

The Service Finds No Significant Impact of Proposed Steller's Eider Reintroduction to the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta

Use of surrogate hens to be tested this summer on Kigigak Island

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today released its Environmental Assessment (EA) and announced its Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) regarding a proposed project to reintroduce the threatened Steller's eiders to the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta (YK Delta). The Service evaluated two alternatives in the EA: no action and reintroduction. Based on the analysis, the Service has concluded that the proposed reintroduction would not have significant adverse impacts.

The Service will now explore methods to reintroduce Steller's eiders to the YK Delta. To date, the Service has received interest, encouragement, and logistical support from communities on the central YK Delta. In addition, the Service has partnered with the Alaska SeaLife Center which has established a captive flock for Steller's eider reintroduction work. The Service plans to continue working with local residents and the Alaska SeaLife Center through the various phases of the project.

The first phase will begin this summer, when the Service will see whether using surrogate hens to hatch and raise Steller's eiders is feasible. The project will take place on Kigigak Island and will use eggs produced by the captive flock at the Alaska SeaLife Center. The Service will evaluate this project in the fall of 2016 to determine if and how to proceed with the reintroduction effort.

Steller's eiders were once considered common breeders on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta's central coast, but by the mid-1970s sightings were rare and only one nest has been found since 2005. Their near disappearance from the YK Delta was a primary factor in the listing of the Alaska-breeding population as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1997. Reintroduction is thought to be the only way to reestablish a viable breeding population in western Alaska and will help restore the natural diversity of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge.

The National Environmental Policy Act requires an EA be done on a proposed action and alternatives to evaluate potential impact to the human environment. Prior to drafting the EA, the Service met with potentially affected tribes and held public meetings to help identify issues to address in the EA. The draft EA was made available for public review and comment for 30 days. Summaries of the comments received and the Service's responses are appended to the EA.

The Final EA, FONSI, the 2016 Reintroduction Work Plan and other information on the Steller's eider reintroduction program are available at:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information, visit www.fws.gov, or connect with us through social media at <http://www.fws.gov/home/socialmedia/index.html>.