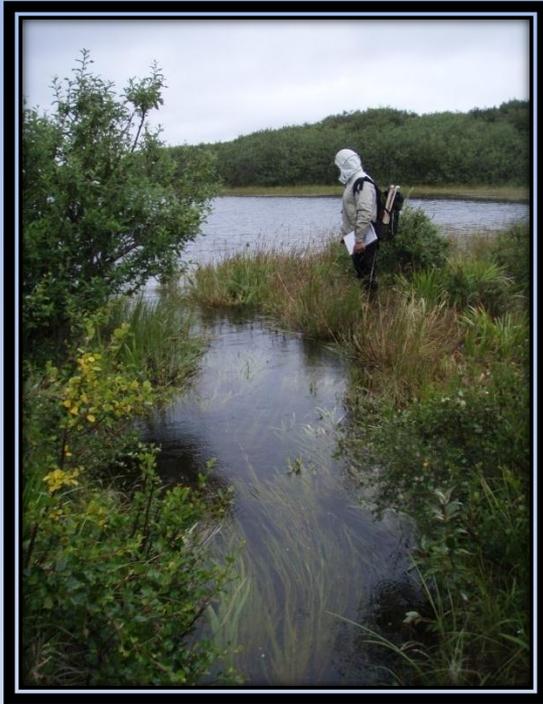




# Shorebirds in the Interior? (...*not so you'd notice*)

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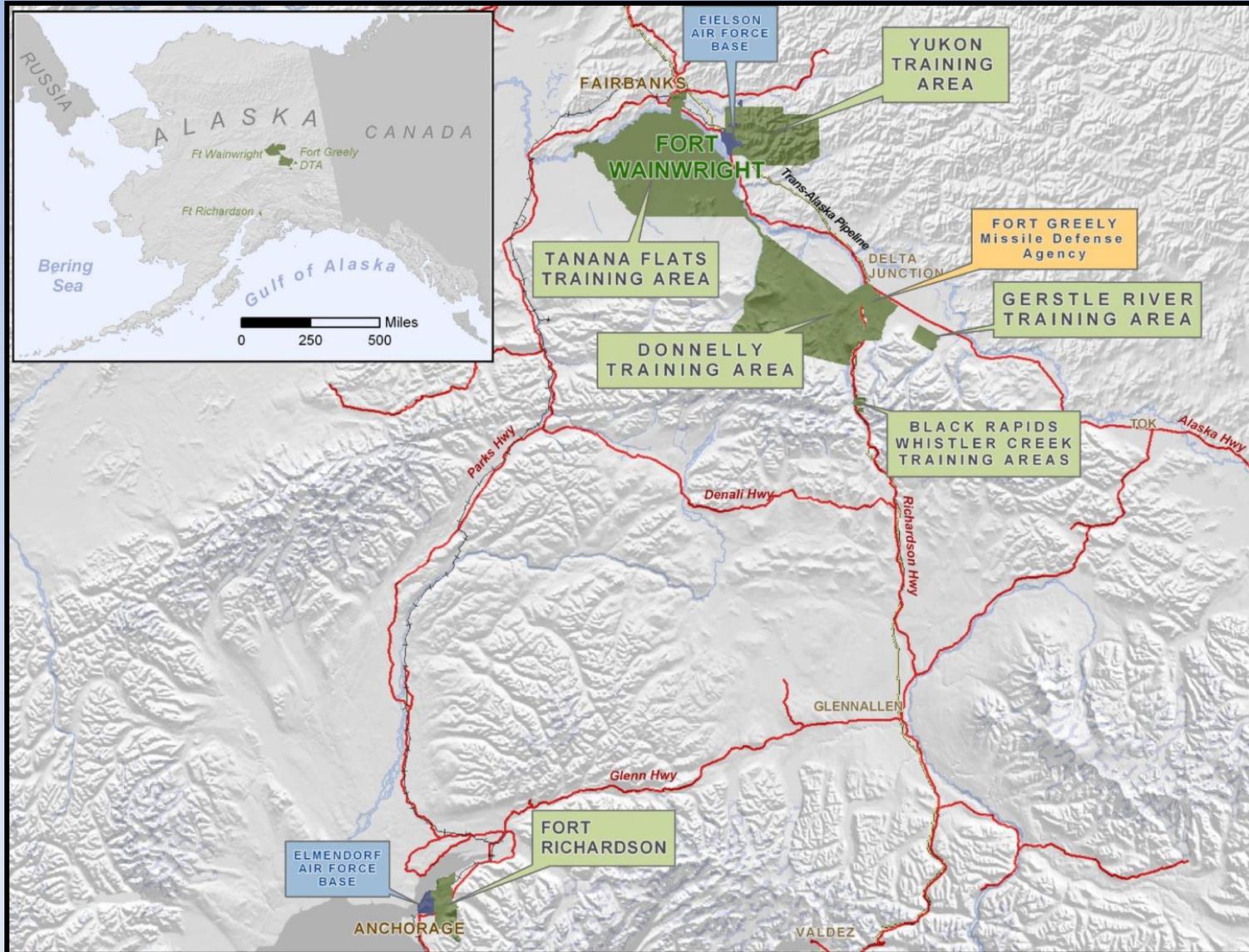


# Presentation Overview

- Location in the eastern interior including Army land
- Climate & Habitat: boreal vs. alpine
- Bird diversity & surveys
- Shorebirds we know nothing about
- Species accounts for ASCP Priority Species
- Notes on the broader region



# LOCATION



# Closer Look at Army Land



The Army in AK manages ~ 1.5 million ac.  
Donnelly Training Area = 660,000 ac.  
Gerstle River Training Area = 20,000 ac.  
Black Rapids/Whistler Ck Training Area = 5,000 ac.

## Climate & Habitat

Climate: steppe (~12" annual rainfall)

Habitat: *boreal forest* (~<3,000') is >80% of DTA

Spruce and hardwood mix, regenerating burns, subalpine scrub

Most of DTA is classified as "wetland" but low function, low diversity black spruce muskeg and tussock shrub tundra

Thousands of kettle lakes and associated sedge meadows. DTA alone has:

~1400 lakes > 1ac. (largest = 200 ac)

~1200 lakes < 1ac.

Habitat: *alpine* (~>3,000') is <20% of DTA

Wet sites: Tussock & shrub tundra, graminoid meadow

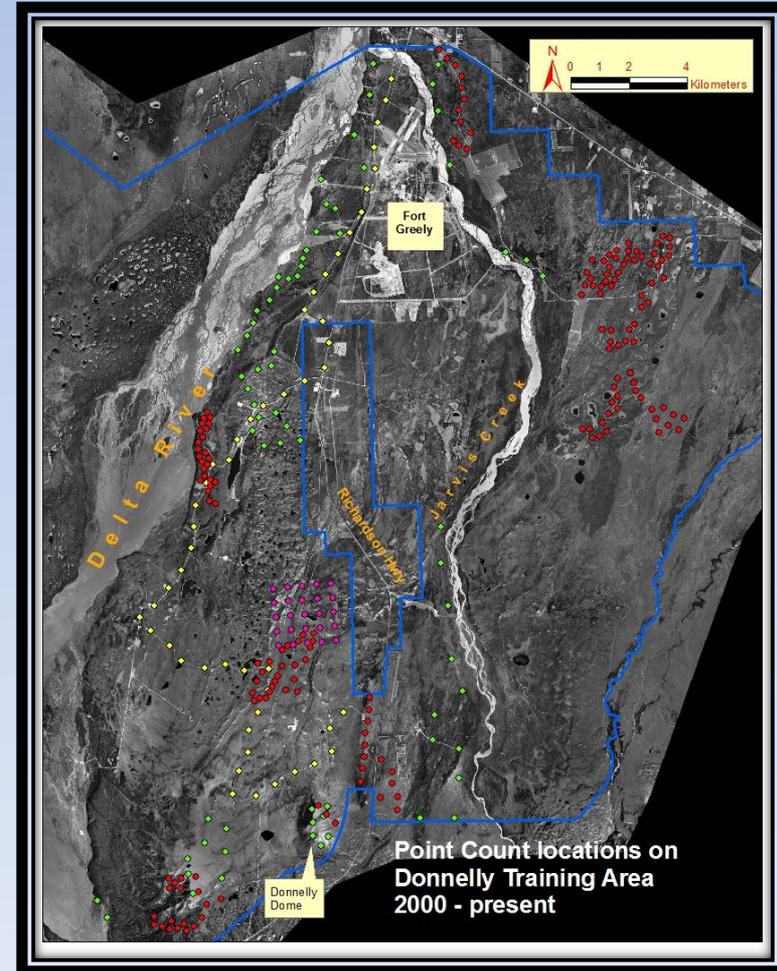
Dry sites: Dwarf shrub tundra and rock/lichen barrens

# Bird diversity & status of bird surveys on DTA



The Upper Tanana Valley is an east-west migration corridor

- Thousands of geese and ducks
- 150 - 200,000 sandhill cranes (Kessel, 1984)
- Thousands of raptors
- Uncounted passerines
- Seemingly few shorebirds
  
- Wildlife Planning Level Survey (ABR) point counts and transects in late 90s post wide.
- MS project through CSU in late 90s (point counts)
- ABO point count surveys in 2002
- BBS route since 2000 (Donnelly) & 1995 (Delta)
- 2 ALMS grids
- “Other” point counts to survey uncommon habitats, under-sampled areas or to target SOC landbirds
- Grouse and ptarmigan breeding surveys
- Sandhill Crane migration surveys
- Whimbrel and Upland Sandpiper surveys



# Shorebird diversity on DTA



## Boreal breeders:

- Lesser Yellowlegs*
- Greater Yellowlegs*
- Solitary Sandpiper*
- Spotted Sandpiper*
- Wilson's Snipe*
- Upland Sandpiper*

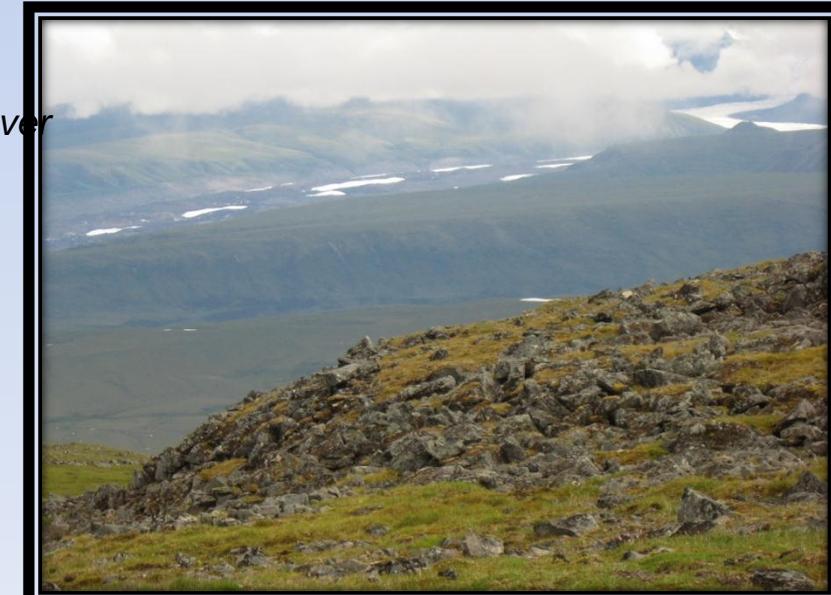


## Shorebirds documented on DTA

<i>Common Name</i>	<i>Migrant</i>	<i>Breeder</i>
American Golden-Plover	R	possible
Semipalmated Plover	U	possible
Killdeer	R	no
<b>Lesser Yellowlegs</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>yes</b>
<b>Greater Yellowlegs</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>yes</b>
<b>Solitary Sandpiper</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>yes</b>
<b>Spotted Sandpiper</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>yes</b>
<b>Whimbrel</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>yes</b>
Surfbird	R	possible
Semipalmated Sandpiper	R	no
Dunlin	U	no
Least Sandpiper	U	possible
Bairds Sandpiper	R	possible
<b>Upland Sandpiper</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>yes</b>
Long-billed Dowitcher	R	no
<b>Wilson's Snipe</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>yes</b>
Stilt Sandpiper	R	no
Red-necked Phalarope	R	possible

## Alpine breeders:

- American Golden Plover*
- Surfbird*
- Whimbrel*





# Shorebirds we know nothing about...

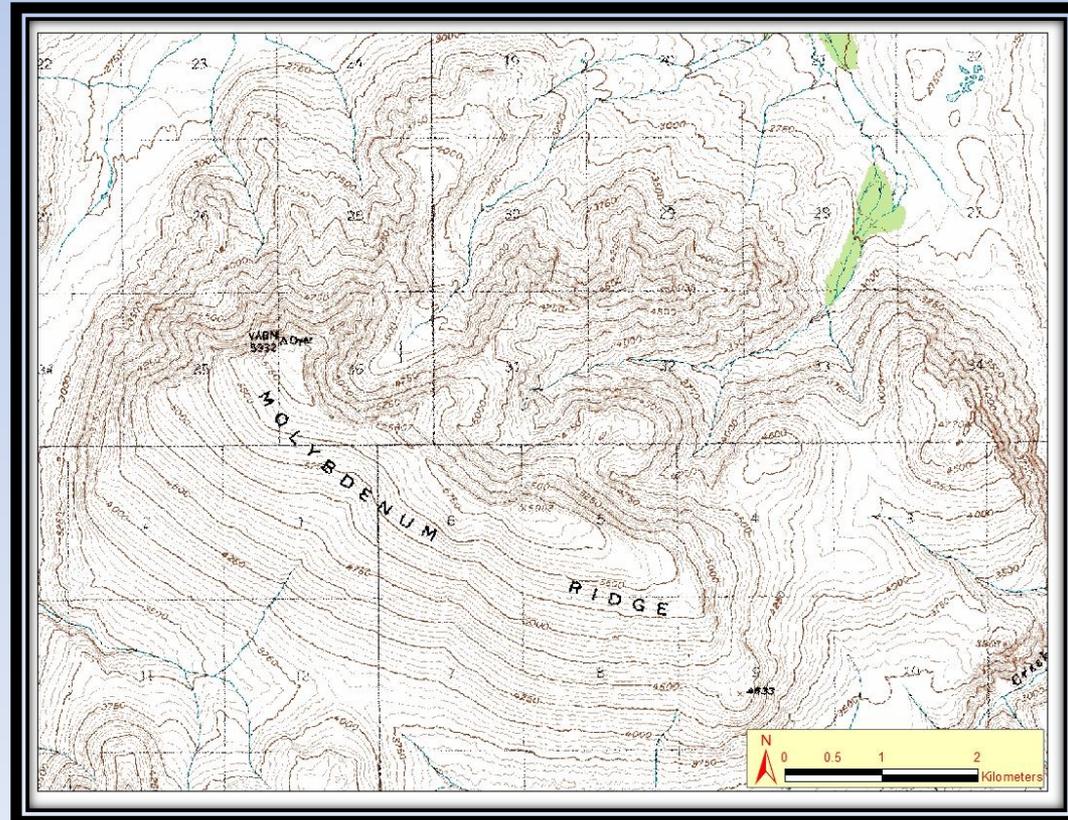
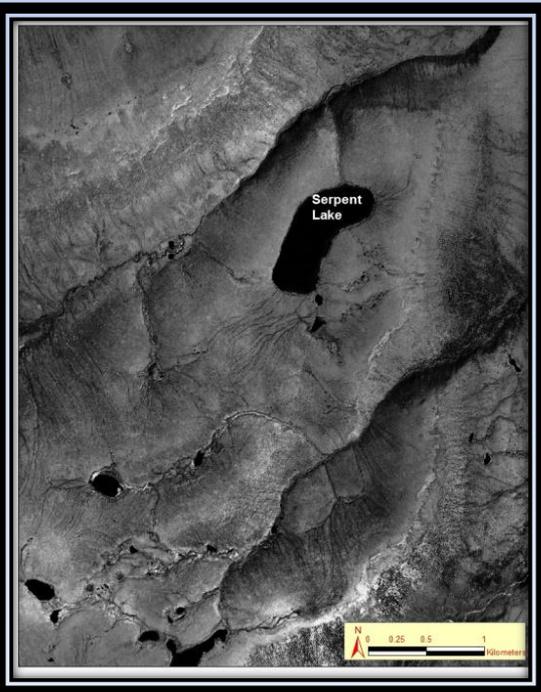


American golden plover – 4 records  
 Surfbird – 1 record

Potential habitat at:  
 Serpent Lake: ~3,000', tussock tundra  
 Molybdenum Ridge: ~6,000', sedge meadow & fell field



Common Name	Migrant	Breeder
American Golden-Plover	R	possible
Semipalmated Plover	U	possible
Killdeer	R	no
Lesser Yellowlegs	C	yes
Greater Yellowlegs	R	yes
Solitary Sandpiper	U	yes
Spotted Sandpiper	C	yes
Whimbrel	U	yes
Surfbird	R	possible
Semipalmated Sandpiper	R	no
Dunlin	U	no
Least Sandpiper	U	possible
Bairds Sandpiper	R	possible
Upland Sandpiper	C	yes
Long-billed Dowitcher	R	no
Wilson's Snipe	C	yes
Stilt Sandpiper	R	no
Red-necked Phalarope	R	possible



## Molybdenum Ridge habitat ~5,700'



Sedge meadow and fell field habitat

# Molybdenum Ridge habitat ~5,700'



Sedge meadow and fell field habitat

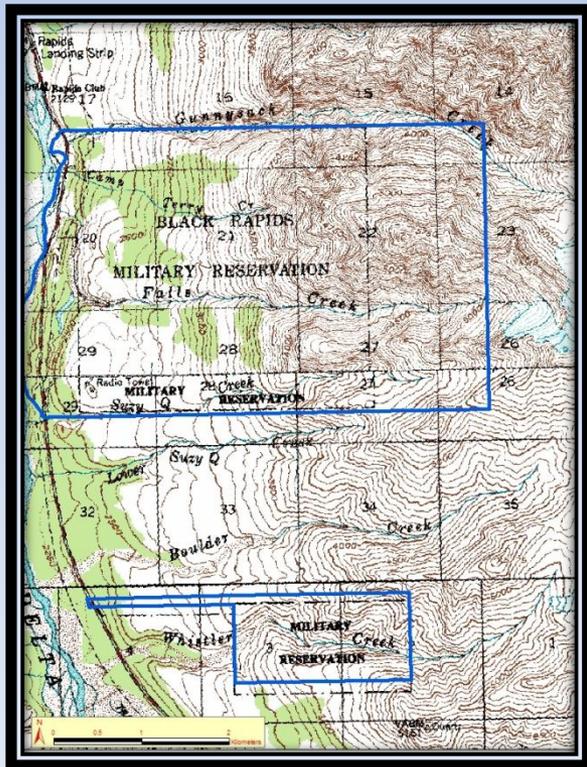
# Black Rapids & Whistler Creek



5,000 ac.

Developing a floral & faunal inventory,  
habitat map

Representative of much of the central AK  
Range



Alpine habitat characterized by:

Short, steep sided drainages to ~6,000'

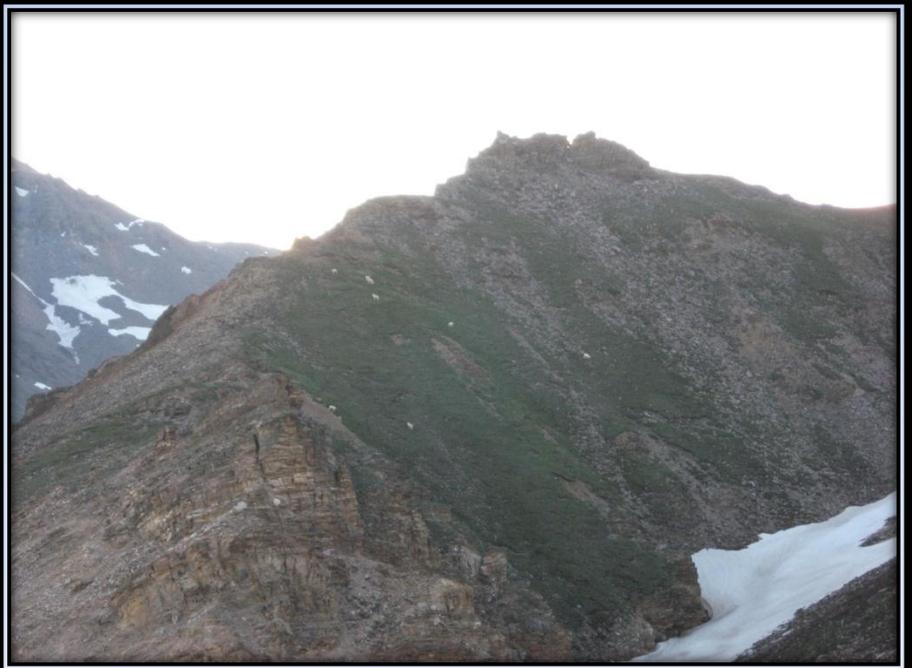
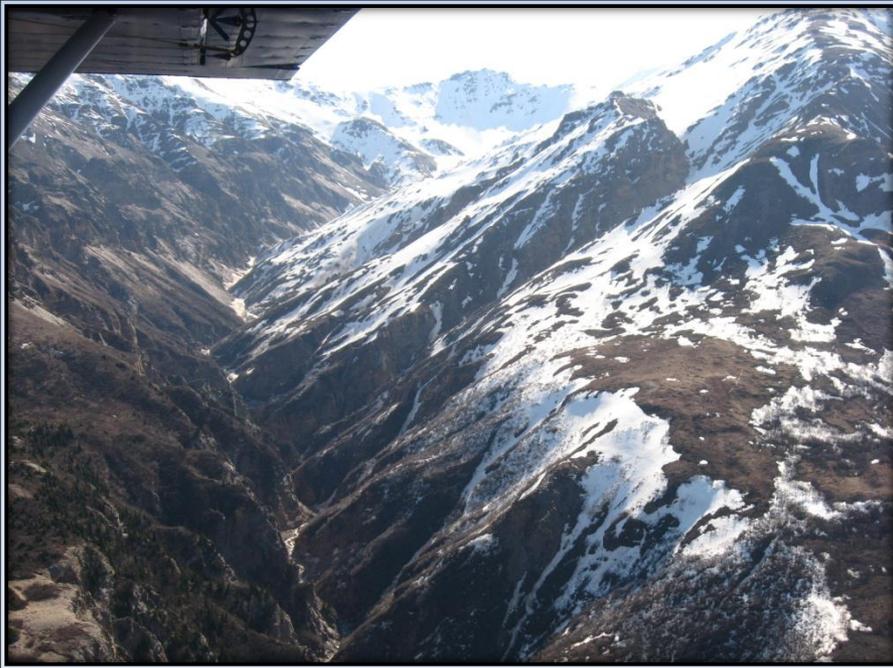
High gradient streams

Sparse vegetation

Shorebirds detected thus far: UPSA

Other alpine breeders: HOLA, WTPT

???What shorebirds breed here???



## Boreal breeder: Solitary Sandpiper



Little data

One of the more common migrants

Not documented on Donnelly BBS or Delta BBS

Has been detected on several other point count surveys

BBS data show decline in AK

Threats?

-Drying wetlands

Question: Is the BBS doing a sufficient job at monitoring SOSA?

If not: Is there a coordinated species specific monitoring plan ongoing or being developed?





## Boreal breeder: Lesser Yellowlegs

Most common *Tringa* sandpiper

Monitored on both local BBS routes

0-4 picked up annually on Donnelly BBS (0-2 the last 5 or 6 yrs)

0-7 picked up annually on Delta BBS

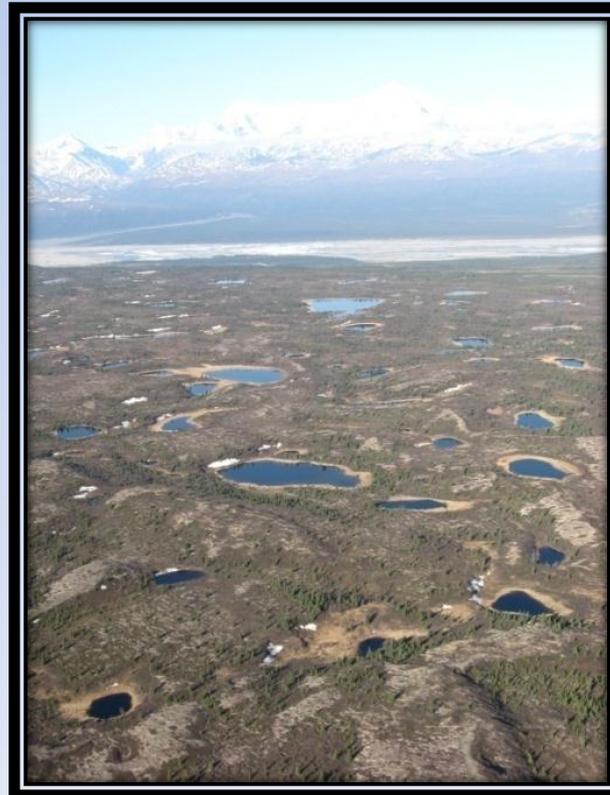
BBS shows decline

Threats?

-Drying wetlands

Question: Is the BBS doing a sufficient job at monitoring LEYE?

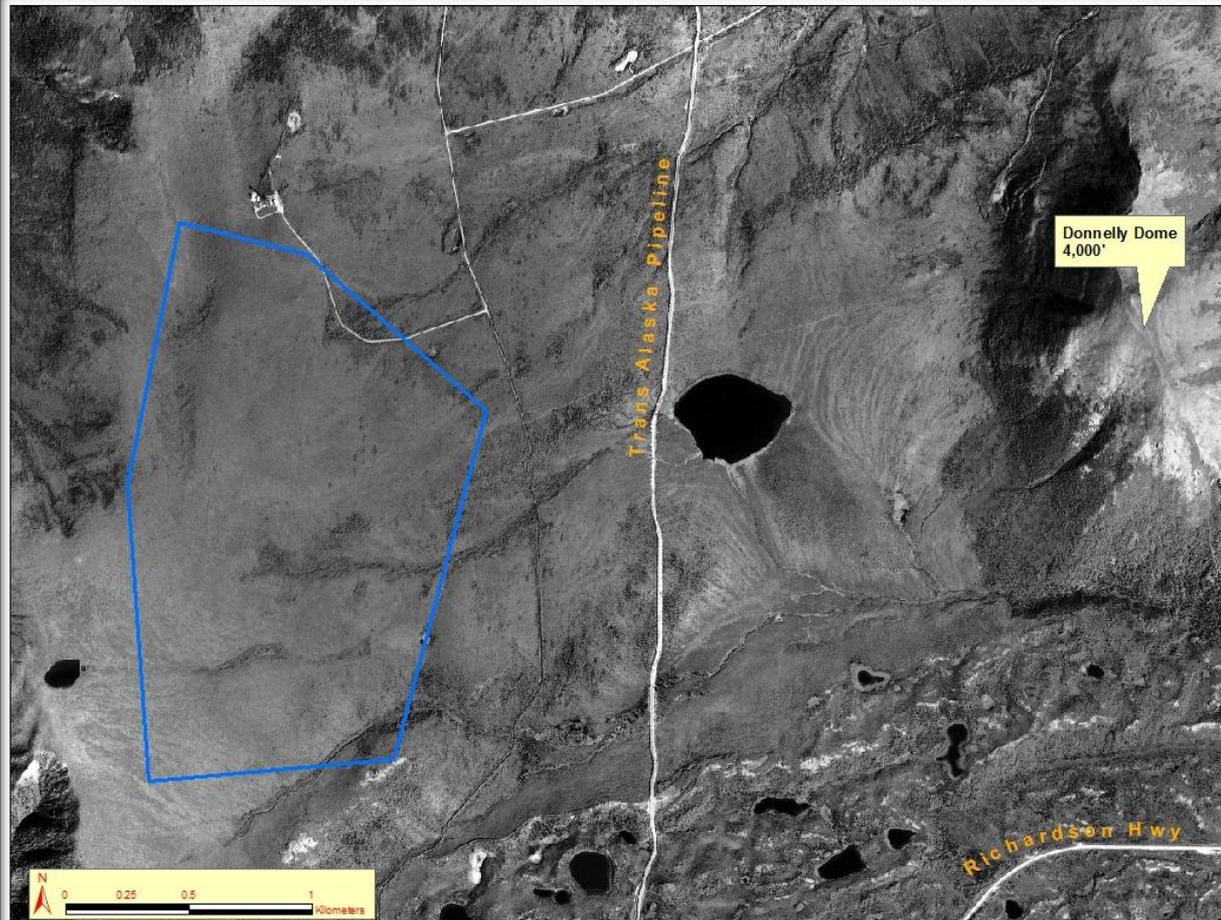
If not: is there a coordinated species specific monitoring plan ongoing or being developed?





## Alpine nester: Whimbrel

Colony discovered in 2000  
Shrub tundra habitat at ~3,000'  
Road accessible



Whimbrel habitat ~3,000'



Graminoid, shrub tundra

Whimbrel habitat ~3,000'



Shrub tundra



## Alpine nester: Whimbrel

Beginning in 2008 ~ weekly monitoring

Highest count = 31 individuals

1 eggshell found in 2009

No nests found, no chicks observed

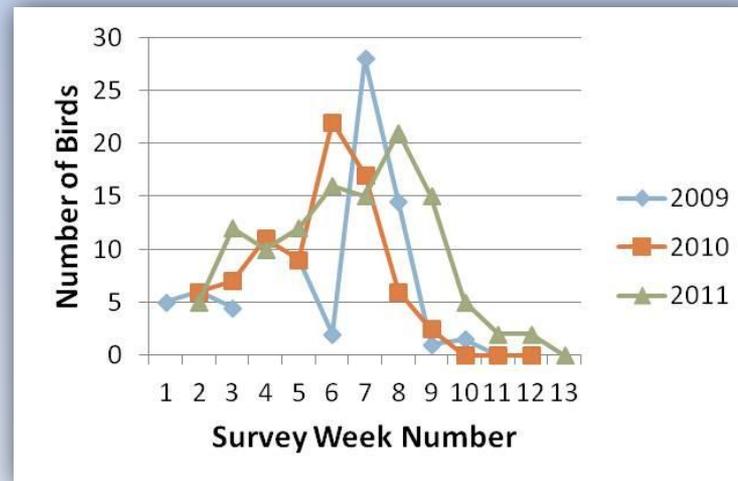
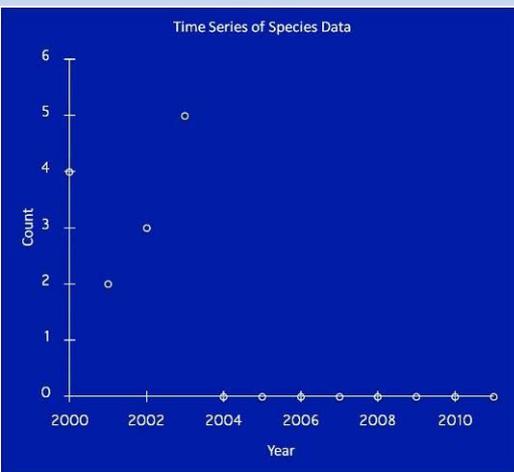
BBS shows decline & no longer monitors WHIM

Short term threats = Common raven depredation?

Long term threats = Advancing treeline/shrubline.

### Questions:

- Is there a coordinated effort to monitor breeding WHIM that we could contribute to and if so how?
- Does the AK shorebird scientific community desire any more/other information about this site?



Whimbrel detections on DTA. Survey week 1 Corresponds to the 1<sup>st</sup> week of May, etc.

## Boreal breeder: Upland Sandpiper



Anecdotal observations & dedicated surveys since 2000 to determine:

- *Distribution*
- *Abundance*
- *Habitat use*

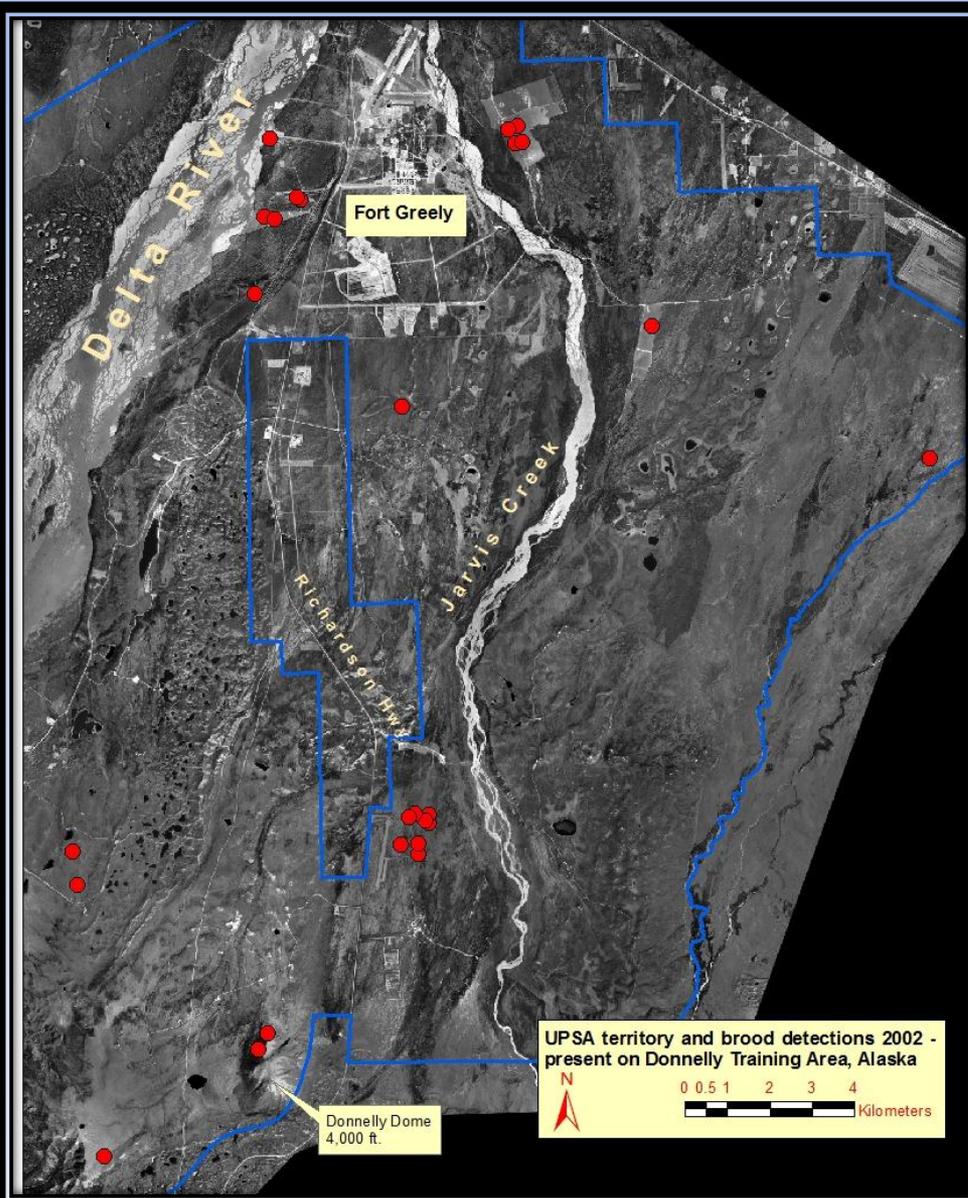
UPSA widely distributed in a variety of habitats

Habitat generalist noted in:

- Subalpine scrub*
- Regenerating burns*
- Human modified scrub*
- Early successional floodplains*
- Farms, roadsides*

2 nests found

- Subalpine scrub*
- Human modified (25 ac.)*



Boreal breeder: Upland Sandpiper



Boreal breeder: Upland Sandpiper



## Boreal breeder: Upland Sandpiper



I estimate there at ~2 dozen breeding pairs on DTA in any given year

Widely distributed in a variety of habitats

Again, no longer monitored by local BBS

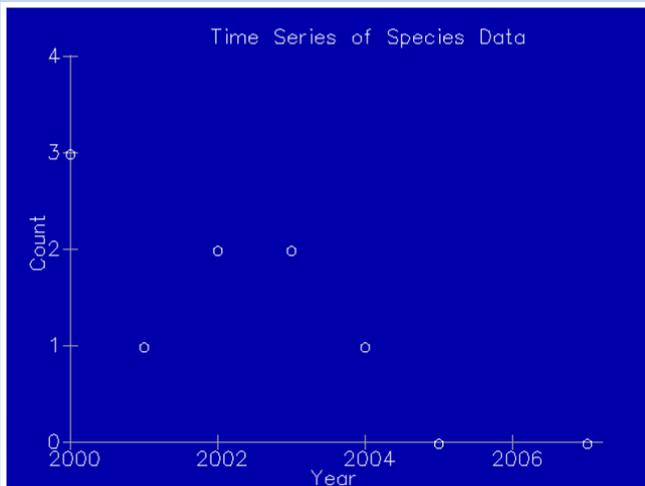
Threats?

-Very little: The Army creates & maintains more UPSA habitat than it destroys.

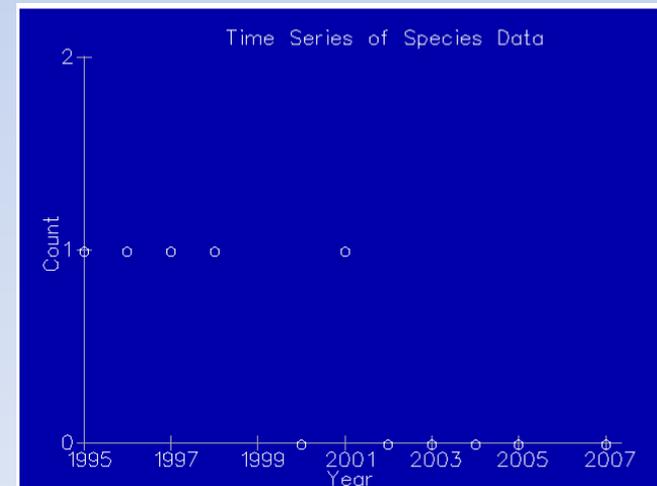
Questions:

- Are UPSA monitored by any/many other BBS routes in AK?
- Is there an effort underway to answer the questions outlined in ASCP?
- What is Yukon doing?

*“Little is known about Alaska’s breeding population and data are needed to determine current distribution, population status, and whether the population breeding in Alaska is morphologically or genetically distinct from birds breeding elsewhere.” (ASG, 2008)*



Donnelly BBS UPSA detections 2000 – 2007



Delta BBS UPSA detections 1995 - 2007

# Questions???

