA Candidate Species

On October 26, 2011, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) released its Candidate Notice of Review (CNOR), a yearly appraisal of the current status of species considered candidates for protection under the Endangered Species Act. Candidate species are plants and animals for which the Service has enough information to propose them as threatened or endangered, but the next step of developing a proposed listing rule is precluded by higher priority listing actions.

In Alaska, we have three candidate species under USFWS jurisdiction. The Pacific walrus is on the CNOR for the first time. The yellow-billed loon and Kittlitz's murrelet remain on the CNOR. However, the listing priority number for the Kittlitz's murrelet has been changed (lowered) from a 2 to an 8 following a reassessment of the threats. A detailed explanation for this decision is provided in the "Listing Priority Changes in Candidates" section of the CNOR. The complete notice and list of candidate species can be found online at <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/cnor.html>.

In September 2011, two multi-district litigation settlement agreements relating to the USFWS listing program were approved. The plaintiffs were WildEarth Guardians and the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD). According to the CBD agreement, "Defendants shall submit a Proposed Rule or a not-warranted finding to the Federal Register for the following species no later than the end of the specified Fiscal Year." For the three Alaska Region species, those dates are:

- Kittlitz's murrelet – Fiscal Year 13 (Sept. 30, 2013)
- Yellow-billed loon – Fiscal Year 14 (Sept. 30, 2014)
- Pacific walrus – Fiscal Year 17 (Sept. 30, 2017)

Pacific Walrus

Walrus hauled out in large numbers (20,000+) at Point Lay again this year, but about a month earlier than last year. There were no large mortality events associated with disturbance. Unlike previous years, tagged animals made a few trips back to Hanna Shoal to feed. Researchers deploying transmitters noted a calf with skin lesions, prompting an investigation by USFWS in cooperation with the Village of Point Lay, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and the North

Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management. The cause of the lesions is unknown, as is the relationship to lesions seen in ringed seals. About 6% of the live walrus at Point Lay had lesions, but those animals were otherwise robust and healthy. Animals were also observed that appeared to have healed lesions.

Short-tailed Albatross

A subadult short-tailed albatross was taken on October 25, 2011, in the Bering Sea. The bird was hooked in a Pacific cod demersal longline fishery. Identification was easily confirmed because the bird was banded as a chick on Torishima Island in 2010. Take is permitted under an incidental take permit (ITP) issued to NMFS in the biological opinion of September 16, 2003. This ITP allows a total of four short-tailed albatross takes over a 2-year cycle (the cycle starting on the issuance date of the opinion). This recent take is the first of four permitted in the current 2-year cycle that began on September 17, 2011.

On a more positive note, a pair of short-tailed albatrosses is, for the second year in a row, nesting on Midway Island. The female laid an egg on November 9, 2011, and immediately headed out to sea, leaving the male to incubate. A remote camera keeps a watchful eye on the expectant parents.