



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Fairbanks

## *Fish & Wildlife Field Office*

### Selawik River Inconnu Study

The Fairbanks Fish and Wildlife Field Office will conduct a mark and recapture study on the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge in northwest Alaska to document the status of the inconnu (sheefish) population in the Selawik River. This study is comparable to a similar study conducted in 1995 and 1996 when the spawning population was estimated to be 5,000 to 6,000 inconnu. Data collected in 2004 and 2005 will help to establish a trend between these estimates.

Inconnu of the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge live and grow in the large complex of rivers, lakes, sloughs, and estuaries east of Kotzebue, Alaska. Selawik River inconnu spawn in only about 12 km of the Selawik River out of the greater than 320 km of river available to them. The reason inconnu select this short segment of river for spawning is still a mystery.

Inconnu spawn by the female broadcasting eggs into the river as she swims upriver. Males, either alone or in groups, follow releasing milt. The fertilized eggs are semi-bouyant, but soon settle to the gravel substrate to incubate.

Biologists believe that, like other whitefish species, the eggs hatch out and the fry are carried downstream with high spring flows. The young fish then feed and grow in the sloughs and lakes of the lower watershed. Females are not thought to spawn every year. In winter, Selawik inconnu mix with another, larger population from the adjacent Kobuk River to the north, which have a similar life history.

In cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the subsistence harvest was monitored and an estimated winter harvest of 15,000 to 18,000 Selawik and Kobuk river fish was obtained, hence the concern of over harvest.

The information gathered from this study will be considered a baseline from which to judge the relative health of the Selawik River inconnu population. This estimate, along with knowledge of the specific spawning habitat, will allow the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to fulfill the ANILCA mandate, that natural and healthy fish populations be maintained for the subsistence needs of rural residents, for generations to come.

A full report of the 1995 and 1996 study is available in the "North American Journal of Fisheries Management" Volume 20:386-393 of the year 2000 issues.



Fairbanks Fish & Wildlife Office  
Steve Lewis, Field Supervisor  
101 12th Ave., Box 17, Room 222  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701  
907-456-0219

