



# Reintroducing Steller's Eiders in Alaska

## *Next Steps in Recovery*

### The Reintroduction Program

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is proposing to release captive-raised Steller's eiders on the Yukon-Kuskokwim River Delta (Y-K Delta) in southwestern Alaska. The purpose of the multi-year release project is to help the threatened Alaska-breeding population recover so it no longer needs the protection under the Endangered Species Act (Act). Recovery of the species is a high priority for the Service.

### Status of Steller's Eiders in Alaska

Currently, the Alaska-breeding population of Steller's eiders nests on the North Slope. Outside the nesting season, the birds may be found in coastal areas of the eastern Aleutians, Bristol Bay, Kodiak and the western Kenai Peninsula where they overlap with Steller's eiders that breed in Russia. Steller's eiders were once considered a common nesting bird on the Y-K Delta. However, this sub-population declined in the mid-20th century and only three nests have been found in the last decade. Their near disappearance was a primary factor in the listing of the Alaska-breeding population as "threatened" under the Act.



To recover species, the Act requires use of all methods and procedures needed to bring an endangered or threatened species to the point that the Act's safeguards are no longer necessary. 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 healthy 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 in 2013, the Service is proposing to reintroduce Steller's eiders to this region. If successful, we anticipate reintroduced birds will migrate to and use the same non-breeding areas currently used by Steller's eiders.

### Project Steps

An early step in the project is sharing the proposal with the public and considering their comments, questions and observations. Specifically, the Service would like to determine the scope of the issues to be considered in an environmental assessment under the framework of the National Environmental Policy Act. The first



*Steller's eiders resting peacefully at the Alaska Sealife Center.*

step in that process is known as a scoping period.

During scoping, the Service will describe the proposed action; why we feel action is needed; and provide the public an opportunity to learn about the proposal and provide input. Officially, the public comment period begins March 3, 2014, and the deadline to submit ideas on the proposed action is April 15, 2014. After that period ends the Service will develop a draft environmental assessment that will lay out the issues, alternatives, analysis of impacts, and describe a preferred alternative.

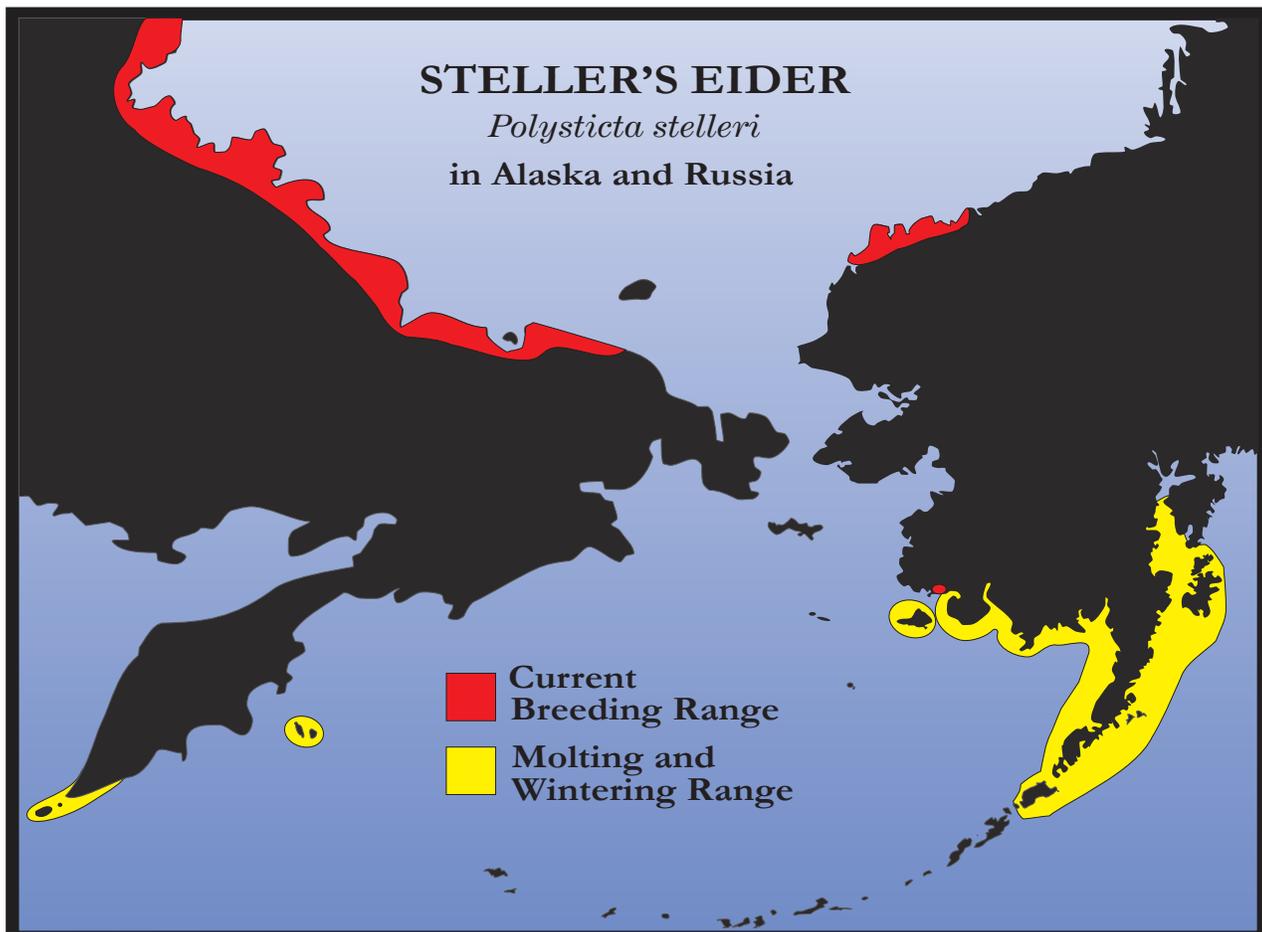
**Information on this topic, including updates on meeting schedules, may be found on the Service's Web site:**

<http://1.usa.gov/1bmQkZ2>

**or on Facebook:**

<http://on.fb.me/1bmPEmy>.

Later in 2014, the Service will provide an opportunity for additional public input on the draft environmental assessment. In the late summer or early fall, the Service may issue a Finding of No Significant Impact and initiate the next steps for reintroduction. If the Service determines



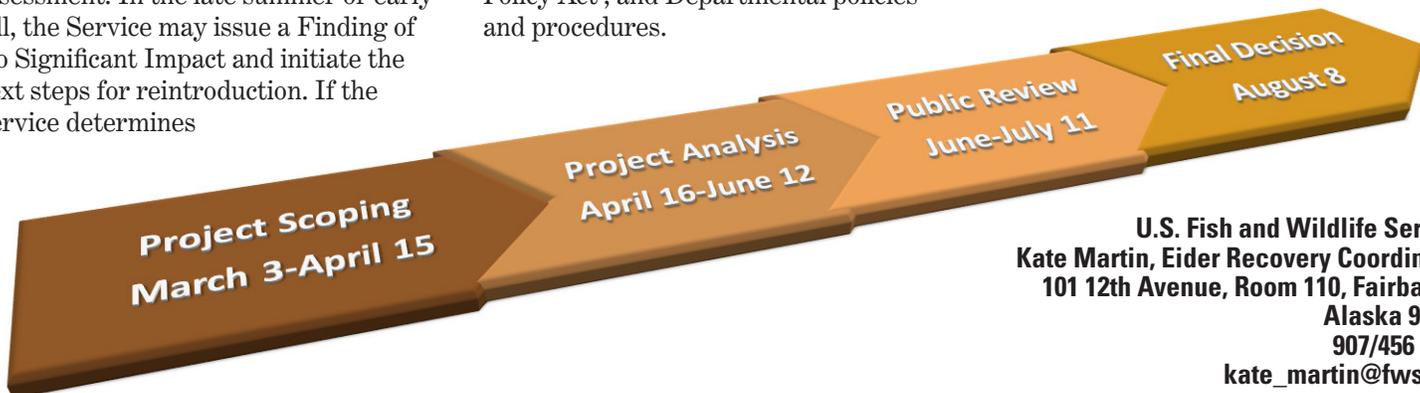
*Distribution of Steller's eiders in Alaska and Russia.*

there could be a significant impact, an environmental impact statement process will be initiated - a process that could take an additional year or longer and that would provide for public review and input.

#### **Public Involvement**

We welcome public involvement in this exciting project. All comments received, including those from individuals, become part of the public record, and are available to the public 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, the issue of removing protections provided by the Act is a decision the Service would make using a separate procedure.



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