



Threatened and Endangered Species Reintroducing Steller's Eiders in Alaska *Next Steps in Recovery*

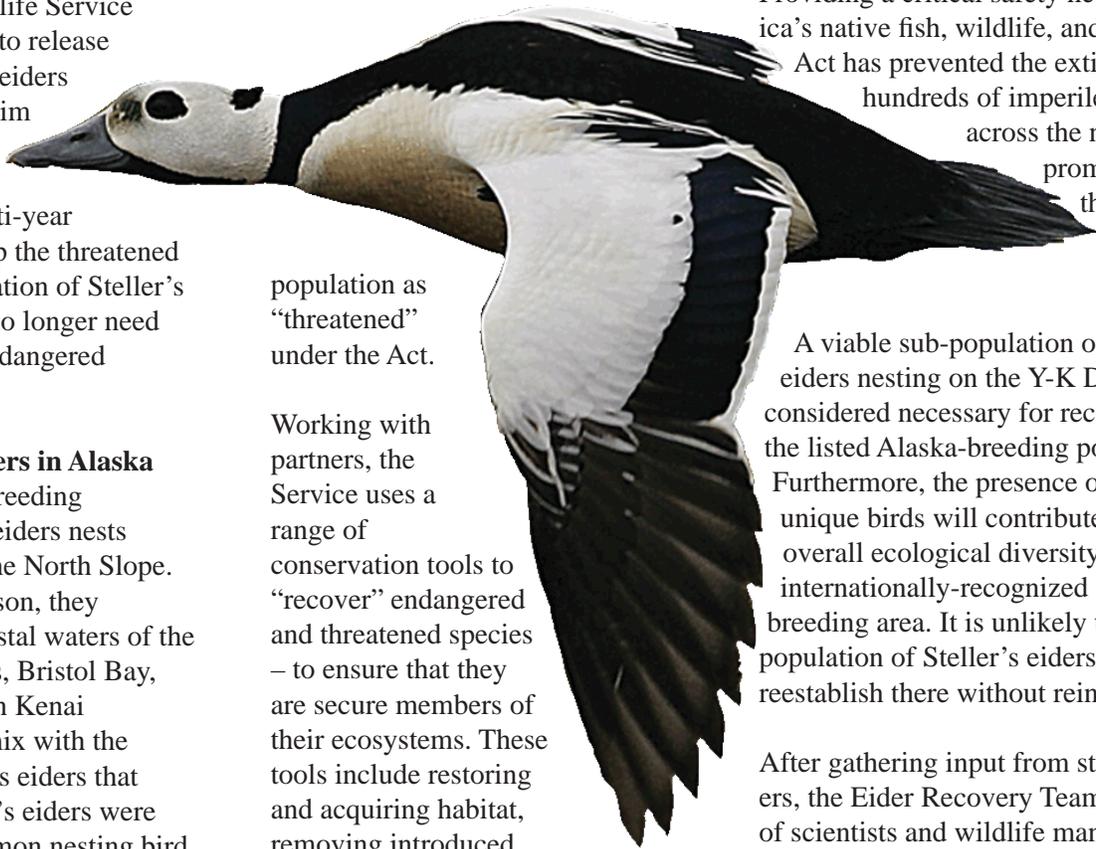
The Reintroduction Program

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has proposed to release captive-raised Steller's eiders on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta (Y-K Delta) in southwestern Alaska.

The purpose of the multi-year release project is to help the threatened Alaska-breeding population of Steller's eiders recover so they no longer need protection under the Endangered Species Act (Act).

Status of Steller's Eiders in Alaska

Currently, the Alaska-breeding population of Steller's eiders nests nearly exclusively on the North Slope. Outside the nesting season, they occur in near-shore coastal waters of the eastern Aleutian Islands, Bristol Bay, Kodiak, and the western Kenai Peninsula where they mix with the more numerous Steller's eiders that breed in Russia. Steller's eiders were once considered a common nesting bird on the Y-K Delta. Only eleven nests have been found on the Y-K Delta since 1997. Their near disappearance from the Y-K Delta was a primary factor in the listing of the Alaska-breeding



population as "threatened" under the Act.

Working with partners, the Service uses a range of conservation tools to "recover" endangered and threatened species – to ensure that they are secure members of their ecosystems. These tools include restoring and acquiring habitat, removing introduced animal predators or invasive plant species, conducting surveys, monitoring individual populations, and breeding species in captivity and releasing them into their historical range.

Providing a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife, and plants, the Act has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation while promoting the recovery of many others.

A viable sub-population of Steller's eiders nesting on the Y-K Delta is considered necessary for recovery of the listed Alaska-breeding population. Furthermore, the presence of these unique birds will contribute to the overall ecological diversity of this internationally-recognized waterfowl breeding area. It is unlikely that a population of Steller's eiders will reestablish there without reintroduction.

After gathering input from stakeholders, the Eider Recovery Team (a group of scientists and wildlife managers), and representatives from central Y-K Delta tribes and communities, the Service proposed to reintroduce Steller's eiders to this region. If successful, the Service anticipates Steller's eiders nesting on the Y-K Delta will migrate to and share the



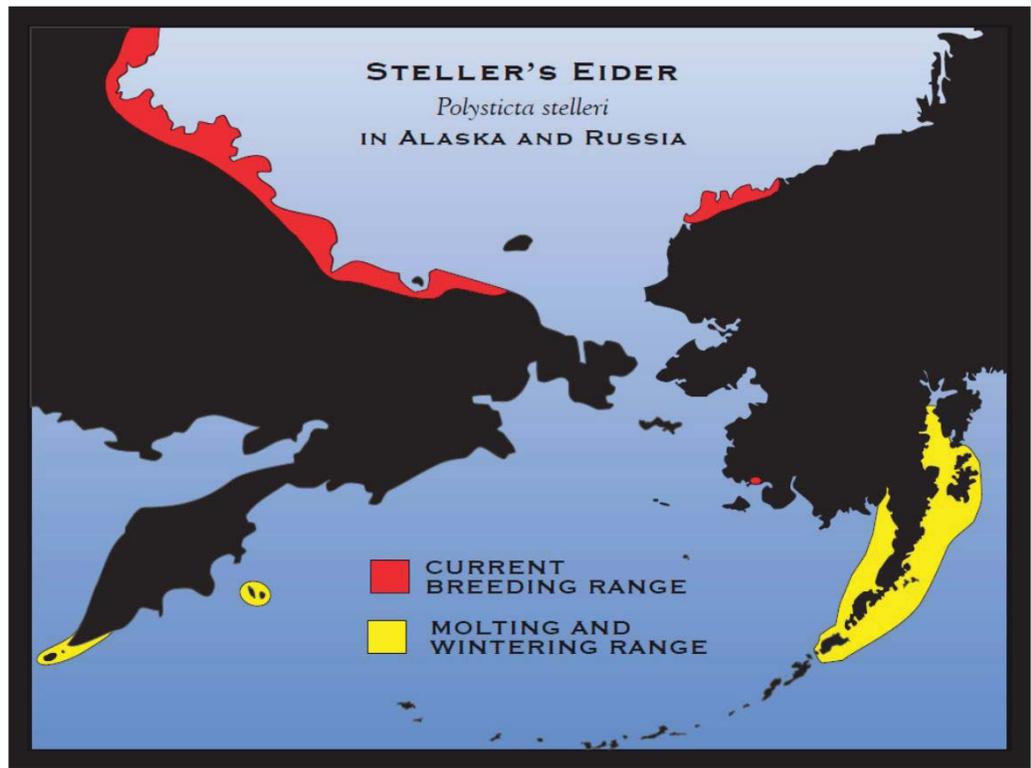
Steller's eiders resting peacefully at the Alaska Sealife Center

same non-breeding areas currently used by Steller's eiders nesting on the North Slope and in Arctic Russia.

Project Planning Steps - The Service is engaging interested parties in project planning through the National Environmental Policy Act process, which has several steps. The first step of this process is scoping, which the Service has completed. During scoping, the Service described the proposed action to interested parties, why the action is needed, and sought input. The Service specifically sought comments and concerns to be addressed in a draft Environmental Assessment. The comment period ended April 15, 2014. Following scoping, the Service developed a draft Environmental Assessment that lays out the issues, alternatives, analysis of impacts, and describes a preferred alternative. The Service is currently seeking input on the draft Environmental Assessment. The comment period for this document will end November 16, 2015.

In fall or early winter, the Service will determine whether the proposed action will result in significant impacts. If the Service determines there could be a significant impact, it will initiate an environmental impact statement process that could take an additional year for public review and input. Alternately, the Service may issue a Finding of No Significant Impact and initiate the next steps for reintroduction.

Public Involvement - The Service welcomes public comment on this project. All comments received, including those from individuals, become part



Distribution of Steller's eiders in Alaska and Russia.

Information on this topic, including updates on meeting schedules, may be found on the Service's web site: <http://1.usa.gov/1bmQkZ2> or on facebook: <http://on.fb.me/1bmPEmy>.

of the public record and are available upon request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and Departmental policies and procedures. Name, address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information, if attached to a comment, may be made available to the public upon request. Withholding personal identifying information from public review can

be requested but cannot be guaranteed. In addition, certain concerns related to the Steller's eider recovery program are outside the scope of this process and will not be addressed. For example, revising the Steller's Eider Recovery Plan or re-classifying the Alaska-breeding population under the Act are actions that, if undertaken, would be conducted using different procedures.

Interested parties may submit comments.

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Steller's eiders brood near Barrow, Alaska