



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Kanuti

National Wildlife Refuge

Planning News - Spring 2004

Find out more on the Kanuti Refuge Plan at:
<http://www.r7.fws.gov/planning/plan.html>

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Propelled by an ancient faith deep within their genes, billions of birds hurdle the globe each season...They are not residents of any single place but of a whole, and their continued survival rests almost entirely within our hands.
- Scott Weidensaul



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This is the first in a series of newsletters about the Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge and the revision of its Comprehensive Conservation Plan. We are beginning the process to update this plan and ask for your help in identifying important concerns or issues that we should address. The revised Kanuti Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan will guide management for the next 15 years or until another review is necessary.

What is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan?

In general, a comprehensive conservation plan does the following:

- *Makes sure that the purposes for which the refuge was established and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System are being fulfilled*
- *Makes certain that national policy direction is included in the management of the refuge*
- *Provides an opportunity for the public to participate in development of management guidance*
- *Provides a step-by-step process for making and recording refuge decisions*
- *Establishes a broad management approach, based on a vision statement, for refuge programs and activities*
- *Provides a way to evaluate accomplishments over time*



Kanuti Flats, Fall 2003, USFWS

Why have a plan?

This plan will be the basis for managing Kanuti Refuge in the future. It will direct management and set limits of what can and cannot be done on refuge lands while giving consideration to Service and Refuge System Missions **and** Kanuti Refuge's Vision Statement.

An orderly planning process helps develop the best possible plan. First the public's concerns and issues are compiled, and refuge-specific management goals and objectives are listed. Then possible management strategies are written and analyzed, and public comments about the alternatives are recorded. After consideration has been given to all comments, a management strategy is selected and documented in a record of decision.



The Mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service is to

Work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people

The Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to

Administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans



Why revise the existing plan?

The current plan was completed in 1987 and many things have changed since then. The Dalton Highway is now open to the public and the highway surface has been upgraded. The federal government now manages subsistence harvest on federal lands and has legalized spring harvest of migratory birds. Kanuti staff have also learned a great deal about refuge lands since the last plan was written. These changes need to be evaluated within the planning process to update our management plan and answer new questions. This revision process will help refuge staff to do a better job in meeting the reasons why the refuge was established. Managers will be better prepared to address potential threats to refuge lands.

Background

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. In addition to the National Wildlife Refuge System, the Service operates national fish hatcheries, fishery resource offices, and ecological services field offices. Through these offices, the Service enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitats, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts.

The National Wildlife Refuge System

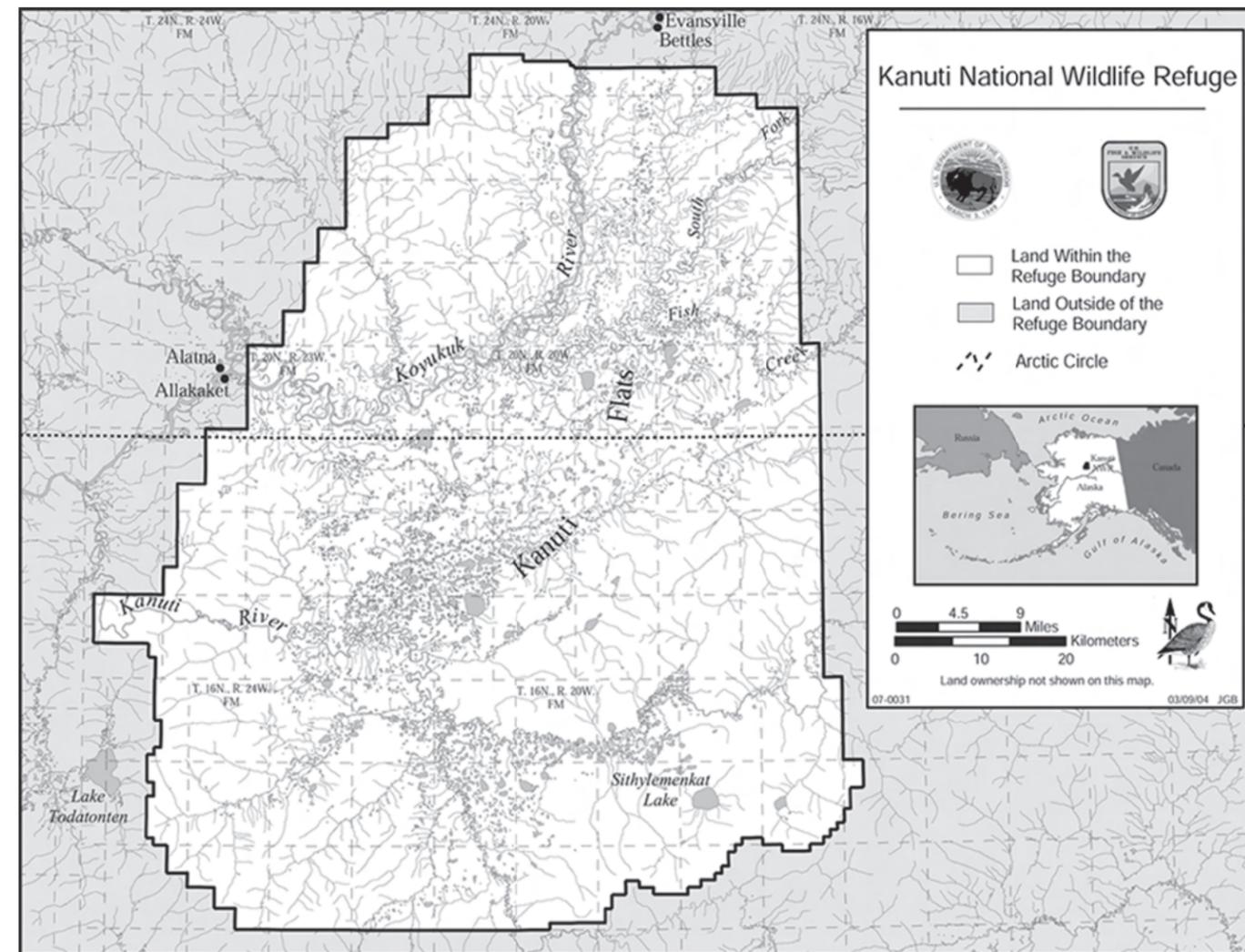
The National Wildlife Refuge System includes over 95 million acres in more than 540 national wildlife refuges and waterfowl production areas in all 50 states and territories. The System provides Americans with opportunities to: a) participate in wildlife-dependent recreation, where compatible with refuge purposes and b) appreciate the value of and need for fish and wildlife conservation.

National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska

There are 16 national wildlife refuges in Alaska. These refuges embody the spirit of Alaska with mountains, glaciers, tundra, grasslands, wetlands, lakes, woodlands, rivers, and maritime areas. Alaska refuges total 76.8 million acres, or about 80 percent, of the entire National Wildlife Refuge System.

The Refuge

Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge is a wild and undeveloped land with no roads or communities within its boundaries. This 1.6-million acre refuge is a prime example of Alaska's boreal ecosystem, dominated by black spruce along with white spruce, paper birch, and poplars. The refuge is located in a basin formed by glaciation and the Kanuti and Koyukuk rivers. Placid streams, winding rivers, rolling hills, numerous lakes, wetlands, and muskegs characterize the landscape. The refuge has a diversity of wildlife, fish, and plants that interact in much the same way as they evolved



When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.

--Aldo Leopold



The Kanuti Refuge was established to (ANILCA, 1980):

1. conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, white-fronted geese and other waterfowl and migratory birds, moose, caribou (including participation in coordinated ecological studies and management of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd), and furbearers
2. fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats
3. provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in above subparagraphs, the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents
4. provide, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth above, water quality and necessary water quantity within the refuge.

Kanuti Refuge Vision Statement (Draft)

Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge will be managed to preserve its natural biodiversity, biological processes, and wild character throughout time. The role of Kanuti Refuge in supporting wildlife populations important to Alaska, the United States, and the world will be the focal point of research and management efforts. Studies will focus on the physical and biological components of the northern circumboreal region, their ecological relationships, and their response to human activity. Stewardship of Kanuti Refuge will involve partnerships and Federal and State government agencies, the public and local communities that rely upon refuge resources for their subsistence needs.

Kanuti Wetland in Fall, USFWS



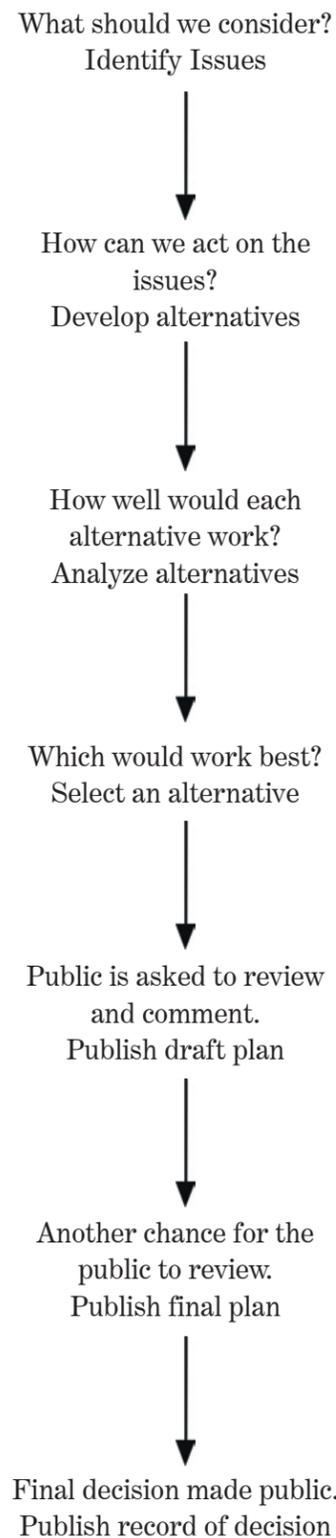
Kilolitna River, USFWS

Refuge Goals (DRAFT)

Refuge goals identify and direct management priorities, provide rationale for decisions, and offer a link between management actions, refuge purposes, Service policy, and the Service and National Wildlife Refuge System mission statements.

- Goal 1: Conserve the refuge's diversity of wildlife, fish and habitats, while fulfilling international treaty obligations, by allowing natural processes to shape the environment
- Goal 2: Improve baseline understanding of water resources on the refuge in order to maintain the water quality and quantity to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity
- Goal 3: Continue to provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation while emphasizing the current use patterns; short-term, dispersed uses that require minimal facility development or habitat alteration
- Goal 4: Provide for interpretive and environmental education programs that increase understanding of the National Wildlife Refuge System, boreal forest ecosystems and natural processes; develop a sense of stewardship for wildlife, cultural resources and the environment
- Goal 5: Participate in cooperative projects, including research that fosters a better understanding of boreal forest ecosystems and ecological processes; partners may include other agencies, organizations, communities, and other Service divisions and universities
- Goal 6: Provide opportunities for local residents to continue their subsistence use of refuge resources consistent with current Federal policy on subsistence priorities and refuge purposes
- Goal 7: Provide for and maintain minimum facilities and equipment necessary to ensure a safe and secure environment for the visiting public, and in which refuge staff can accomplish refuge purposes, goals and mandates

Steps of the Planning Process



Public Involvement

There will be opportunities for people interested in the management of the Kanuti Refuge to get involved. Your involvement is important to this planning process.

Your response to this newsletter is one way for refuge staff to learn your views about the refuge and the revision of the conservation plan. You will also have opportunities to comment at public meetings held in communities near the refuge, in Fairbanks, and in Anchorage. Times and locations of these meetings will be announced through local media.

Once issues are identified, refuge staff will develop alternative ways to approach them. Detailed descriptions of the alternatives will be included in a draft plan. This plan will include an analysis of how each alternative could affect the environment. After people have had an opportunity to review and comment on the draft plan, a final plan and environmental impact statement will be prepared. From this final plan, a “record of decision” will be developed to guide management of the refuge.

How You Can Help

- Stay on the mailing list so you can receive future mailings. If you are not already on it, ask to be added!
- Let us know your concerns and the issues you think we should address in this revision. What’s working well? What should be changed?
- Respond to the list of questions on the attached mail-in card.

You may view plans and newsletters online at www.r7.fws.gov/planning

For information about the plan or to submit comments, please write, fax, or e-mail either of the following:

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thousands of years ago. The refuge provides undisturbed lands for breeding birds including loons and geese; many of which migrate long distances and breed only in Alaska. It provides space and isolation for moose, wolves, and bears. Seasonally flooded streams and rivers are home to salmon, Arctic grayling, and whitefish.



Alaska National Wildlife Refuges

Stewardship of Kanuti Refuge

When managing Kanuti Refuge, there are three objectives that must be addressed. There is a legal mandate to meet the refuge purposes as listed in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA, 1980), which provide fairly specific management directives (see box on next page). Second, the refuge needs to stay true to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and finally the vision statement developed specifically for Kanuti Refuge should guide management decisions.

Bird Watching on Kanuti Refuge, USFWS

