



# Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge

*Planning News*

*Winter 2005*

*This is the first in a series of updates on the revision of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge. It announces the beginning of the revision process and asks for your help in identifying the issues that need to be addressed in the revised plan, which will provide overall direction for management of the Refuge for the next 15 years.*

## **The purposes for which Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge was established and shall be managed include**

*i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity . . . ;*

*ii) to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats;*

*iii) to provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes in (i) and (ii), the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents;*

*iv) to ensure . . . water quality and necessary water quantity within the refuge; and*

*v) to provide . . . opportunities for interpretation and environmental education, particularly in conjunction with any adjacent state visitor facilities.*

*Section 302(8)(B) of ANILCA*

## **About the Refuge**

On December 2, 1980, Congress enacted the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), which, among other things, designated Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge and identified the purposes for which it was established. One of 16 national wildlife refuges in Alaska, Tetlin Refuge encompasses 934,000 acres of the Upper Tanana River Basin.

The Refuge is located west of the Alaska–Yukon border between the Alaska Highway and Wrangell–St. Elias National Park and Preserve (see map on page 2). The Upper Tanana Basin is characterized by snowcapped mountains and glacier-fed rivers, spruce forests, muskegs, treeless tundra, and an abundance of wetlands. Moose, caribou, lynx, whitefish, trumpeter swans, bald eagles, muskrats, and numerous species of ducks are among the animals that use the rich habitats of Tetlin Refuge.



The mixed spruce-hardwood forests and wetlands of Tetlin Refuge are bisected by the Chisana and Nabesbna rivers, which converge to form the Tanana River.

## A Vision for Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge (Draft)

*Through collaboration with a diverse network of partners and through the highest principles of conservation, Tetlin Refuge will foster a strong land ethic, scientific leadership, and opportunities for people to discover meaningful relationships with nature in a dynamic and changing landscape. As a result, Tetlin Refuge will perpetuate its unique history and continuing role as a vital passageway for fish, wildlife, plants, people, and cultures.*

## What is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan?

*In general, a comprehensive conservation plan does the following:*

- *Ensures that the purposes for which the refuge was established and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System are being fulfilled*
- *Ensures national policy direction is integrated with refuge management direction*
- *Provides an opportunity for public participation in developing management guidance*
- *Provides a step-by-step process for making and recording refuge decisions*
- *Establishes a broad management direction for refuge programs and activities*
- *Provides a way to evaluate accomplishments over time*

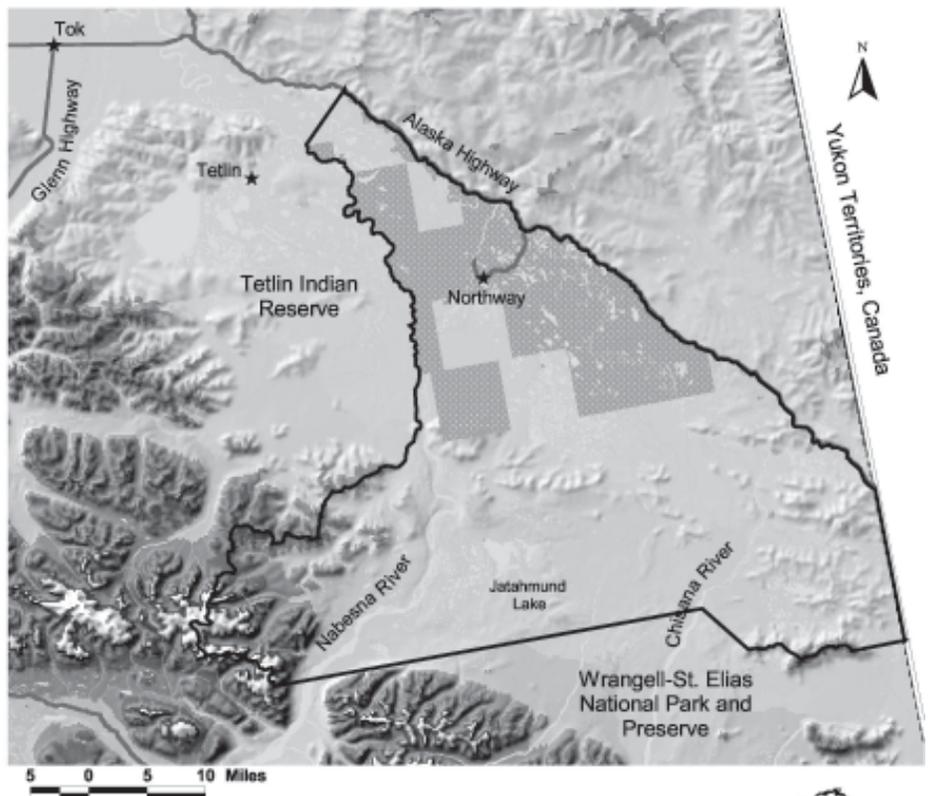
## Why Revise the Plan?

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) is required to prepare and periodically review comprehensive conservation plans for each refuge. Revising the 1987 Tetlin Plan is a way of better preparing for future management of the Refuge. The revision process allows Refuge staff to reflect on our progress in meeting the purposes for which the Refuge was established, to update information in the Plan, to incorporate new information and responsibilities we did not have before, to evaluate the effects of various changes in and around the Refuge, and to address important new and ongoing concerns.

## What Long-Term Direction Did the 1987 Plan Provide for Tetlin Refuge?

The original 1987 conservation plan for Tetlin Refuge set overall guidance for meeting the requirements of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 and for fulfilling the purposes of the Tetlin Refuge and other requirements identified by ANILCA. It designated areas within the Refuge according to their resources and values; specified programs for conserving fish and wildlife and maintaining other special values of the Refuge; specified activities and uses that may be compatible with the identified purposes of the Refuge; and identified opportunities for compatible fish- and wildlife-oriented recreation.

*(continued on page 3)*



- Lands not administered by Tetlin Refuge
- Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge



(continued from page 2)

Specifically, the Plan provided long-term direction for the following:

- Determining where various public use facilities and management activities could occur on the Refuge (e.g., hiking trails, boat launches, fire management and suppression)
- Assessing and, where appropriate, restoring fisheries in key rivers and lakes
- Improving opportunities for public use through environmental education, public outreach, and better visitor facilities
- Using careful prescribed burning and tree thinning to increase wildfire protection for private lands within Tetlin Refuge while maintaining healthy habitats for fish and wildlife
- Developing various step-down management plans that detail specific projects and tasks to implement the Plan

## How Successful Was Tetlin Refuge in Implementing the 1987 Plan?

Through the Plan, both the public and the Service expressed high expectations for Tetlin Refuge. We have made substantial progress in meeting those expectations.

- A growing number of partnerships and volunteers have enabled the Refuge to gather important information through biological surveys, studies, and research. This information confirms the fact that Tetlin Refuge continues to play a vital role in conserving healthy populations of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. This information will also be critical in measuring change in the years to come.
- The Refuge now has a visitor center open seven days a week in the summer to maximize opportunities for travelers driving the Alaska Highway. The Refuge has improved campgrounds, trails, boat launches, and pullouts along the Alaska Highway.
- Refuge staff now present hundreds of interpretive programs to thousands of visitors and local residents each year, and the Refuge's exceptional outreach program has received national recognition for its quality and achievements.
- The Refuge Fire Management Program has partnered with communities in hiring local workers to complete several successful tree-thinning projects and prescribed burns that reduced the danger to private lands from wildfires. The Service continues to monitor the effects of wildfires that have occurred in remote parts of the Refuge.
- With the help of local residents, recent fisheries research projects have provided new insight into the life and harvest of humpback whitefish. This information will be useful in conserving this important subsistence resource.

## What Will Not Be Addressed in the Revised Plan?

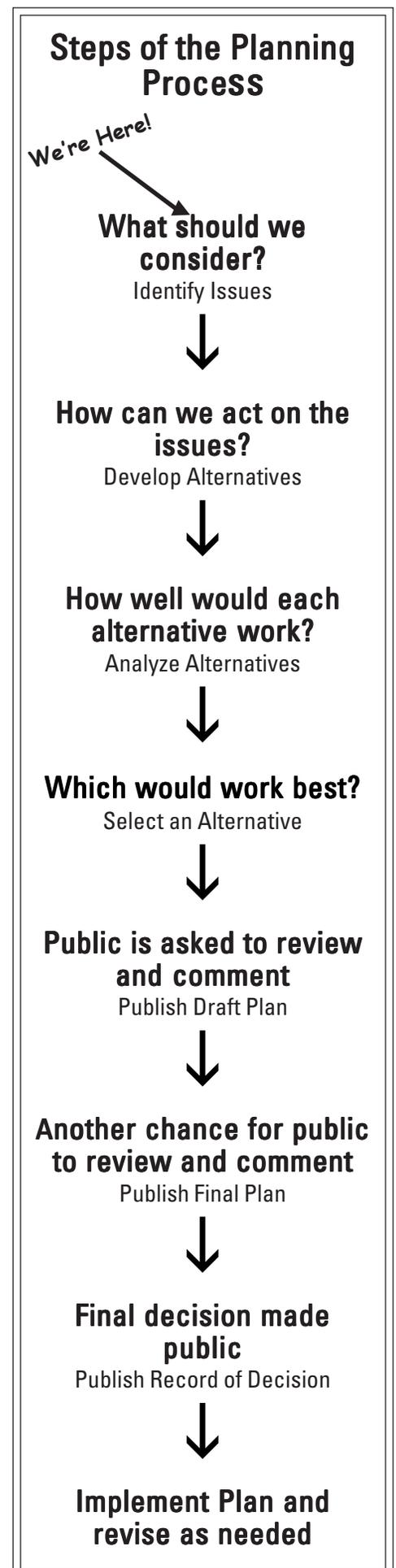
The Plan for Tetlin Refuge provides broad direction for the conservation, use, and development of refuge lands. Some decisions, however, such as the following, are outside the scope of the Plan:

- **Harvest methods, means, and bag limits for fish or wildlife.** These decisions are made primarily by the Alaska Board of Fisheries, the Alaska Board of Game, and the Federal Subsistence Board.
- **Construction, development, or other activities on private or state lands within or adjacent to Tetlin Refuge.** National wildlife refuges do not diminish the rights of landowners.
- **Uses of rivers, lakes, and streams within the Refuge.** Final determinations of which waters will be managed by the State of Alaska or by Tetlin Refuge are ongoing. Regardless, Tetlin Refuge will continue to work cooperatively with the state on issues related to waters within the Refuge.
- **Changes to laws and regulations.** These changes cannot be made through the Plan, but the document can form the basis for making these changes in the future.

## What's the next step?

Updating the Plan follows a series of steps established through the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act. The first step is developing and prioritizing a list of issues and concerns. Some concerns, including the following, have been expressed, and Service staff would like to know your opinion about these or others that you have for Tetlin Refuge.

- A mixture of prescribed fire and tree thinning is used to reduce the risks of large wildfires while maintaining a healthy ecosystem. Is this the best approach to managing refuge habitats and fire threats to private property?
- Tetlin Refuge recognizes access for subsistence and recreational uses as being compatible with refuge purposes and necessary for fulfilling the Refuge's mission. How will Tetlin Refuge ensure these uses can continue without long-term negative impacts to the health of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats?
- Invasive nonnative plants, damage to cultural resources from fire, and contaminants from a variety of activities are some of the potential threats to Tetlin Refuge. Are there other potential threats, and which do you think are most important?
- Tetlin Refuge anticipates that the number of travelers on the Alaska Highway will continue to increase. What direction should Tetlin Refuge take in providing environmental education, public outreach, and fish- and wildlife-dependant recreation opportunities for these potential visitors?
- Before the Refuge was created in 1980, construction and development had various impacts on fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats in the Upper Tanana Valley. Are there potential impacts to these resources in the future as development and construction continue near refuge lands? What risks could these impacts present to the health of fish, wildlife, plants, and people who live in and use Tetlin Refuge?



## Tell Us What You Think

You can help focus the Refuge's planning effort on things that matter to you and your community by staying on our mailing list to receive planning updates, attending our public meetings, providing comment on our draft Vision Statement (see page 2) and issues mentioned in this planning update, and describing other issues or concerns relating to Tetlin Refuge that were not mentioned. Your comments will assist in identifying the best alternatives for long-term management of Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge. Following are some questions you might consider when providing comments.

1) How many times do you visit Tetlin Refuge each year? (please circle one)

0

1–5

6–10

11–15

16–20

20+

2) Have there been changes (positive or negative) at Tetlin Refuge that have affected you? If so, please describe which are most important to you.

3) Are there certain places or resources in Tetlin Refuge you feel deserve extra attention, protection, or management? If so, please list them and explain why you think they are important.

4) Based on your own concerns, and those listed in the newsletter, what do you think are the most important issues Tetlin Refuge will face in the next 15 years?

5) If you had to pick one thing for Tetlin Refuge to continue doing, change, or accomplish in the next 15 years, what would it be?

Do you want to be on the mailing list for the Tetlin Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan revision?

No. Please remove my name from the mailing list.

Yes. I want to be added to the mailing list or my address has changed.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
(only if you represent it in an official capacity)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State/Prov: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip/Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Country: \_\_\_\_\_

*fold* ----- *fold*

*fold* ----- *fold*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

place  
stamp  
here

Mikel Haase  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Division of Conservation Planning and Policy  
1011 E. Tudor Road, MS-231  
Anchorage, AK 99503-6199



## **Public Involvement**

Involvement of the public is essential to this planning process. Everyone interested in management of Tetlin Refuge will have several opportunities to be involved during the plan revision.

Your response to this newsletter is one way for refuge staff to learn your views about the Refuge and the revision of the Conservation Plan. You will also have opportunities to comment at public meetings planned in the communities of Northway, Tetlin, Tok, Tanacross, and Delta Junction. Watch local newspapers, post offices, and other public places in these communities for announcements listing the times and locations for upcoming meetings.

Once issues are identified, refuge staff will develop alternative ways to approach them. Detailed descriptions of the alternatives will be included in a draft plan. This plan will include an analysis of how each alternative could affect the environment (an environmental impact statement). After people have had an opportunity to review and comment on the draft plan, a final plan will be prepared. Following a public review of the final plan, a decision on which alternative will be used to manage the Refuge will be made, and implementation of the Plan will begin.

### **For information about the plan or to submit comments, please write, fax, or e-mail:**

Mikel Haase, Planning Team Leader  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1011 E. Tudor Road, MS-231  
Anchorage, AK 99503-6199  
fax: (907) 786-3965  
e-mail: FW7\_Tetlin\_Planning@fws.gov

### **For information about Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge, please visit its website (<http://alaska.fws.gov/nwr/tetlin/index.htm>) or contact**

Ed Merritt, Refuge Manager  
Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge  
P.O. Box 779  
Tok, AK 99780  
(907) 883-5312

## **How You Can Help**

You can help focus the Refuge's planning effort on things that matter to you and your community by staying on our mailing list to receive planning updates, attending our public meetings, providing comment on our draft Vision Statement and on the issues mentioned in this planning update, and describing other issues or concerns relating to Tetlin Refuge that were not mentioned. Your comments will assist in identifying the best alternatives for long-term management of Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge. Please tear off and complete the comment form on the preceding pages, fold it in thirds, add a postage stamp, and return it to the Service planning team.

***Thank you!***

*The National Wildlife Refuge System Mission*  
To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats of the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

## Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge Planning News

### Look What's Inside!

*The Fish & Wildlife Service:*  
Part of the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Fish & Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing the nation's fish and wildlife populations and their habitats for the benefit of people. It has responsibility for migratory birds and fish, endangered species, and certain marine mammals. The Fish & Wildlife Service also manages the National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's largest collection of lands set aside specially for protection of fish and wildlife populations and habitats. Today there are more than 540 refuges spread from Alaska to Puerto Rico, from Maine to Hawaii. Varying in size from one-half acre to thousands of square miles, they include more than 90 million acres of the nation's best wildlife habitat. The vast majority of these lands are in Alaska.

**Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge**  
**c/o U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
**1011 E. Tudor Road**  
**Anchorage, AK 99503-6199**  
<http://alaska.fws.gov/nwr/tetlin/index.htm>

PRESORTED - STANDARD  
POSTAGE & FEES PAID  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
PERMIT NO. G-77

