

**Draft Revised Public Use  
Management Plan and  
Environmental Assessment**

*Togiak National Wildlife Refuge  
and Hagemeister Island*



## **1. Public Use Management Plan Introduction**

This is the Draft Public Use Management Plan Revision and Environmental Assessment for the 4,786,965 million acre Togiak National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), and the 73,890 acre Hagemeister Island portion of Alaska Maritime Refuge located in southwestern Alaska.

The purpose of this Plan is to provide direction to the Refuge in managing public use on the Togiak Refuge. It represents the combined effort and input of the State of Alaska, local residents, the visiting public, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) staff.

Chapter 1 of this Plan describes the purpose for the Plan revision, various mandates considered in its writing, and how the process was carried out. Chapter 2 describes the various alternatives courses of action developed for the future management of public use on the refuge, including the preferred management alternatives.

A description of affected environment is in Chapter 3 of the Comprehensive Plan, located in the first section of this document. It includes information on the physical characteristics of the Refuge, its fish, wildlife, wilderness, cultural and archaeological resources, the local economy and its relationship to the Refuge, the public use and recreation on the Refuge, and how these resources and their uses have changed since 1985.

Chapter 4 of this Plan describes how each of those alternatives is expected to affect the environment if it is implemented. Chapter 5 provides a summary evaluation of the alternatives proposed in this Plan.

Chapter 6 describes how this Plan and the preferred alternative will be implemented.

### **1.1 Purpose and Need**

In 1991, the Public Use Management Plan for the Togiak Refuge was completed and the Refuge began implementation. Since the implementation of the Public Use Management Plan, several studies have been completed, data have been collected, wildlife populations have changed, and public use of the Refuge has changed.

The original Public Use Management Plan states that every three to five years, Refuge staff should formally evaluate the plan to determine if changes are needed. The plan also states

that when non-guided sport fishing use approaches or exceeds the level of guided use, an analysis is to be conducted to determine if further regulation of non-guided use is needed. Since the plan was completed, non-guided use has increased and has reached or exceeded the level of guided use on the Kanektok and Goodnews rivers. The current plan also allows the existing level of guided sport fishing to continue on the Upper Goodnews River. Allocation of guided sport fishing use for the river was deferred until additional resource and use data could be acquired. The refuge staff has since gathered new data on Refuge public use and natural resources.

The final Public Use Management Plan will serve as a management plan for public use on the Refuge for the 5-10 years or until a significant action or event occurs that would require the Plan be revised. The plan may be modified as changes occur, and other more specific plans will be written to address specific resources and uses of the Refuge.

### 1.2 Legal and Policy Guidance

Management of the Refuge is dictated, in large part, by the legislation that created the unit and by the purposes and goals described later in this chapter. Other laws, regulations, and policies also guide the management of the Refuge.

Among the most important laws guiding Refuge management are the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, the Refuge Recreation Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Wilderness Act. These acts are described briefly in Appendix A along with other acts and legal guidance that influence management of the Refuge. For the national wildlife refuges in Alaska, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), as amended, provides key management direction. ANILCA sets forth the purposes for the Refuges; defines provisions for planning and management; and authorizes studies and programs related to wildlife and wildland resources, subsistence opportunities, and recreational and economic uses. ANILCA also provides specific direction for the management of designated Wilderness Areas in the State of Alaska beyond the direction provided in the Wilderness Act. How ANILCA influences management of the Refuge is described throughout this Plan.

## 1.3 Refuge Purposes, Vision, and Goals

### 1.3.1 *Refuge Purposes*

That portion of the Refuge designated as the Cape Newenham National Wildlife Refuge in 1969 was given the broad purpose “. . . for the protection of wildlife and their habitat . . .” Public Land Order 4583, dated Jan. 23, 1969. In addition, Sections 303(1)(B) and 303(6)(B) of ANILCA set forth the purposes for which Alaska Maritime and Togiak Refuge (including the former Cape Newenham Refuge) were established and shall be managed, including the following:

(i) To conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity, including the following:

- [Togiak Refuge] salmonids, marine birds and mammals, migratory birds, and large mammals (including their restoration to historic levels)
- [Alaska Maritime Refuge-Hagemeister Island] marine mammals, marine birds and other migratory birds, the marine resources upon which they rely, bears, caribou, and other mammals

(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 purposes set forth in subparagraphs (i) and (ii), the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents

[(iv) Alaska Maritime Refuge-Hagemeister Island] To provide, in a manner consistent with subparagraphs (i) and (ii), a program of national and international scientific research on marine resources

[(iv) Togiak Refuge; (v) Alaska Maritime Refuge [Hagemeister Island]] To ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in paragraph (i), water quality and necessary water quantity within the Refuge

- [Togiak Wilderness Area] To secure an enduring resource of wilderness, to protect and preserve the wilderness character of areas within the National Wilderness Preservation System, and to administer this wilderness for the use and enjoyment of the American people in a way that will leave it unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness

### **1.3.2 Vision Statement**

With the help of cooperators and partners, the Refuge will continue to be part of a healthy functioning ecosystem where fish and wildlife populations and their habitats exist in an environment primarily affected by the forces of nature. Current and future generations will have opportunities to participate in a variety of fish- and wildlife-dependant activities that emphasize self-reliance, solitude, and a close relationship with the environment. The public will gain an understanding of the Refuge on natural, cultural, and scientific levels to appreciate the importance of its protection and preservation for future generations.

### **1.3.3 Refuge Goals**

Goals are broad descriptive statements of desired future conditions that convey a purpose but do not define measurable units. Goals for the Refuge will direct work at carrying out its mandates and achieving the purposes defined by ANILCA and the Wilderness Act.

The Refuge developed the following goals to guide management toward meeting the vision statement and purposes of the Refuge. Objectives to help meet the goals are outlined in Section 2.2 of the Comprehensive Plan.

**Goal 1.** Increase our knowledge of refuge resources to support management decisions and maintain the health and integrity of native ecosystems.

**Goal 2.** Provide high quality fish and wildlife oriented recreation, subsistence, interpretive, and educational opportunities that promote stewardship of southwest Alaska wildlife and their habitats.

**Goal 3.** Protect the natural and cultural resources of the Refuge to ensure their integrity.

**Goal 4.** Maintain the wilderness character of the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness Area.

**Goal 5.** Develop and maintain support mechanisms and infrastructure to achieve management goals.

**Goal 6.** Maintain a leadership role in the management of [native] natural ecosystems in southwest Alaska.

## **1.4 State of Alaska Coordination**

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) has the responsibility for managing resident fish and wildlife

populations in Alaska. On refuge lands, the Service and ADF&G share the responsibility for conservation of fish and wildlife resources and their habitats, and both are engaged in extensive fish and wildlife conservation, management, and protection programs. In 1982, the Fish and Wildlife Service and ADF&G signed a Master Memorandum of Understanding that defines the cooperative management roles of each agency (see Appendix C). This memorandum sets the framework for cooperation between the two agencies.

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and its subdivisions are also key management partners. DNR manages all state-owned land, water, and surface and subsurface resources except for fish and game. The DNR Division of Mining, Land, and Water manages the state's water and submerged land interests within the Refuge. State management direction for lands in the area of the Refuge is also included in Appendix C.

## **1.5 The Planning Process**

The process used to develop this draft Plan and Environmental Assessment is consistent with the planning requirements in the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, as amended; the Service's planning policy (602 FW 1); National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C.4321-4347); and the Council on Environmental Quality's Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508).

In 1994, Togiak Refuge began to revise its Public Use Management Plan. The Refuge staff had not yet released a draft public use plan when they began to review their Comprehensive Plan in advance of its revision. To minimize the impact of two separate consecutive planning efforts, the Service chose to combine those efforts. This document is the result of that combined effort. A full description of the planning process used can be found in section 1.7 of the Comprehensive Plan located in the first section of this document. An environmental analysis for each of the five plan alternatives is found in Togiak Public Use Management Plan Chapter 2.

## **1.6 Planning Issues**

### ***1.6.1 Issues Considered But Not Addressed in the Alternatives***

Much of this plan revision is focused upon important issues raised through written and verbal comments from local, tribal, and state

governments, the general public, and Service staff. As part of the planning process, we mailed public newsletters, administered surveys, held public meetings, held planning meetings with local and state government representatives, and incorporated a number of comments from other planning newsletters, surveys, and public meetings from as far back as 1994.

Through the course of all those meetings, surveys, and correspondence, certain important issues have been identified that will not be addressed in this plan. This may be because the issue is addressed by existing laws, regulations, policies or management actions, the issue is or will be addressed in the same manner regardless of alternative selected, or the issue is outside of the scope of this planning effort.

Following is a brief discussion of issues that will not be addressed in this plan.

### *1.6.1.1 Health of Fish and Fish Populations*

The salmon of Bristol and Kuskokwim bays are the single most important resource in the area. The income and food that salmon provide are critical to the livelihoods of almost everyone in the region. Because of the importance of these fisheries, they are monitored, sampled, and studied by federal and state agencies to ensure that they continue to provide for the communities near the Togiak Refuge. Of the hundreds of thousands of salmon that return to rivers within the Togiak Refuge every year, only a few thousand are caught or taken by sport anglers and local residents. The vast majority of the harvest is taken by commercial permit. It is unlikely that current or future levels of sport or subsistence harvest will affect salmon stocks within the Togiak Refuge.

Concerns have been raised about disturbance to spawning and rearing habitats from wading anglers and jetboats. Research on wading has found variable effects, and studies of motorboat use effects on fish habitat in Alaska have not found effects large enough to warrant regulation on those rivers. Kicking up eggs to attract fish does not appear to be a problem on these rivers compared to some locations in the nation. Bank erosion from angler trampling appears minimal because most angling takes place on gravel bars. Many rivers are already seasonally closed to sport fishing for king salmon to protect spawning fish. For example, the Kanektok is closed for kings after July 25. The State does have the authority to close an area to fishing under some circumstances. Since studies have not demonstrated clear relationships between wading, jetboats and health of fish; streamside habitats appear to be in good condition; and methods

and means of take are set by the Alaska Board of Fish, these topics are considered to be outside the scope of this plan.

Another facet of this issue is the risk of disease introduced from other regions. Anglers from around the country and the world travel to Alaska and fish in the remote waters wearing the same clothing, especially waders, that they may have used in other waters where infectious disease occurs. Transportation of disease, aquatic vegetation, and aquatic organisms has occurred in other areas of the country. The Service's King Salmon Fishery Resource Office collected tissue samples from ten rainbow trout populations, two Dolly Varden populations, and one arctic char population throughout southwest Alaska during 1998 to test for specific diseases and parasites. Rainbow trout were collected from the Kanektok and Togiak river drainages. Dolly Varden and arctic char were collected from the Togiak drainage. All tests for *Myxobolus cerebralis* (whirling disease) were negative. Other bacterial pathogens tested for were all found at or below normal levels or were nonexistent. Rainbow trout that spawn in cold water temperatures are less susceptible to the detrimental effects of whirling disease. Information about appropriate gear care and disease transmission is provided to Refuge visitors. Current management actions and monitoring appear to be adequate to minimize the risk of disease transmission and will be continued regardless of alternative chosen; therefore, this is not considered a significant issue for this plan.

Other concerns are related to the effect catch-and-release fishing may have on rainbow trout. Many local community members view this common form of angling as disrespectful and inappropriate. Local anglers dislike catching fish that have been previously caught and feel that the quality of the meat is diminished. This long-standing issue is broader than a concern over the health of fish stocks; it is clearly also an issue grounded in cultural values. In the context of this issue (health of fish), we will only address the mortality aspect. Angler education has been recognized by both ADF&G and Service managers as the best method to successfully implement catch-and-release fishing and minimize mortality. Education of anglers by Togiak Refuge personnel is initiated during airport contacts for unguided floater trips and by the Togiak Refuge ranger program contacting groups in the field. Information is sent to interested parties inquiring about the Refuge. Permitted guides on the refuge are required to brief all clients on proper catch and release methods. Information provided to visitors also includes the sensitivity of catch-and-release practices to local residents.

Several comments suggested changes in fishing seasons, harvest limits, or methods of harvest. The Alaska Board of Fisheries regulates all methods and means of recreational and commercial fishing in all state waters, including waters within the Refuge; thus, these issues and suggestions are outside the scope of this Plan and will not be considered. However, the Togiak Refuge will continue to work closely with ADF&G to address these important issues and concerns.

#### *1.6.1.2 Public-Use Impacts on Wildlife*

During scoping, concerns were raised about the effect that visitors and their activities have on wildlife within the Refuge. If food, fish or game carcasses, and garbage are not properly cared for and disposed of, bears and other wildlife may learn to associate people with a source of food. Bears can also become habituated to human activities. Food conditioning and human habituation can increase the likelihood for encounters. Such encounters have the potential for human injury and for bears being killed. These types of negative encounters are very rare; to our knowledge, no one has ever been injured by a bear in the Refuge.

Displacement is another possible effect of increasing public use in wildland areas. Some animals do not adapt to increased frequency in boating, hiking, snowmobiling, or other activities; as a result, animals may avoid these activities and the areas where they occur. The primary concern is that wildlife such as bears and moose will move away from important riparian habitats during the summer and fall when public use is highest. This could affect the availability of animals for subsistence hunters as well as the health of individual animals.

There is no indication that wildlife populations have been affected by the increased presence of humans along river corridors or that subsistence hunters are having decreased success. Under all alternatives, additional information will be gathered to more clearly understand the relationship between public use and wildlife displacement within the Refuge.

#### *1.6.1.3 Public Safety and Visitor Conflicts*

The issue of motorboat safety continues to be of concern to many people who visit, work, or live in the Refuge and surrounding areas. The use of motorized boats along rivers within the Refuge and the Togiak Wilderness Area is a traditional method of access. Along certain portions of these rivers, the normal rules of navigation are not always possible. Jet-powered boats must maintain a certain minimum speed to safely negotiate sharp bends and shallow water. Some river sections are narrow, and visibility is often limited by tall grass or brush. As a result, both

motorboats and rafts sometimes find themselves in hazardous situations that can result in serious injury.

The Service has no management authority over boating safety of the general public on these waterways. The Refuge evaluates permittees on their safety record and policies. The Refuge is willing to work with partners to improve boating safety in the area.

### *1.6.1.4 Environmental Contaminants*

During the planning process, concerns were raised about the impact of heavy metals, PCBs, and other contaminants from abandoned mining claims, existing mining operations, and the U.S. Air Force long-range radar installation at Cape Newenham. This issue is being addressed through a separate process. A contaminants assessment for the Refuge was completed in 2004 as part of a National program to summarize contaminants issues on all National Wildlife Refuge. Two major sources of contamination were identified by this assessment on the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge: Snow Gulch Mine site and Cape Newenham Long Range Radar site. Final Snow Gulch cleanup took place in Spring 2007. Efforts are underway to remove or mediate the contamination at Cape Newenham.

The Service will continue to work with private landowners, the State of Alaska, and the Air Force to monitor mitigation, site remediation, or contaminant containment measures currently in place and to address future contaminant issues as they are discovered.

### *1.6.1.5 Water quality*

Local residents have expressed concerns about impacts to water quality in the rivers from improper disposal of human waste by recreational visitors. The rivers serve as the primary source of drinking water for locals. This is of particular concern along the Kanektok River, where recreational use is the highest.

To address this concern appropriately, the Service conducted a water quality study in 2001 on the Kanektok River at the Wilderness Area boundary. Results from these samples indicate that *E. coli* levels are very low and are at or below levels that occur in river systems with little or no human use (Collins 2001 [unpublished]). The low levels of contamination indicate that water quality within the jurisdiction of the Service does not require additional action at this time. Other concerns associated with human waste disposal (aesthetics, trespass) are dealt with separately.

*1.6.1.6 Camping Opportunities on State Lands*

The State of Alaska allows camping for three consecutive days at one location on Special Use Lands within the Togiak Refuge and along the Goodnews River. Public comments have suggested the length of stay be adjusted on State lands along that portion of the Kanektok River outside the Togiak Wilderness Area. This issue is the responsibility of the State of Alaska, Department on Natural Resources. State management direction is presented in Appendix C.

**1.6.2 Significant Planning Issues Addressed in this Plan**

“Significant” planning issues are those that the Service has the authority to address and that are addressed in the alternatives presented in this Draft Plan. Each of the significant issues identified through this planning process is presented in this Plan with alternative actions to address each one. Following is a brief summary of the significant issues and concerns raised during the planning process. Alternative ways of addressing these issues are discussed in chapter 2.

***Issue 1. Public Use within Cape Peirce Wildlife Viewing Area and Public Facilities at Sangor Lake***

Cape Peirce was designated as a wildlife viewing area in the 1991 PUMP to protect the marine mammals, marine birds, raptors, migratory waterfowl and their habitats while providing continued opportunities for subsistence and recreational use.

The 1991 PUMP recommends that visitation within the viewing area be limited to no more than six people at one time through a first-come, first served permit system in place from May 1 to November 30. At those times when either Pacific walrus are hauled out at Maggy Beach or seals are hauled out on sandbars in Nanvak Bay, boat and aircraft landings are limited. Instead, aircraft would be permitted to land just outside the wildlife-viewing area at Sangor Lake or at the far northern end of Nanvak Bay. There are also a number of conditions as part of special-use permits that minimize other potential wildlife-viewing disturbances.

Regulations to enforce the permit program have not been promulgated, although an informal permit program was in place for several years. At the current time, no permits are required to enter the Wildlife Viewing Area. Permits are issued on a first-come, first-served basis with no separate allocation between wildlife-viewing guides, air-taxi operators, and the general public, and can result in one group dominating the available permits. A better way to allocate these permits is of concern to business operators, the general public and the

Refuge. Also, some have suggested that the number of allowed visitors could increase and some facilities could be constructed with proper regulation and supervision. This is a significant issue for the Public Use Management Plan. Resource based factors that should be considered include wildlife disturbance, campsite conditions, and trail conditions. Social factors that should be considered include permit availability, camping conditions, and party size.

***Issue 2. Unguided Recreational Opportunities in the Kanektok and Goodnews River Watersheds***

Recreational fishing and hunting are currently compatible with the purposes of the Refuge, but concerns have been raised that increasing visitation may reduce opportunities for solitude and naturalness within the Togiak Wilderness Area. Preserving opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined recreational experience in a natural setting is a key supplemental purpose for the Togiak Wilderness. Local residents are concerned that areas traditionally used for subsistence hunting and fishing are increasingly used by recreational anglers.

The Togiak Refuge has taken steps to ensure wilderness solitude, naturalness, and quality visitor experience by increasing visitor outreach and education efforts and by regulating the amount of guided recreational fishing that occurs within the Wilderness Area and on other lands administered by the Refuge. However, concerns remain that these efforts are not adequate and that controls on unguided recreational uses should be considered. This is a significant issue for the Public Use Management Plan. Resource based factors that should be considered include campsite conditions and the availability of preferred fish species. Social factors that should be considered include solitude while traveling, solitude while camping, availability of traditional use areas, and equity of opportunity. This Plan will consider what other actions may be useful in maintaining these opportunities and achieving recreation management goals.

***Issue 3. Waste Management***

Concerns have been expressed for many years about the disposal of human waste. People improperly and illegally dispose of feces by depositing it in the water or on land within 100 feet of surface waters. Disposal is currently allowed on Service managed uplands, but where the uplands are privately owned, permission (usually in the form of a permit) is required to avoid trespass. People are offended by seeing improperly disposed human waste and/or toilet paper along rivers within

the Refuge. This is a significant issue for the Public Use Management Plan. The resource factor that should be considered is evidence of human waste (feces or toilet paper). The social factor that should be considered is the incidence of trespass on private lands.

**Issue 4. Commercial Sport Fishing in the Goodnews, Togiak, Osviak and Matogak River Watersheds**

The Refuge has a system of guide use areas on the Togiak River that has been in place for many years. The suggestion was made that additional opportunities on the Togiak River may be desirable. The Osviak and Matogak rivers were considered for commercial guiding opportunities in the 1991 Public Use Management Plan. At that time, the Service decided not to offer guiding opportunities on those rivers. The State of Alaska has asked that the Service reconsider offering guiding opportunities on coastal rivers (e.g., the Matogak and Osviak rivers). This is a significant issue for the Public Use Management Plan.

## 1.7 References Cited

Collins, A.P. 2001 [unpublished] Monitoring water quality of the Kanektok River, Southwest Alaska: Addressing issues and concerns in the Togiak Wilderness Area, Togiak National Wildlife Refuge. Dillingham, Alaska: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Togiak National Wildlife Refuge.