



**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**  
**Region 7 - Alaska**  
**1011 East Tudor Road**  
**Anchorage, Alaska 99503**  
**(907)786-3309 (TDD Available)**

*News*

13-16

July 19, 2013

Contact: David Irons, 907-786-3376

[David\\_iron@fws.gov](mailto:David_iron@fws.gov)

## **Potential Recovery of Pigeon Guillemot in Prince William Sound Comments Requested on Draft Environmental Assessment**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), along with the U.S. Forest Service-Chugach National Forest (Forest Service), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service-Wildlife Service (APHIS-WS) announce the availability of the draft Environmental Assessment "Potential Recovery of Pigeon Guillemot Populations, Naked Island Group – Prince William Sound, Alaska." The comment period will be for 30 days, starting July 19, 2013 and ending on Aug 17, 2013.

Management of the Naked Island Group, located in Prince William Sound, Alaska, is administered by the Forest Service. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game also has an interest in this project to ensure their mandate for fish and game management is met.

The pigeon guillemot (*Cephus columba*) is currently the only marine bird species remaining affected by the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill and is listed as "not recovering" on the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council's Injured Resources List. Since 1989, the pigeon guillemot population in Prince William Sound has declined 47% and there is no sign of population stabilization or recovery. Approximately 100 pigeon guillemots remain at the Naked Island Group. The primary limiting factor for pigeon guillemot reproductive success and population recovery at the Naked Island Group appears to be American mink (*Neovision vision*) predation. The draft Environmental Assessment proposes management actions required to recover the pigeon guillemot population in Prince William Sound. The Naked Island Group has historically been the most important breeding location for the pigeon guillemot in Prince William Sound.

The Service announced scoping for this draft Environmental Assessment in January, 2012 and invited the public to provide their comments during a 60-day public review period. In addition, four public meetings were held in Valdez, Cordova, Whittier, and Anchorage in late February, 2012. Based on comments received as well as agency participation, this draft Environmental Assessment analyzes two alternatives:

**Alternative A: No Action-Current Management.** No management action to control or reduce American mink would be taken under this alternative. The area would remain open under State and Federal regulations for public trapping of American mink. The Naked Island Group would continue to be managed by the Forest Service as a wilderness study area to maintain and protect the existing wilderness character. Under this alternative, it is likely that the pigeon guillemot population will continue to decline.

**Alternative B: Proposed Action – Control of Predatory Mink.** This action would remove predatory American mink over a three to five year period from the nesting areas of pigeon guillemots at the Naked Island Group. The first three years would entail removing American mink. Year four and five would involve monitoring and removing any remaining American mink found in the nesting zone of the Naked Island Group. Project success would be assessed at the end of year five, if necessary, further action would be taken after the agencies discussed the best way to proceed to ensure the recovery of the pigeon guillemot. The Naked Island Group would continue to be managed by the Forest Service as a wilderness study area to maintain and protect the existing wilderness character. It is expected that reducing the American mink population would result in recovery to an estimated 1,000 pigeon guillemot in 15 years.

The draft Environmental Assessment can be downloaded at <http://alaska.fws.gov/>. For additional information, please contact Dr. David Irons at 907-786-3376.

Please provide your comments via the U.S. Postal Service or email below to:

David Irons, Seabird Coordinator  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
1011 East Tudor Road  
Anchorage, Alaska 99503 USA  
email: [david\\_iron@fws.gov](mailto:david_iron@fws.gov)  
Phone 907/786-3376 Fax 907/786-3641

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