



Twenty Years of Sailing for Science

M/V Tiġlaġ

Twenty Years of Conservation Work

For two decades the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge's M/V Tiġlaġ has been plying the wild waters of coastal Alaska, ferrying biologists to remote camps and serving as a platform for nearshore research.

The Tiġlaġ (TEKH-lah - Unangan or Aleut for eagle) and its crew work for the Refuge as its research and transportation support vessel. In a season, the Tiġlaġ may sail to islands in Southeast Alaska, the far western end of the Aleutian Chain, and into the Bering Sea, typically traveling, 12,000 to 20,000 nautical miles.

The map below shows the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge in orange, comparing the scale of the Refuge lands with the lower 48 United States. If the Refuge were in the lower 48 states, it would span from California to Georgia!



Highlights of 20 years of conserving Refuge resources include the following:

Studying Seabirds and Marine Mammals

- Conducted studies of ocean conditions in the nearshore waters adjacent to critical seabird and marine mammal breeding colonies. The Tiġlaġ has served as a floating research platform to characterize the marine food web relative to distribution of foraging marine birds and mammals in the nearshore waters around several annual monitoring sites in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea.



Photographer/Al Grillo, Associated Press

M/V Tiġlaġ



Photographer/Steve Hillebrand, USFWS

- Amassed 20 years of data on the welfare of seabird colonies in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea. Watching for change is critical to understanding species decline and possible causes including climate change. The Tiġlaġ sets out and picks up the monitoring field camps and visits periodically during the summer bringing news and fresh food to the uninhabited islands where the work is carried out.
- Conducted research that has documented the collapse of sea otter populations in southwest Alaska. Scientists use the Tiġlaġ to gather data nearly every year to try and assess why this is occurring and what, if anything, can be done about it.

- Supported Steller sea lion research throughout the Aleutians - from pup counts to sea lion capture for radio transmitter application. National Marine Fisheries Service, responsible for sea lion research, is just one of the many agencies that uses the Tġlaġ to get their job done.

Saving Rare Species

- Brought the Aleutian Cackling Goose back from the brink of extinction. A rare exception for an endangered species, this bird came off the Endangered Species List as fully recovered in 2001. The Tġlaġ was involved in all aspects of the project from supporting fox trappers who made the islands safe for geese again to transporting young goslings to the now fox free islands, reintroducing them to their historic range.
- Reintroduced the Evermann's rock ptarmigan to Agattu Island. Predation by introduced foxes had eliminated this rare subspecies of ptarmigan on all but one island. The Tġlaġ supported the capture and transfer of birds that are now breeding successfully on Agattu.



Photographer/Steve Ebbert, USFWS

Oil Spill Response

Assessed oil spill damages from the Exxon Valdez and the Selendang Ayu shipwrecks.

Archaeology

Unraveled some of the mysteries of early Aleut life. Projects by USFWS and other agencies and university archeologists supported by the Tġlaġ over the years have contributed to our understanding of early Unangan (Aleut) history and culture.

World War Two

War swept over the refuge islands of the Aleutians leaving remnants in many places. The Tġlaġ has supported the documentation and preservation of that history. In 1988 after a field crew stumbled upon the remains of a missing soldier from the war, the Tġlaġ brought him home.



Photographer/Steve Hillebrand, USFWS

M/V Tġlaġ at Big Koniuji Island in the Aleutians



Photographer/Steve Hillebrand, USFWS

M/V Tġlaġ Facts:

- Commissioned - 1987 for Alaska Maritime Refuge
- Home Port - Homer, Alaska
- Captain - Kevin Bell; Relief Captain/First Mate - Billy Pepper
- Length - 120 feet; Weight - 250 tons (unladen)
- Crew - 6; Passengers - 16
- Facilities - fully-equipped galley; lounge/mess for up to 22 people. 4,800 cubic feet of cargo space; fore and aft crane for loading.
- Skiffs - Four 16-foot outboard-powered inflatable boats transport gear or workers
- Fuel Capacity - 37,000 gallons. Can travel 10,000 miles (without refueling)

- Speed - cruises at 10 knots
- Navigation Equipment - X and S-band radar, sonar, GPS, depth sounders
- Communications - satellite phone, HF sideband, marine VHF, CB, WxFa
- Lab Space - wet and dry labs for examining and preparing specimens
- Sampling Equipment - Simrad bioacoustic transducers and data processors for sampling fish/plankton densities; Midwater and bottom trawls; Neuston and vertical plankton nets



Photographer/Carolyn Gudmundson

For more information, contact:

Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge
95 Sterling Highway #1
Homer, Alaska 99603
907/235-6546 (phone)
<http://alaskamaritime.fws.gov/>

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