

## Spotlight Species Action Plan

*Spectacled eider*

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## U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE - SPOTLIGHT SPECIES ACTION PLAN

**Common Name:** Spectacled Eider

**Scientific Name:** *Somateria fischeri*

**Lead Region:** 7

**Lead Field Office:** Fairbanks Fish and Wildlife Field Office

### **Species Information:**

Status: Threatened

Recovery Priority Number or Listing Priority Number: RPN=5

Recovery Plan or Candidate Assessment Form: Recovery Plan dated 1996.

Most Recent 5-year Review: No formal review.

Other: Recovery Team updates and prioritizes recovery action list on an approximately annual basis. Updates are approved by the Regional Director.

Threats: Threats on breeding grounds include ingestion of spent lead shot, shooting, and predation by mammalian and avian predators. Potential alterations to breeding pond salinity or food availability due to climate change need to be investigated. In marine habitats, potential threats include changes in availability of benthic prey and sea ice, and future movement of bottom trawl commercial fishing into critical habitat, all due to climate change; increasing competition with walrus due to sea ice loss; and future offshore oil and gas development in molting or staging areas.

**Target:** Species status improved. The delisting criteria in the Recovery Plan were developed for each of 3 breeding populations. However, the entire species was listed prior to the policy on Distinct Population Segments, so individual breeding populations cannot currently be delisted separately. The Russian breeding population is large enough to meet delisting criteria laid out in the Recovery Plan. The Yukon Delta breeding population is increasing and could meet delisting criteria in 5-10 years if current trend continues. The North Slope breeding population is stable, and lower than the recovery criteria standard.

**Measure:** Change Recovery Priority Number from 5 (low recovery potential) to 2 (high recovery potential). Approach specific recovery criteria for delisting as outlined in recovery plan.

**Actions:** Current list of high priority recovery actions listed in our Recovery On-line Activity Reporting system (ROAR) address major threats described above.

*Identify responsible parties for the actions:* An eider recovery coordinator is responsible for facilitating these actions, including identifying partners and funding sources. Many partners are actively involved in recovery of this species, including multiple divisions within the Service, other Federal land management and regulatory agencies, tribes and other Alaska Native organizations, State and local agencies, industry stakeholder groups and management bodies, the Alaska SeaLife Center (a research and educational institution), and conservation organizations. Many of these

groups are represented on the Recovery Team. Each recovery action has an identified lead, and a description detailing the purpose, scope and methods required to accomplish it.

*Estimated costs of the actions:* There are currently more than 30 high priority recovery actions on the ROAR list. Costs vary depending on the type of partnership and in-kind support used to leverage projects. In some cases, portions of projects are funded as sources become available, so total cost may be variable. For example, a winter survey of spectacled eiders required applying satellite transmitters to eiders on breeding grounds over two years, securing aircraft contracts for aerial surveys over a remote area of the Bering Sea, and acquiring simultaneous marine habitat information from benthic scientists on the icebreaker *Healy*. The total cost will exceed a million dollars over a 5 year period. However, it was funded in sections from various partners, with each section also a stand-alone project that answered important questions in its own right. Other recovery actions such as education to prevent shooting or the use of lead shot by hunters are often opportunistic, using existing outreach programs, so their cost is variable and difficult to calculate on an annual basis.

**Role of other agencies:** The role of other agencies is critical to implement many recovery actions. Some spectacled eiders breed on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and State of Alaska lands leased for oil and gas development, and offshore development in eider critical habitat is regulated by the Minerals Management Service. Commercial fishing could eventually occur in critical habitat managed by NOAA Fisheries and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). All these agencies are partners, and have funded eider recovery projects and/or worked to conserve eiders under their regulatory authority. For example, BLM funds eider education efforts on the North Slope, and the NPMFC has facilitated funding of the winter survey described above, and has worked with NOAA Fisheries to close commercial fishing in the Northern Bering Sea where critical habitat occurs. The U.S. Geological Survey conducts research on the spectacled eider, and participates on the Eider Recovery Team. The State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game and North Slope Borough have representatives on the Recovery Team, and are actively involved in eider management.

**Role of other ESA programs:** During section 7 consultations on projects that may affect the spectacled eider, we work with the Federal action agency to minimize potential adverse effects to the species, and incorporate protective measures into proposed projects as appropriate. Section 7 consultations on eiders are conducted by both the Fairbanks and Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Offices. The Regional Office issues section 10 recovery permits that authorize research projects conducted by multiple partners. We work with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to develop section 6 projects on endangered, threatened, and candidate species in Alaska, including the spectacled eider. The goal of these projects is to learn more about the species and the threats facing them, in an effort to improve their status.

**Role of other FWS programs:** The Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge harbors breeding spectacled eiders, and is actively involved in monitoring breeding populations and conducting the only current North American study on spectacled eiders. The Division of Migratory Bird Management supports surveys to monitor spectacled eiders on the Yukon Delta and on the Arctic Coastal Plain in northern Alaska, and on the marine wintering grounds. The Division of Law Enforcement considers listed eiders to be a top priority, and works closely with the Refuge and partners on the Arctic Coastal Plain to prevent illegal harvest of eiders.

**Additional funding analysis:** We are working to acquire funding for all high priority recovery actions. Additional funding at the earliest possible date will increase the likelihood we can raise

the RPN within 5 years, particularly on the Yukon Delta, where the only ongoing study of spectacled eider annual survival is at risk because of losses in Refuge budgets. In addition, further work on predator control, understanding effects of climate change, and education to prevent lead shot deposition into eider habitat and to prevent shooting would benefit from increased funding. We will continue to measure improvement by monitoring eider breeding population levels. Continuing the annual survival study (which also gives us information on effects of climate change on both wintering and breeding grounds) requires \$70,000 to 100,000 per year. Additional predator control research and implementation would cost \$50,000-\$300,000. Additional education could be accomplished with an additional \$20,000 per year.

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