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**NEWS**

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## **Quick Action Stops Mouse Invasion of St. George Island, Alaska**

House mice were never meant to be on the remote and windswept Bering Sea Island of St. George, Alaska, so it was quite a shock for Mark Mercurief and his coworkers from the City of St. George when they opened a shipping container of grass seed and straw, and found house mice scurrying around inside. St. George is one of the few populated islands in the world where house mice have not become established and the residents of the island (both people and wild animals) want to keep it that way. No nuisance mice, gnawed food packages or threats to native wildlife for them! “It was a surprise,” said Mercurief, “and not a nice one.”

Recognizing the threat, the city workers immediately contacted Chris Mercurief, President of the St. George Traditional Council, the organization charged with protecting the island from rodent introductions. Mercurief, and a crew from the Traditional Council, set traps and spread the news to the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge because part of the island is a National Wildlife Refuge and home to two million nesting seabirds. The Refuge and the Traditional Council have long been partners working to keep St. George free of invasive rodents, so once the mice were discovered they worked together with the City to come up with a plan to remove the mice.

Two experienced rodent trappers from the Refuge, Steve Ebbert and Greg Thomson flew to St. George as soon as possible, thanks to financial help provided by the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation. Once the biologists made it to the island they immediately got to work eradicating the mice. When the dust cleared more than 50 mice were trapped by the collective effort of the Refuge, the Traditional Council and the City. Fortunately, all the mice were inside the shipping container and had not yet spread to adjacent containers or the tundra.

“We got really lucky here” said Alaska Maritime Refuge biologist Marc Romano. “If mice had established themselves on St. George they could have threatened the wildlife and gotten into the village.” Mice can kill wild bird eggs and chicks, alter native vegetation, and could have threatened the native lemming species that’s found only on St. George Island. In addition, eradicating mice once they’ve become established is expensive and in many circumstances nearly impossible.

The people of St. George Island have a long and successful history of cooperation with the Alaska Maritime Refuge in keeping invasive rodents off of their island. The strength of this partnership was evident during the recent efforts to eradicate the house mice. The early detection and swift action on the part of the St. George Traditional Council and City Government personnel helped ensure that the mice did not spread across the island. The expertise and hard work of the Alaska Maritime Refuge biologists helped eliminate all of the mice in the shipping container and confirmed that mice had not become

established elsewhere. Finally, the financial support of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation allowed the rapid response to take place, and helped make this into a success story.

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