



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Togiak National Wildlife Refuge Planning Update

Spring 2001

This is the second in a series of planning updates on the revision of the comprehensive conservation plan for the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge. The revised plan will guide management of the Togiak Refuge for the next 10-15 years.

Where We Are Now

Over the past year, our core planning team has met four times to work on revising the Togiak Refuge's comprehensive conservation plan. The team consists of Togiak Refuge staff, Fish and Wildlife Service planners, tribal government representatives from six local villages, and representatives from the Alaska Department of Natural Resources and Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

Our last update contained a set of preliminary planning issues. Issues are important because they tell us what to focus on when revising the plan. We received well over 100 letters or verbal comments on the issues.

Based on what we heard, we revised the planning issues, which are summarized on pages 2-4. If you're interested in the longer description of issues, you can request one or view it at our planning website:
<http://www.r7.fws.gov/planning/plan.html>



The Togiak Refuge provides outstanding vistas and experiences.

The web site also displays our first Togiak Refuge update and additional information about planning, including information on the other two Alaska refuges for which plans are currently being revised. You can also send us an email directly from the web site.

We are now working with the core planning team to identify possible ways the Togiak Refuge and its management partners could address the issues. We're starting by identifying actions that the Togiak Refuge should continue doing regardless of what management approach is eventually chosen.

At the same time, we're looking at some new options. We're calling the new options "building blocks" because they will be used to build alternative management directions to be presented and evaluated in the draft environmental impact statement.

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Planning Issues

When the Fish and Wildlife Services revises a comprehensive conservation plan, we usually don't change everything about how the refuge is managed. Many components of current management may be working well and are continued.

The issues are important public and Fish and Wildlife Service concerns or opportunities that call for new approaches to management. Issues are therefore the foundation of revising the plan.

In response to the first planning update describing preliminary issues, we received 72 letters: 64 from individuals; 3 from local or state government; 3 from guides; and 2 from organizations. Eleven of the written comments were from locals, 11 from non-local Alaskan addresses, and 47 were from residents of the lower 48 states.

In addition, we held meetings in local villages and Anchorage. A total of 67 people attended, 11 in Goodnews Bay, 19 in Quinhagak, 12 in Togiak, 12 in Manokotak, 2 in Bethel, 6 in Dillingham, and 5 in Anchorage.

The notes from these meetings and the comments from the letters were merged into a database to ease summary of the responses. The full meeting notes and copies of all

written comments received are available.

About 2/3 of the people who provided written comments said the range of issues listed in the update covered their concerns. The comments helped us to modify or further describe the issues and ways of addressing them. For some issues such as wilderness most people stated their preferences.

One of the questions on the first planning update response sheet asked people what they valued most about Togiak Refuge and its resources. The most frequent response was the wilderness character and environment, followed by fish and opportunities for fishing, wildlife, subsistence uses, and opportunities for motorized access.

When asked about threats to those values, people's most frequent response was increasing human use and

crowding, followed by conflicts between and among sport and subsistence users.

Purposes of the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge

(established in Section 303(6)(B) of ANILCA):

(i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, salmonids, marine birds and mammals, migratory birds and large mammals (including their restoration to historic levels);

(ii) to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats;

(iii) to provide, in a manner consistent with purposes set forth in subparagraphs (i) and (ii), the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents; and

(iv) to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent



The people of Goodnews Bay express their hopes and concerns for the Togiak Refuge.

A 50-page report describes the issues, summarizes how the Togiak Refuge and others address the issues now, identifies data or information relevant to the issues, and sorts out who has authority to address each issue. Please look at our web site or contact us for the full report.

Here's a quick look at the seven issues and some of the questions the revised plan will address:

1. Water Quality

What is the current status of water quality on the Togiak Refuge? What is the Fish and Wildlife Service's role in improving or maintaining water quality? What is the effect of human uses on water quality, especially in the Kanektok River?

2. Health of Fish

Are fish stocks healthy? What are the impacts to spawning areas from public use? What is the effect of catch-and-release fishing on fish mortality? How can the Togiak Refuge minimize the risks of introduction of whirling disease or other parasites that could infect fish populations?

3. Subsistence Opportunities

How should the Togiak Refuge define and manage for subsistence opportunities? How will the Togiak Refuge know if subsistence uses are declining in quality or becoming significantly restricted?



The quality of recreation on the Togiak Refuge is one of the issues to be addressed in the plan revision.

What are the main influences on subsistence on the three main river systems? How is recreational use of the three main river systems affecting subsistence uses?

4. Recreation Quality

How do visitors and the Togiak Refuge define a high quality recreational experience, and is that experience being provided?

What resource and social conditions contribute to high quality experiences, and what are the threats to recreational opportunities? What should the Togiak Refuge's role be in defining and managing for quality experiences on the Kanektok, Goodnews, and Togiak rivers?

5. Impacts of Public Use on Wildlife in the River Corridors

Under what conditions are game species displaced from river corridors during hunting season? What can the Togiak Refuge do to minimize effects on subsistence hunting? Under what conditions are bears attracted to human camps along the rivers? What can the Togiak Refuge do to minimize the effects of bears on fish camps, villages, and recreational visitors?

6. Management of Human Use and Wildlife at Cape Peirce

How can the Togiak Refuge protect marine mammals and other species which depend on Cape Peirce, while providing opportunities for public use?

7. Possible New Land Management Designations

What lands, if any, should the plan recommend for designation as wilderness? Where and how would additional wilderness help the Togiak Refuge to better achieve its purposes? What effects would additional wilderness designation have on human uses and administration of the Togiak Refuge?

What river segments are eligible for designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers, and which, if any, should the plan recommend?

Would Wild and Scenic River designation help the Togiak Refuge better achieve its purposes, and what effects would it have on human uses?



Team Togiak: Searching for Common Ground

Deciding what, if anything, to change about how the Togiak Refuge is managed is not the only question that needs to be answered during revision of the comprehensive plan. Another important question is who has the authority to take various actions?

The Togiak Refuge does not have authority over many of the resources and opportunities located within its boundaries. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game manages resident fish and wildlife populations and sets harvest regulations for sport users. The Alaska Department of Natural Resources manages state lands and waters within the refuge.

Many issues focus on the Togiak Refuge's main rivers. Downstream from

the Wilderness boundary, lands along the Kanektok and Togiak rivers are owned and managed by Native Corporations. Many other lands within the Togiak Refuge are Native allotments that are managed by individual landowners.

It should be clear that the Togiak Refuge needs partners to help meet its goals. That is why the core team for the Togiak Refuge plan revision is not composed only of Fish and Wildlife Service employees. The two state agencies are represented, as are tribal governments of local villages. Representatives from Manokotak, Quinhagak, Goodnews Bay, Twin Hills and Togiak attend the meetings and have a substantial role in helping shape the plan revision.



Local residents have depended on wild resources for generations. Fish camps with drying racks like this are located on private lands within the Togiak Refuge.

What Happens Next

At its next meeting, the core planning team is taking a closer look at the range of actions the Togiak Refuge could take to address the issues. One topic will be how to manage non-guided use of the three main river systems. Currently, the number of guided sport anglers is limited through the special use permits that are required for all guiding businesses. However, there are few restrictions on non-guided use.

The current Togiak Refuge plan calls for assessing how to manage non-guided use when it reaches the level of guided use on the three rivers. This is now the case for the upper Kanektok and upper Goodnews.

Another topic will be regulations for human waste disposal. Currently, people are required to bury their waste properly on Togiak Refuge lands. Along the lower rivers where the river corridor uplands are privately owned, visitors are required to carry out solid human waste or obtain a Native Corporation permit to use the uplands.

Our next planning update, scheduled for this summer, will describe preliminary alternatives developed by the core team. We'll ask for your comments and then develop a final set of alternatives. The Draft EIS will assess the effects of each alternative on the resources and opportunities on the Togiak Refuge, and on the local villages and economies.

Planning Information

■ The Fish and Wildlife Service is planning to begin or continue several studies to provide information for the plan revision.

■ A multi-year baseline study of water chemistry at locations on the Togiak Refuge where the Fish and Wildlife Service has stream gauges. This will be



Haulouts, such as Cape Peirce, provide walrus with critical places to rest and digest.

supplemented by water quality monitoring at the Wilderness boundary on the Kanektok.

■ A study of subsistence uses and conflicts on the Kanektok, Goodnews, and Togiak rivers, to better understand uses of the Wilderness and lower sections of the rivers and identify conditions that add to or detract from subsistence.

■ A study of sport angling on the same three rivers, to assess how anglers use and perceive conditions on the river and the quality of recreation. The results will be compared with a similar survey conducted in 1995.

■ A study monitoring abundance and distribution of caribou on the Nushagak Peninsula and moose in the Togiak drainage. Ongoing monitoring of rainbow trout and char population movements and distribution. Monitoring populations of

marine mammals and seabirds at Cape Peirce, part of an international research effort.

The Planning Steps

Identify issues

What should we consider?



Develop alternatives

What are some different ways of acting on the issues? (we are here now)



Analyze alternatives

How well would each alternative work?



Choose alternative

Which would work best?



Publish draft plan

Public is asked to review and comment.



Publish final plan

Another chance for the public to see and comment.



Publish record of decision

The Fish and Wildlife Service makes its final decision public.



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How to contact us:

You can contact the planning team leader or the refuge manager with comments or questions. You can reach us by email at:

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Tribal representatives can also be contacted through the tribal councils.

USFWS Mission Statement

"The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people."

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