

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
April 1-7, 2008

**Salmon Bycatch**

- **Yukon River Salmon Management:** The outlook for the 2008 Yukon River Chinook salmon return is anticipated to be similar in run abundance to the 2007 return – which was less than average. 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. Subsistence fishermen will enter the season on the “windowed” subsistence fishing schedule which restricts salmon fishing to two time periods per week. Subsistence fishermen will likely remain on the schedule for a greater time period this year. A decision by the Department in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to prosecute a directed Chinook salmon commercial fishery in the Lower Yukon River will likely be delayed until near the mid-point of the run.
- 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.

**Pacific Walrus**

- On February 7, 2008, The Secretary of the Interior and the USFWS received a petition from the Center for Biological Diversity to list the Pacific walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus divergens*) as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. [http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/species/mammals/Pacific\\_walrus/pdfs/CBD-Pacific-walrus-petition.pdf](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/species/mammals/Pacific_walrus/pdfs/CBD-Pacific-walrus-petition.pdf). Upon receiving a petition, the Service’s first responsibility is to evaluate the document to determine whether it contains “substantial information” indicating that a listing “may be warranted.” The Service currently has numerous listing actions that are driven by court orders or court-approved settlement agreements and that require funding in fiscal year 2008. The remaining available funds in the listing program for fiscal year 2008 have already been allocated to the Service's highest priority listing actions. As a result, there are no listing funds available to evaluate the walrus petition in fiscal year 2008.

**Short-tailed Albatross**

- The FWS Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office has continued in its consultation with NOAA Fisheries and Dr. Rob Suryan at Oregon State University over use of joint satellite telemetry tracking data for short-tailed albatross relative to the question of 4E exemptions for seabird avoidance. The Service believes that the initial draft EA/RIR/IRFA is ready for public review.
- The pioneering effort to translocated short-tailed albatrosses to a portion of their former range continues with great success. On February 19<sup>th</sup>, 10 short-tailed albatrosses were taken from their natal colony on Torishima Island, Japan (home to 85% of the world population), to Mukojima Island, Japan. Since then, a crew comprised of biologists from Japan’s Yamashina Institute, with

assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the New Zealand Department of Conservation, have been hand-feeding the chicks. As of the end of March, all 10 translocated chicks remain in excellent health. Field techniques for rearing the chicks have evolved substantially based on their experience raising Laysan albatross chicks in 2006, and black-footed albatross chicks in 2007. The goal of this effort is to establish a new colony on a non-volcanic island with room for short-tailed albatross population growth. Establishment of this colony will hasten the delisting of this endangered seabird. The translocated chicks should fledge in late May or early June, and will hopefully return to breed in 5 years.

- Six satellite tagged breeding short-tailed albatross from Torishima Island continue to send back data as they forage for their. As is often the case with multi-year studies, the at-sea feeding patterns in 2008 differ from what was observed during 2006 and 2007.
- The USFWS provided a review of Canada's draft "Recovery Strategy for the Short-tailed Albatross and Pink-footed Shearwater in Canada". One of the focal points of the strategy relates to interactions with fisheries in Canadian waters.
- The Service and NOAA Fisheries is working with the State department to consider benefits of the U.S. Accession to the existing international treaty for the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP).

### **Spectacled Eiders**

- U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is planning to implant satellite transmitters in spectacled eiders on the Yukon Delta this summer. The USFWS is collaborating with USGS, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), and others, to implant satellite transmitters in spectacled eiders on the North Slope in 2009. We are hoping NPRB will fund the follow-up winter aerial surveys, and expect to hear about the funding of this proposed research in the next couple weeks. The Council has previously expressed interest in obtaining more up-to-date information on the winter distribution of spectacled eiders south of St. Lawrence Island.
- The field season has begun for the Bering Sea Integrated Ecosystem Research Program. Seabird and marine mammal studies are currently underway in the north Bering Sea onboard the USCG Cutter Healy.

### **Sea Otters**

- The next Sea Otter recovery team meeting will be April 15-17 in Anchorage. The Service is hoping to have the draft plan by the end of the calendar year. Council has been previously briefed on the prospect of designating sea otter critical habitat in Alaska. The Service is on-track to either: 1) determine that it is not prudent to designate critical habitat for this DPS in Alaska; or 2) determine that it is prudent to designate critical habitat and publish a proposal to do so. The deadline for this decision is November 30, 2008.

### **Kittlitz's Murrelet**

- FWS, USGS, the National Park Service, and other biologists who work with the Kittlitz's murrelet are taking steps to become a Technical Committee under the auspices of the Pacific Seabird Group. The committee will facilitate information exchange, research priorities, and conservation issues. Michelle Kissling (FWS/Juenau) will be the Chair, and she is writing the draft proposal for the committee.