



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Alaska Region

Accomplishment Report 2010



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

Regional Director



Geoffrey L. Haskett
Regional Director

Welcome to the Second Annual Alaska Region Accomplishment Report

By Geoffrey L. Haskett, Regional Director

Once again, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Alaska Region can look back on a year of outstanding accomplishments; achievements that hit at the very core of our mission to work with others and conserve wildlife for current and future generations of Americans. These included actions that built on the foundation of former successes and others that resulted from our responses to challenges impossible to anticipate, including an unprecedented oil spill that required the aid of staff from every region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

This 2010 Accomplishment Report doesn't provide a detailed, item-by-item catalog of all of the good work done by all of the programs in our Region (to do so would require a far larger volume). Its purpose, instead, is to underline a selection of examples that are representative of the great things done by Alaska Region staff in a number of areas, and to—by highlighting these examples—provide some small recognition for these and many other difficult jobs that were exceptionally well done during the last year.

In the pages that follow, you'll be able to explore some of the more interesting and innovative of our regional accomplishments, organized by program. Each programmatic entry will also include a brief bulleted summary of other achievements, each of which would certainly be worthy of a booklet of its own.

Alaska is a huge place, with a large cast of stakeholders (often with conflicting missions), a complex patchwork of land-management status, and issues that frequently rise to the level of national (and international) interest. We do a great job dealing with all of these conflicts, and are able to do so because of all of you...men and women whose talents, dedication, and innovation meet and surpass the demands of this unique state to which we've chosen to dedicate our efforts.

Geoff

Regional Milestones



Arctic

Izembek

Fifty years ago, on December 6, 1960, the two historic Alaska refuges of Arctic and Izembek were established.

See story on page 3.

Regional Milestones cont.

Alaska's National Wildlife Refuges have had a busy year. Perhaps most visible among our many accomplishments have been the efforts to support the 50th Anniversaries of Izembek and Arctic refuges. Both were established as National Wildlife Ranges in 1960 and were expanded, and renamed as National Wildlife Refuges, with the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in 1980.

Celebrations of Arctic's anniversary have been ramping up all year. In addition to producing the film "America's Wildest Refuge," we contributed to the development of the play "Wild Legacy." Other events have included photographer Jeff Jones' "Arctic Sanctuary" traveling photo exhibit, which will be traveling the country this coming year.



USFWS

Stunning scenery surrounds these campers in the Arctic NWR.



USFWS

A caribou cow keeps watch over her young on a hillside in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Izembek Refuge's events included an exhibit featuring refuge photos by Tom Collopy and Mary Frische, both members of the Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges. A reception for the opening of

the photo exhibit in Anchorage included presentations on refuge history, and wildlife. The photo exhibit is now permanently installed at the Cold Bay, Alaska air terminal.



A pair of images from Izembek NWR: A ptarmigan takes flight (above right); Cold Bay sunset (below).

©Mary Frische and Tom Collopy



more Regional Milestones

Though the Alaska Region continued to face challenges in 2010, two unrelated events, one the result of an ongoing Presidential initiative and the other brought about by an unprecedented environmental disaster, impacted much of our work in the Alaska Region this year:

The oil spill that resulted from the April 20, 2010 explosion on the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico killed 11 platform workers and injured 17 others. By the time the leak was capped in July, it was estimated to have released about 4.9 million barrels of crude oil, making it the largest accidental oil spill in history.

Alaska Region staff, many of whom had the advantage (most would say misfortune) of working with similar environmental disasters ranging from the notorious 1989 Exxon-Valdez spill to the smaller Selendang-Ayu grounding of 2004, were quick to respond to the Department of the Interior's call for assistance. Often at great personal and professional inconvenience (with the demands of home life unlikely to stop for the spill, and the work on their desks piling up even as they were putting in often brutal hours on spill response duties), more than 70 Alaska Region staffers, some undergoing multiple deployments, put in a total of more than 25,000 hours responding to the disaster; and earning the Region the thanks and respect of everyone involved in this heroic national effort.



USFWS



Tasks for the Dennis Pass barge staff in LA during the Gulf oil spill were reconnaissance and recovery. All oiled birds were counted and captured when possible for transfer to rehabilitation centers. Carcasses were collected for evidence.

National ARRA Fund Status

Though the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was in its second year, the timely and appropriate management and distribution of ARRA funds continued to add to workloads across the region in 2010, particularly in our Contracting and General Services and Refuges programs. Handling a volume of work that was approximately four times that which would typically be completed by the region in these



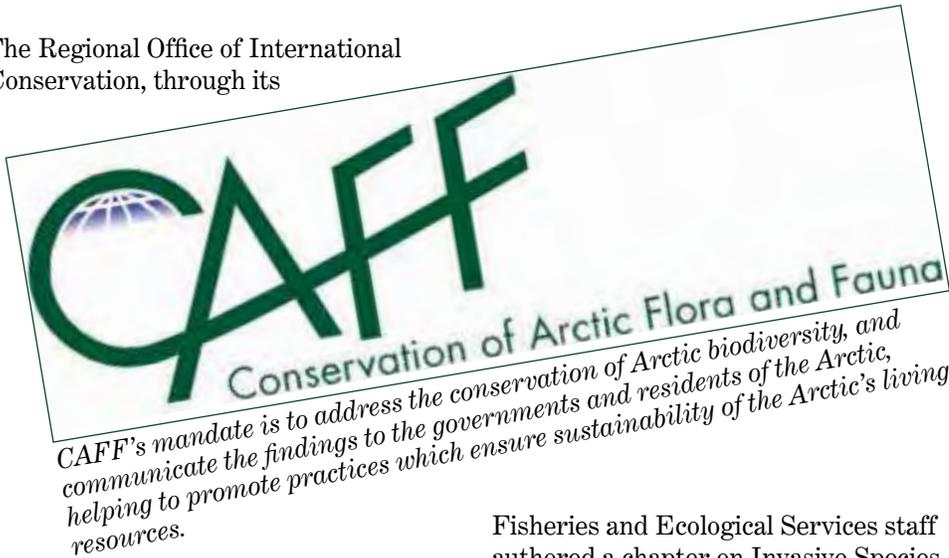
areas, our staff successfully obligated \$2.6 million for habitat restoration, \$0.6 million for youth-hire programs, and \$7.7 million for facilities projects. More impressive still, the region achieved a 100% obligation rate for these funds on August 8th, and was the first region in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reach this goal. In addition, completed project pages for all ARRA projects were submitted ahead of schedule, resulting in feature articles on both the Department of the Interior ARRA website and in local media.



International Conservation

The Office of International Conservation works with others to strengthen cooperation and scientific exchange, promote communication, and provide leadership in Alaska for international conservation of shared fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats, especially in the Circumpolar Arctic.

The Regional Office of International Conservation, through its



participation in the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) Working Group of the Arctic Council, took the lead on an initiative to review and assess the Arctic Sea Ice Biodiversity from an ecosystem and circumpolar perspective. Environment Canada joined the initiative, followed by all other arctic countries. In partnership with Canada, a steering committee was established to plan a workshop of experts on sea ice biodiversity. The workshop has been scheduled for March of 2011 in Vancouver, B.C. The workshop will provide a summary of the current status and trends of sea ice-associated biodiversity, discuss the expected reaction of biota to lower occurrences of ice, and consider the ways in which sea ice changes and the related impact on biodiversity impact northern peoples.

International Conservation continued to provide support for and guidance to the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment (ABA) scientific report, including serving on the multilateral Steering Committee, coordinating and assisting the U.S. lead and co-lead authors who are working on the Species chapter, as well as contributing to the Ecosystem Services

and Genetics chapters. The ABA is a 5-year initiative of the CAFF working group and is expected to be completed in 2013.

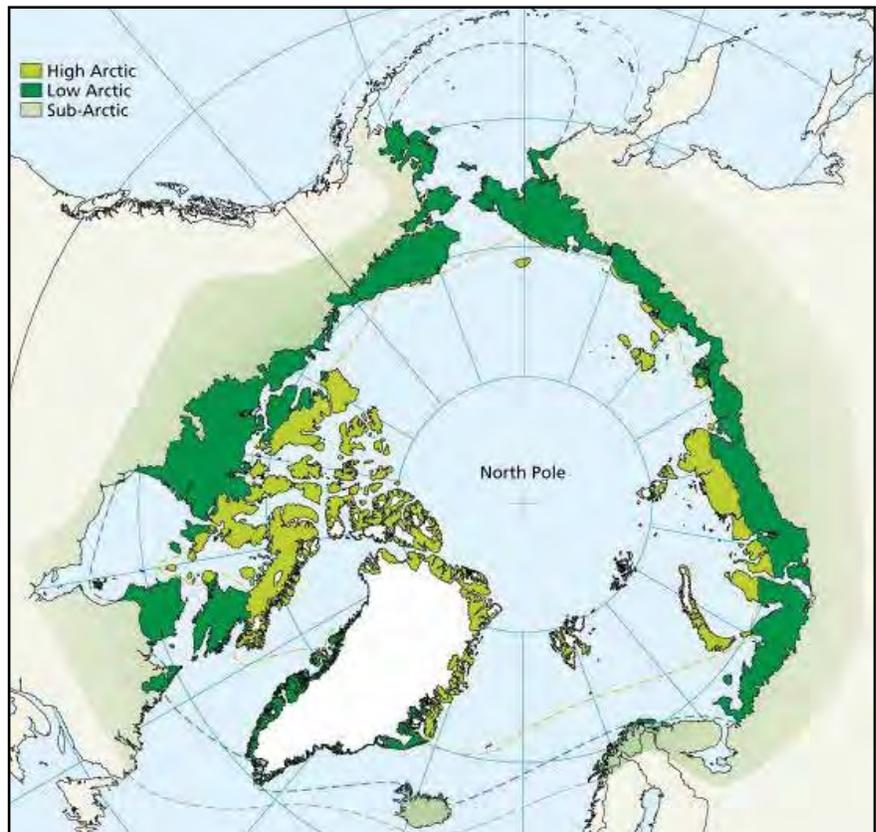
Working with International Conservation, the Alaska Region

Fisheries and Ecological Services staff authored a chapter on Invasive Species for the "Arctic Biodiversity Trends 2010" document published by the Arctic

Council and served as Science Editor for the American Fisheries Society's national professional publication, *Fisheries Magazine*.

Other Accomplishments

- The program coordinated and prepared Regional input to the Science Support Program (SSP) and Quick Response Program (QRP), both are important research programs of the USGS.
- We represented the Regional Director in participation in the NPS's Beringia Days with Russia, which focused on ecological and cultural aspects of the Beringia region.
- International Conservation represented the Alaska Region and the Service as Head of Delegation to the CAFF Management Board, and, in that role, provided advice to the U.S. Senior Arctic Official (State Department) on matters concerning biodiversity.



Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group

Much of the work of International Conservation focuses on the study and conservation of resources in the Circumpolar Arctic.

External Affairs

The Office of External Affairs supports all regional programs by providing information about the work of the Service to the media, the Alaska congressional delegation, and Alaska Tribes. Functions performed by the program include serving as liaison to the legislature, overseeing Tribal grants, conducting outreach, managing media relations, providing graphic information and assistance, managing the Region's web presence, and advising programs and field stations in records management.

as Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, and YouTube were made available for general use, managed by External Affairs.

The Alaska Region currently has a presence on each of these platforms, which provides opportunities for us to explain the work of the Service to diverse audiences and

to use each of these new technologies to drive audiences to the others.

This represents a significant expansion in our outreach/communication efforts, and will enable

External Affairs to spread the word about Service activities and accomplishments with greater immediacy and efficiency.

During 2010, we also worked to advance the mission of the Service and implement a Presidential priority by emphasizing the importance of Alaska Native input and involvement in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service activities and decisions. By hiring an Alaska Native Affairs Specialist to coordinate activity and advise programs on Alaska Native issues, the External Affairs program has been able to foster new partnerships with Alaska Native Tribes and provide a Service presence at critical meeting such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs providers' conference and the annual Alaska Federation of Natives gathering.



Laura Whitehouse/USFWS

*Crystal Leonetti
Alaska Region Native Affairs Liaison*

twitter



Perhaps the most broad-ranging of the many accomplishments achieved by the External Affairs program in 2010 is the adaptation of "new media" technologies into our regional outreach and communications efforts. A partial lifting of the national embargo on using such tools was granted in order to allow the Service to more effectively communicate with multiple audiences during the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and soon thereafter such "Web 2.0" phenomena



Other Accomplishments

- Worked with Arctic Refuge on its 50th Anniversary celebration, contributing to contracts, film review, writing, and editing projects.
- Provided Endangered Species Act outreach materials on such high-profile issues as the designation of polar bear critical habitat.
- Responded to approximately 300 inquiries from local, state, national, and international media.
- Coordinated and wrote/edited for the annual Regional Director's Awards.
- Served as regional lead for the National Connecting People with Nature priority.
- Served on the National Wildlife System's Vision Team.
- Provided staff plus administrative and travel support for the Service's Deepwater Horizon oil spill response efforts.
- Provided support for the Feb. 2010 Project Leaders Meeting, and hosted the "Science of the Service" reception.

Law Enforcement

The Law Enforcement program supports the regional and national interests and objectives of the Service in the sound management of the nation's fish and wildlife resources by regulating those human activities that can have an adverse effect on wildlife populations. The program also works to further international conservation efforts by enforcing treaties and U.S. laws that help foreign countries protect their indigenous wildlife species.

A one year covert investigation into illegal wildlife sales (including migratory birds) by a Juneau, Alaska resident concluded with four search



Law Enforcement wildlife inspectors at Anchorage's Ted Stevens International Airport monitor the import of wildlife products from around the world.

warrants being executed and multiple simultaneous interviews in Service Regions 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7. The investigation has resulted in evidence being obtained documenting the sale of migratory birds and parts and as many as 35 illegally taken big game species, including elk, antelope, mule deer and white-tailed deer trophies. The big game species were illegally taken in Montana between 2004-2008 by the main defendant and several friends and relatives. Cooperating agencies involved in the investigation include Service special agents from several Service Regions, Alaska State Troopers-Fish and Wildlife Protection, and Montana Fish and Game Investigation Unit.

In the spring of 2010, Service special agents focused their efforts on enforcement of subsistence waterfowl hunting and subsistence marine mammal harvest activities. Special agents traveled to St. Lawrence Island to monitor the

subsistence harvest of walrus. Agents maintained a presence on the island for the month of May and documented a number of walrus being harvested. Agents issued violation notices to two individuals for the taking of a walrus in a wasteful manner. Two walrus heads, with tusks, were seized pursuant to the violation notices.

Special agents and refuge officers conducted enforcement efforts related to subsistence waterfowl hunting on the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta. Agents and refuge officers utilized helicopters and fixed wing aircraft to locate and check subsistence waterfowl hunters

for compliance with lead shot and closed season bird (emperor geese, spectacled and Steller's eiders) regulations. Several violation notices were issued for possession of lead shot. In August 2010, a Kipnuk hunter, who refused to identify himself when contacted by officers in the spring while hunting was sentenced in federal court in Anchorage to pay a \$500 fine and abandon

all lead shot, for one count of violating



USFWS law enforcement agent Mike Wade monitors walrus harvesting on St. Lawrence Island, Alaska.

the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and one count of violating the National Wildlife Refuge Act.

Other Accomplishments:

- In February 2010, two Anchorage based special agents attended the 24th Vertebrate Pest Conference in Sacramento, California. The agents took part as Panel Members on a panel, which discussed "Regulatory and Policy Issues Around Non-Target Mortality and Environmental Fate of Rodenticides."
- During FY 2010, Service special agents and wildlife inspectors took part in a variety of illegal wildlife interdiction efforts in Region 7. Numerous violations were documented including violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, CITES, Lacey Act, Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act.
- In 2010, an Anchorage based wildlife inspector attended the Advanced Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination Level II Certification training for Zebra and Quagga Mussels at Lake Mead, Nevada.
- While inspecting international passengers, an Anchorage based wildlife inspector intercepted 25 bottles of capsules containing tiger products, three bottles of liquid with musk deer ingredients, and six packages of capsules containing fur seal oil from a Chinese citizen residing in the U.S.
- In March 2010, an Anchorage based wildlife inspector discovered 500 schedule 4 drug tablets while conducting wildlife inspection duties.
- In April 2010, special agents from the Fairbanks, Alaska, office participated in the Migratory Bird Fair held in Barrow.
- In July 2010, all Alaska Region special agents successfully completed a five day Survival Shooting Training Program in Sitka, Alaska.

Subsistence Management

Unique to Alaska, the Federal Subsistence Management Program is jointly implemented by the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture in accordance with the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). Under ANILCA, the mandate of the program is to protect and continue subsistence uses of wild renewable resources by rural Alaskans on federal public lands and waters while maintaining healthy populations of fish and wildlife. Housed within the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Office of Subsistence Management administers the multi-agency program by providing regulatory, administrative, and technical expertise.

In 2010, the Subsistence Program received and analyzed more than 100 proposals to regulate the harvest of wildlife. That's twice the average! In addition, fisheries proposals affecting subsistence salmon fishing in the Yukon River and follow-up consideration of a proposal to recognize the customary and traditional use of all fish in the Kenai River by residents of Ninilchik were



Courtney Caruthers/USFWS

Graduate student Katie Moerlein from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (far right) hangs whitefish with families from Noatak, Alaska at Sisualik, a traditional location for summer fishing and hunting. Katie is collecting information on changing subsistence practices in response to climate change.

ushered through the regulatory process. The Federal Subsistence Management Program uses working groups to address contentious issues through consensus building. One such working group met in July of 2010 to address concerns the state has over the sale of handicrafts that include brown bear claws.

In addition, the Subsistence Program funded and participated in working groups to address moose and caribou management issues and user conflicts in Southwest Alaska as well as regulations guiding the harvest of spawned out red salmon in Katmai National Park.

As part of its responsibilities for resource management, the Subsistence Program funds projects to provide information needed for subsistence fisheries management. Funded projects monitor subsistence harvest and status of fish stocks and collect and analyze traditional ecological knowledge on subsistence fisheries. In 2010, a three-

year effort to develop a strategic plan to guide whitefish research in the Yukon-Kuskokwim area was completed. In addition, the Subsistence Program funded 52 other projects across the state. Three projects will examine the effects of climate change on subsistence fisheries in the Bering Straits, Northwest Alaska, and the Yukon River.

Other Accomplishments

- Funded the hiring of 30 youth as technicians and interns through the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program.
- Developed and launched a new internet-based system to issue permits for subsistence hunts and to manage fisheries resource monitoring projects.
- Participated in an environmental assessment process for Unimak Island caribou.



Dan LaPlant/USFWS

In July of 2010 a Federal Subsistence Management Program working group met to address concerns of the State of Alaska about the sale of handicrafts that include brown bear claws.



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Courtney Carothers, Assistant Professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (far right) sits with elders in Noatak, Alaska to gain information about observations of environmental change in the region and implications for subsistence fishing activities

Migratory Birds & State Programs

The program manages and studies loons, seabirds, waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds and landbirds to help conserve migratory bird populations in Alaska. It also helps administer several conservation grants programs that distribute funds to the State of Alaska and Alaskan Tribes using funds derived from excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment and other congressional appropriations. The Service's commitment to developing diverse partnerships to more effectively manage and conserve wildlife populations is exemplified by this program's participation in the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council (AMBCC).

The Kittlitz's Murrelet is one of the rarest breeding seabirds in the North Pacific and one of the least known in North America. During a study of Breeding Ecology of Kittlitz's Murrelet at Agattu Island, Migratory Bird Management biologists and cooperators located and monitored 23 nests; more than had ever been discovered for the species prior to this work. Researchers learned that Kittlitz's Murrelet chicks at Agattu suffer from low growth rates, likely owing to low-lipid content in fishes provided by adults.

In an outstanding example of partnership and programmatic synergism, personnel from Migratory Bird Management, Ecological Services, Law Enforcement, External Affairs, and Budget and Administration successfully launched the Bald and Golden Eagle Permit Program. Working together, the programs have



Visit the Eagle Permit Program site at: <http://alaska.fws.gov/eaglepermit/index.htm>

completed a user-friendly website and several of the major components of the permit process. The Service has provided extensive consultation and technical expertise as development projects have been proposed by private developers and public utilities seeking permits to disturb or take eagles.

Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration staff cooperatively worked with Juneau Fish and Wildlife Field Office, Alaska

Department of Fish and Game, the City and Bureau of Juneau, and consultants on the draft environmental assessment and public review of the proposed Statter Harbor boat launch facility. Project proponents revised project scope to reduce intertidal fill footprint from seven to four acres, avoid dredging, avoid fill in the alluvial delta by construction of a marine seawall, and minimize sedimentation to eelgrass beds. The proposed action would provide 122 trailer spaces and 87 passenger spaces for recreational fishing and boating in the Juneau area, improving highway and harbor safety and reducing congestion.

Other Accomplishments

- Monitored 91 grants involving 413 projects and \$96 million to ensure compliance with terms and conditions incorporated in pertinent regulations, policies and guidelines.
- In 2010, Migratory Bird Management staff directed 36 projects that leveraged \$3,401,000 from outside funding sources.
- In FY10, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration staff reviewed and provided comments on draft Service Manual chapters on the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation; Financial and Performance Reporting; Single Audit Act Audits; Multi-State Conservation Grants; Boating Access; Audits (5 chapters); Compliance; and regulation revisions to 50 CFR 80 and 50 CFR 86.
- Convened regional partners in two statewide meetings of the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-management Council to recommend regulations for managing migratory bird subsistence hunting. Regulations were published that accomplished conservation needs while allowing opportunities statewide for subsistence hunters to meet their subsistence and cultural needs during the spring and summer seasons, while complying with three international conventions.



Alison McNight/USFWS

In 2010, Migratory Bird Management biologists and partners discovered more Kittlitz's Murrelet nests than have ever been found to date, improving our knowledge of this rare and poorly understood seabird.

Budget & Administration

The role of the eight divisions of the Budget and Administration program is to support the mission-critical conservation agenda of the Service and Region in Alaska. To the degree that the Region and its programs succeeded in protecting and conserving our trust species and lands and providing subsistence opportunities for our rural residents, the staff of our Budget and

Administration programs have also succeeded because they have provided behind-the-scenes logistical support upon which such missions depend. The program takes great pride in striving to make sure that the Alaska Region has the people, materials, technology, and resources to carry out our agency's mission.

A wide ranging program, Budget and Administration's accomplishments were equally numerous and varied for 2010.

The Deepwater Horizon disaster and ARRA funding are both addressed specifically at the beginning of this report, but it is worth repeating that both of these—one an environmental crisis and the other an unprecedented opportunity—placed unforeseen and previously unimaginable demands on Budget and Administration staff. Our responses in both cases represent two of the high points of a year full of accomplishments that speak volumes about the dedication and professionalism of these men and women.



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Acting Service Director Rowan Gould (far left) and Alaska Regional Director Geoff Haskett (far right) present the 2010 Partners for Conservation Award to Anchorage Park Foundation Executive Director Beth Nordlund, for the outstanding Youth Employment in Parks program, which benefitted from ARRA funding.

Other Accomplishments

- 98.6% of all payments were made on time.
- The Region responded to audits involving the Personnel Management Evaluation Acquisition Management Review, and Credit Card Review under A-123 Internal Controls. No major findings of deficiencies were reported, demonstrating the region's commitment to sound business practices.

Diversity & Civil Rights

The Diversity and Civil Rights Office assists managers and supervisors in creating a work environment that recognizes and appreciates the value of a diverse workforce; removes barriers to full and active participation; and strives for compliance with all civil rights legislation.

Through the cooperative efforts of the Regional Directorate Team, the Diversity and Civil Rights Office, and managers/supervisors in the Regional Office and field stations across the State, the Alaska Region had one of its most successful years in recent history. We were able to achieve three of four GPRA diversity goals and seven of the Director's eight Equal Opportunity and Diversity objectives.

Other Accomplishments

- Continued to partner with the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program, resulting in a pool of natural resource professionals.
- Partnered with the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service to provide expanded and enhanced training opportunities to the Region's workforce – including a presentation by acclaimed author and writer Tim Wise.
- Created a cross-programmatic team of diverse employees and managers who advise the Regional Directorate Team on issues related to outreach, recruitment, professional development, and retention.
- Under the direction of the Regional Directorate Team, assisted managers in ensuring that nearly half of its permanent vacancies were announced as developmental positions
- Made conflict resolution services available to Regional employees through a partnership with the Federal Executive Association Shared Neutral Program.

National Wildlife Refuge System

The Refuge Program in Alaska administers a national network of lands and waters for conservation, management, and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the U.S. for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. With some 77 million acres of diverse habitats, Alaska's refuges comprise almost 83% of the entire National Wildlife Refuge System.

In 2004, a large “thaw slump” created by permafrost failure occurred on the upper Selawik River. Since that time the

Sometimes conservation means just saving the dirt. During 2010 we purchased five Native allotments within Alaska refuges, further protecting wildlife resources while providing needed funds for Alaska Native families. After 10 years of negotiation, we completed the Nunivak Island Mekoryuk Alaska (NIMA) Corp. exchange this year, resulting in the acquisition of 32,895 acres of land located within the boundary of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge. These lands contain high quality wetlands important for fish and wildlife habitat and migratory bird nesting areas. The lands being divested are in close

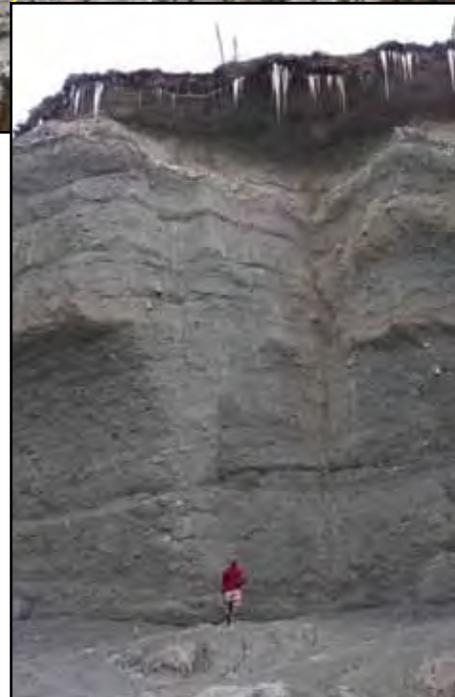
proximity to the Village of Mekoryuk where subsistence activities take place.

In 2010 the Refuge System launched a national inventory and monitoring strategy. While this is still very much a work in progress, the Alaska Region was funded for six new positions, one in the Alaska Regional Office, two co-located with the Arctic LCC, and three new field biologists. This program should start taking real shape this coming year.

In 2010 the Alaska Region refuge program also put to bed a four-year study as to whether or not to do a 110,000 acre land exchange within the Yukon Flats Refuge. While the exchange would have added high quality wetlands to the refuge, it would have also facilitated oil and gas development on private lands within the refuge boundary. The Regional Director signed the Record of Decision selecting the No Action alternative on April 21st.



slump has seasonally transformed the once clear river into a muddy one for many miles downstream. The largest of its kind in Alaska, the slump has attracted the attention of geologists, hydrologists, fisheries biologists, and other scientists from around the world interested in understanding the dynamics and impacts of this event. This summer a team of geologists, accompanied by refuge staff, returned for a third year in a row to continue studies on the slump to document the rates and mechanism of slump growth, the character of sediment released into the river and the impact on river function. The Selawik River slump presents an unusual opportunity to study this harbinger of climate change. Research on the slump is expected to continue for many years.



Standing at the base of the headwall inside the slump, a person is dwarfed by the size of the mud cliff.

Tina Moran/USFWS

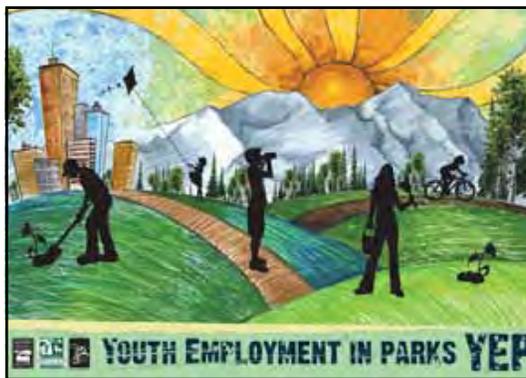
Other Accomplishments

- After an invasive species removal effort, Rat Island was officially declared “rat free” this year.
- Refuges play a big role in educating and informing the public about conservation. This year we installed a walrus display in the Bethel airport, remodeled numerous exhibits in the interagency King Salmon visitor center, designed new interagency exhibits for the Homer airport, and updated many interpretive panels on the Kenai refuge.
- Brought the national refuge inventory and monitoring strategy to Alaska.
- Alaska Maritime’s Vernon Byrd was recognized as Refuge System Employee of the Year, and our Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, now 307 members strong, won “Friends Group of the Year.”
- We made great progress in planning next July’s national “Conserving the Future” Refuge System conference, with Region 7 participation on the Vision Teams representing various programs.

Fisheries & Ecological Services

In the Alaska Region, Fisheries and Ecological Services consists of a diverse group of programs with varied responsibilities over complex issues including fisheries, endangered species, environmental contaminants, habitat conservation, and marine mammals.

Notable Fisheries and Ecological Services program accomplishments this year include the designation of critical habitat for the polar bear, which was listed as threatened under the



FES was instrumental in securing DOI's Partners in Conservation Award for the Anchorage-based Youth Employment in Parks program.

Other Accomplishments

- Surveys and studies of spectacled and Steller's eiders were conducted around Barrow, and work continued on listed eider species and yellow-billed loons in Russia.
- Service staff facilitated an effective mitigation plan for the Rock Creek Mine Project.
- We contributed to the effort to have the Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership recognized by the National Fish Habitat Action Plan Board.
- We coordinated Service actions in responding to 43 oil and hazardous materials spills.
- We investigated the adverse effects of lead shot exposure in waterfowl, sampling blood from more than 500 ducks.
- Along with our Japanese partners, we contributed to significant advances in endangered short-tailed albatross rearing and recovery in 2010.
- On June 9, 2010 the U.S.-Russian Commissioners to the Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Conservation and Management of the Alaska-Chukotka Polar Bear Population adopted a limit to the harvest of polar bears from the Chukchi and Bering Seas; this historic vote, which recommends that an annual harvest should be limited to no more than 58 animals, significantly enhances our, and the Russian Federation's, ability to manage and conserve this population of polar bears.
- Yukon River salmon management activities included federal in-season subsistence management, genetic mixed stock fishery assessment, tributary spawning escapement monitoring, and participation in international treaty meetings.



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Mitigating the effects of invasives is a partnership between FES and events such as this year's Fairbanks weed smackdown.

Endangered Species Act in 2008; and the opening of a Fish & Wildlife Service office in Barrow, staffed year round by a fish & wildlife biologist and a community liaison.

Service staff worked to assist developers seeking to tap into sources of renewable energy in an environmentally friendly way. Last year, we worked closely with

entrepreneurs designing one of the first viable hydrokinetic projects in the country, potentially located in Upper Cook Inlet. We also worked across the State with the wind industry to help developers site facilities that avoid, minimize, and compensate for potential impacts. And finally, we assisted developers investigating geothermal energy potential in the Mt. Spurr area.

Climate change and an increasing connectedness to the "outside" put Alaska at higher

risk of biological invasion. Our staff input and outreach efforts played pivotal roles in detecting and responding to two new invasions in 2010. Early detection of Canadian waterweed (*Elodea canadensis*) was enabled through publication of a new Service-funded guide to Alaska's native and potential invasive aquatic plants. The highly invasive coastal tunicate (*Didemnum vexillum*, aka "marine vomit") was discovered in Alaska for the first time in the summer of 2010. Service staff helped initiate the funding and formation of a rapid response partnership.



T. Wurtz/USFWS

Canadian waterweed, *Elodea canadensis* (above), disrupts boating and dramatically alters fish habitat.



ADF&G

Invasive tunicate, *Didemnum vexillum* (aka "marine vomit"), overgrowing an oyster cage near Sitka, Alaska.

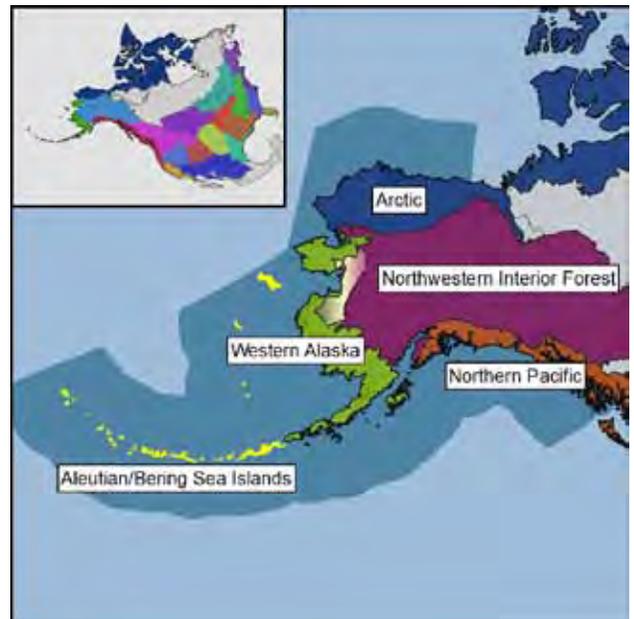
Science Applications

The Science Applications program works with the Regional leadership and staff to develop and implement initiatives to support and facilitate the use of science within the region, assisting with identifying and prioritizing science needs. The program's areas of focus include the coordination of Alaska's Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs); working with the Alaska Climate Change Executive Round Table (ACCER); coordinating the Region's Climate Change Advisory Committee that helps the Region address climate change in refuge plans and other planning processes, project reviews, etc.; and facilitating the identification and prioritization of regional science needs.

New to the Alaska Region this year, the Science Applications Program has made considerable progress. In FY 2010, an Assistant Regional Director for Science Applications was hired. The Arctic LCC hired core staff positions, including LCC and Science Coordinators and a Spatial Analyst. A Steering Committee was formed that developed shared conservation goals. The Arctic LCC Charter was finalized and endorsed by the Steering Committee. Eleven innovative research projects to address shared conservation goals were initiated using LCC funds.

Also in FY 2010, the Western Alaska LCC was piloted, including hiring LCC and Science coordinators and convening an interim steering committee. This interim committee met three times, with a focus on strategic planning and implementing outreach. Numerous additional meetings with potential partners from NGOs, universities, and other agencies were held to discuss LCCs. A state-wide LCC introduction webinar was developed by a 5-agency working group and delivered to state and federal agencies by three different agency leads.

The Alaska Region led the development of two foundational documents. The first document detailed the structure and governance for Alaska's LCC, its Climate Science Center, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's proposed Regional Climate Service in Alaska. The second formalized the executive-level partnership embodied by the Alaska Climate Change Executive Roundtable.



Terrestrial and marine boundaries of Alaska's five LCCs; inset shows the network of LCCs across the North American continent.

With help and much appreciated assistance from other programs within the Region, the Science Applications Program is officially up and running!

Other Accomplishments

- Participated in regional Leadership Conference focused on Energy and Climate Change.
- The Alaska Region was the top region in obligating Landscape Conservation Cooperative FY10 funds.
- Worked closely with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to further the development of LCCs in Alaska.
- Helped develop national documents for the Fisheries and CPA programs as those programs identify ways to integrate their program strengths into the conservation strategies of the LCCs.
- Assisted the North Pacific LCC leads in taking the first steps to establish this LCC.
- Printed a statewide LCC brochure to spread the word about this important new approach to conservation.



January 2011

“Once again, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Alaska Region can look back on a year of outstanding accomplishments; achievements that hit at the very core of our mission to work with others and conserve wildlife for current and future generations of Americans.”

Geoffrey L. Haskett, Regional Director

Front Cover Photo:

These students discover a new fascination with nature while working in Alaska in the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) program. YCC is a summer employment program for young men and women ages 15 through 18, from all segments of society, who work, learn, and earn together by doing projects on public land. Since 1970 the Youth Conservation Corps program has operated as a work-earn-learn program for youth. The program is administered by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife, National Park Service, and U.S. Department of Agriculture - Forest Service. Currently there are two National Wildlife Refuges with YCC programs, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Soldotna, Alaska and Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge, Tok, Alaska.