



# Selawik National Wildlife Refuge

Newsletter

Fall 2008

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Hannah Loon

Pauline Ramoth, Laura Smith, and the late Hannah Davis share memories of earlier days.

## Selawik Elders Talk About Caribou

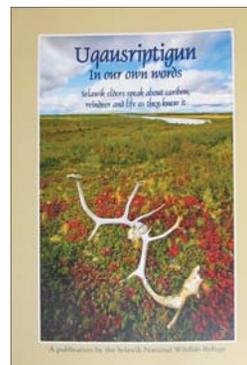
Insight into life in the Selawik area in the 1940s and 1950s is now available through a new booklet called *Uqausriptigun: In Our Own Words*. Recently produced by the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge, this colorful booklet features ten Iñupiaq elders from Selawik describing their knowledge of and experience with caribou, caribou hunting, and reindeer herding. Although abundant in the region today, caribou were very scarce in the Selawik area before the 1950s. Hunters recall traveling north by dogteam for weeks at a time to find caribou.

supported in part by the Selawik Refuge, NANA's Iñuuniaŋiqput Committee, and the Native Village of Selawik. The featured elders include Daniel Foster, Sr., Ruby Foster, Ralph Ramoth, Sr., David Greist, Marie Clark, Johnny Norton, Laura Smith, Frank Berry, Sr., Delbert Mitchell, Sr., and Eva

Henry. Several of these elders have since passed away, making their words and photos all the more precious.

The booklet has been enthusiastically received by readers both near and far. To obtain a free copy, please contact the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge

in Kotzebue (442-3799 or 1-800-492-8848) or in Selawik (484-2118) or email [susan\\_georgette@fws.gov](mailto:susan_georgette@fws.gov).



**Let us know your thoughts!**  
**The Selawik Refuge begins planning this winter.**  
**Read more on page 2.**



The research for this booklet was conducted in 2003 by Selawik resident Hannah Loon and

## Thinking About Our Future

What do you think the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge should look like over the next 15 years?

That is the question the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service will be asking local residents in several Northwest Arctic communities in the coming months.

The Selawik National Wildlife Refuge is starting to update its “Comprehensive Conservation Plan,” a document that will guide the management of the wildlife refuge for the next 15 years. The current plan for the wildlife refuge was completed in 1987 and is now more than 20 years old.

Staff from our office—Lee Anne Ayres, Susan Georgette, and Clyde Ramoth—will be visiting Selawik, Noorvik, Kiana, Buckland, and the upper Kobuk this winter to ask about your thoughts on future management of the wildlife refuge.



*The community of Selawik, pictured above, is situated on the lower Selawik River in the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge. Fresh fish are available to local residents year-round in this rich river delta environment.*

We will also be holding an open house in Kotzebue in December to seek ideas and comments from the public.

We invite anyone from near or far to let us know your thoughts and concerns about the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge. Please fill out and return the enclosed comment card by January 15, 2009. Or feel free to call, write, or email us directly or to visit us in Kotzebue or when we are in your community. You can find our contact information in the box on the following page.

### First Things First

At this point, you might be wondering, “WHAT is the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge, and WHERE is it?”

The 2.15-million-acre Selawik National Wildlife Refuge spans the lower Kobuk River and nearly the entire Selawik River watershed.



*Cottongrass blooms in great abundance in some years, looking like snow on the tundra.*

Mary Frische

The Refuge was created in 1980 by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA).

The Selawik National Wildlife Refuge is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It is one of more than 500 wildlife refuges across the country that protect and restore fish, wildlife, and plants for the benefit of the American people.

### Invisible Boundaries

In northwest Alaska, we are lucky to live in a natural place without fences and other visible boundaries crisscrossing the landscape. But this can make it difficult to know where one type of land stops and another starts. As you know, we have many different landowners in our region—Native corporations, State of Alaska, National Park Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, private individuals, and others. The map on page five shows the location of the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge and can help you become familiar with land ownership in this area.

James Maghaz

## Your Thoughts?

Here are some things to think about when it comes to planning and management of the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge. We welcome any concerns or suggestions you have on these or any other topics.

- Shelter cabins and trails?
- Hunting and fishing?
- Recreation and public use?
- Subsistence?
- Sinjagruk Bridge?
- Wildlife and fisheries issues?
- Historical or cultural sites?
- Roads and easements?
- Hot Springs?
- Water quality?
- Fire management?
- Research?
- Climate change?
- Other?

We would like to know if you are satisfied with the current Refuge management or would like to see changes. For examples of potential Selawik issues, please see page four.



Mary Frische

*Gallons of blueberries are picked each summer on the Selawik Refuge by local residents.*

## What Is the Purpose of the Selawik Refuge?

Throughout the United States, a network of national wildlife refuges exists to protect wildlife, fish, and their habitats, and to provide for public uses such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and education. The purposes of the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge include:

- conservation of caribou, migratory birds, salmon, and sheefish;
- providing for continued subsistence opportunities; and
- ensuring necessary water quantity and quality.



Susan Georgette/USFWS

*Nearly every camp in the Selawik area has a lookout tower, or nasirvik, for spotting game.*

## How to Contact Us

*To email planning comments, please use this address:*  
Selawik\_planning@fws.gov

*You can also reach us in the following ways:*

*By phone:*  
907/442 3799  
800/492 8848 toll-free

*By mail:*  
Selawik National Wildlife Refuge  
PO Box 270  
Kotzebue, AK 99752

*By email:*  
susan\_georgette@fws.gov

*By dropping by:*  
160 2nd Avenue, Kotzebue  
(just past Wells Fargo bank)

We look forward to hearing from you!



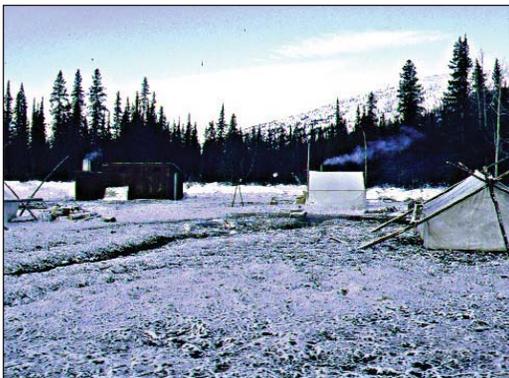
Tina Morani/USFWS

*Swans, qugrut in Iñupiaq, are one of the many kinds of waterfowl found in abundance in the waterways of the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge.*

# Some Management Issues to Think About . . .



*Would you like to see any changes in trails or shelter cabins on the Refuge?*



*Would you like to see any changes at the Hot Springs?*



*Would you like to see any changes in public use or recreation on the Refuge?*



*What do you think about wildlife or fisheries issues on the Refuge?*



*What do you think about research on the Refuge?*

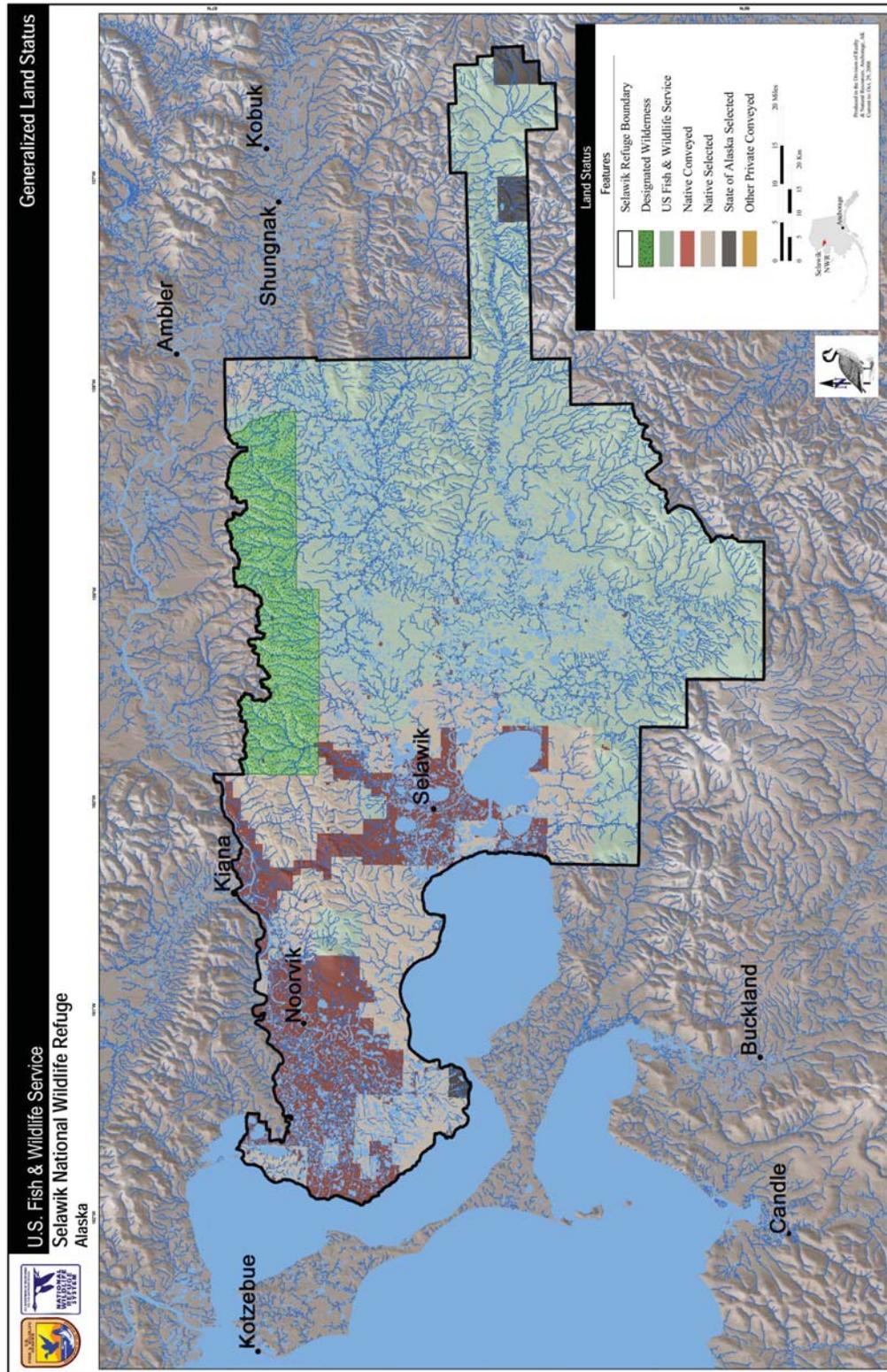


*Would you like to see any changes in the Sijiaġruk Bridge?*



# WHERE is the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge?

The map below shows the boundary of the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge and its neighboring communities. Also shown are private lands (in dark brown) and selected lands (in light brown) within the Refuge as of October 2008. The private lands are mostly Native corporation lands and Native allotments. The green stippled area along the Refuge's northern border is the Selawik Wilderness Area.



## Living Off the Land

Local residents are the primary users of Selawik Refuge. Two communities—Selawik and Noorvik—are within the Refuge boundaries and several others are close by. Access to these communities is mainly by airplane, boat, and snowmachine. About 1,400 people live in Selawik and Noorvik, most of whom are Iñupiat. Many local residents follow a subsistence way of life, relying substantially on natural resources from their environment. These include caribou, moose, sheefish, whitefish, *siulik* (pike), waterfowl, and berries.



Susan Georgette/USFWS

*Lorraine Foster of Selawik hangs whitefish to dry in the fall, continuing a long community and cultural tradition.*

## Welcome, Sonny!

Frank “Sonny” Berry, Jr. joined the staff of Selawik Refuge in 2007. With his excellent outdoor skills and knowledge of the land, Sonny is frequently called upon to take scientists into the field and to assist with research. His advice is highly respected by the staff. Sonny also works on many maintenance projects in Kotzebue, Selawik, and the field, helping to keep things running smoothly. He resides in Selawik and is the son of Mabel Berry and the late Frank Berry, Sr.



Elise Kahl/USFWS

*Frank “Sonny” Berry, Jr.—our newest staff member!*

## Understanding Sheefish

Did you know that there are only two places in the Northwest Arctic where sheefish spawn? One of these is the upper Kobuk River above Kobuk village. The other is the upper Selawik River, about 110 river miles upstream of the Tagragvik River mouth.

On the Selawik River, the spawning grounds are downstream from the large landslide (or “thaw slump”) that continues to spill mud and silt into the river during summer months. Scientists and local residents have been concerned about the effect this might have on spawning sheefish.

The Selawik Refuge is looking into research that could help us understand the effect of sediment on sheefish eggs. This is especially difficult because little is known about why sheefish spawn where they do, or what takes place during their hatching and early growth.

From upper Kobuk elders, we do know that sheefish in that area



USFWS

*Radio transmitters like this are implanted in the bellies of some of our region’s sheefish. If possible, let us know if you come across one!*

spawn anytime after September 20. They spawn at the water surface in the main current, often splashing noisily. They move rapidly



USFWS

*Despite their high profile and importance for subsistence, much is still not known about sheefish.*

downstream after spawning, and within days have all but disappeared from the upper Kobuk.

To learn more about sheefish, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Alaska Department of Fish and Game have surgically put radio transmitters in the bellies of about 240 sheefish in our region in the past few years. These fish have a thin wire antenna trailing beneath them and an odd-looking 3-inch capsule in their abdomen. It is fine to catch and eat these fish, but we do appreciate knowing when and where they are caught and having the capsules returned to us if possible. You can find our contact information on page three. Thank you!

## Watching Swans Fly South

One of the most distinctive birds in our region is the tundra swan with its large size, long neck, and snowy white color. The sight and sound of these birds returning to northwest Alaska are one of the joys of springtime.

For the past three years, biologists with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service have tested swans in our region for avian influenza (“bird flu”). Using dip nets from inflatable boats and float planes, crews captured over

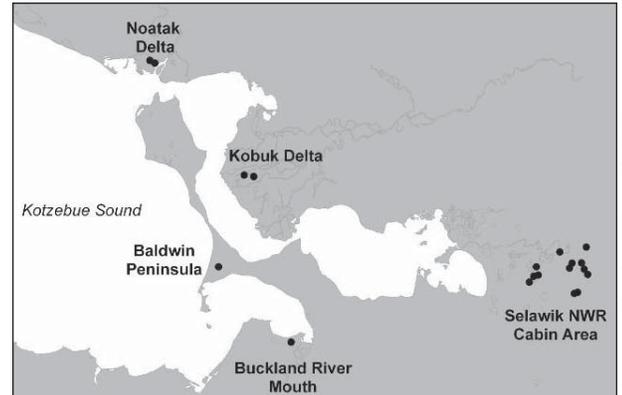
200 molting swans in five Northwest Arctic locations in July 2008. The birds were tested, measured, banded, and collared, then released unharmed. So far none have tested positive for the dangerous bird flu virus (HPAI H5N1), but final results are still pending.

This year an exciting new component was added to this research. For the first time in our region, scientists surgically implanted satellite transmitters in ten swans from the Kotzebue Sound area. The transmitters allow scientists to track the swans’ migration using computers. The map below shows the swans’ southward route as of early November 2008.

Transmitters were also implanted in swans from four other breeding areas in Alaska for a total of 50 birds. Scientists hope to learn more about

the timing and route of the swans’ migration, their winter destinations, and their genetic differences.

The transmitters are expected to last up to two years. You can follow the swan updates by visiting the website: [http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/avian\\_influenza/TUSW/index.html](http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/avian_influenza/TUSW/index.html). It will be exciting to watch the movements of these birds through the seasons!

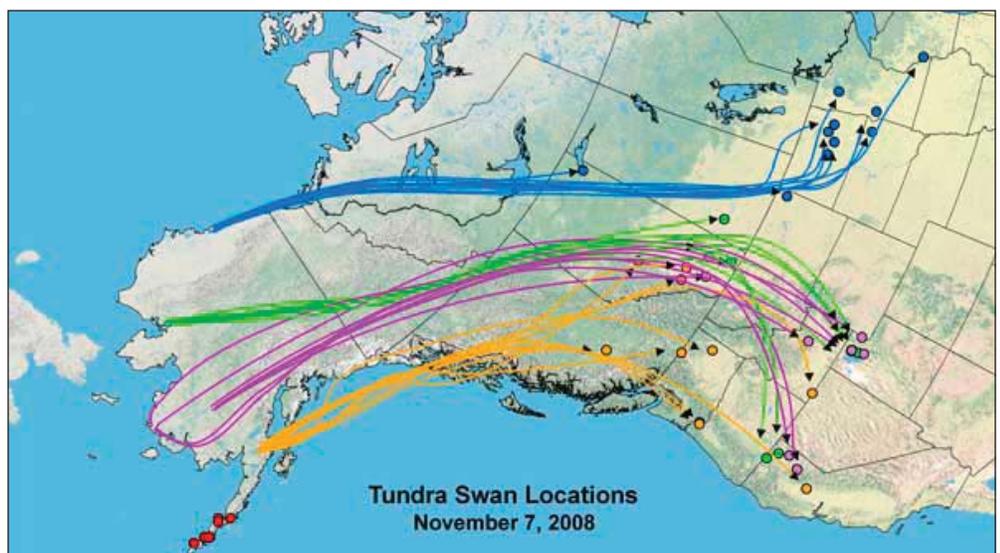


*The dots on this map show the locations where molting swans were captured in the Northwest Arctic region in 2008.*

Courtesy Heather Wilson/USFWS

### Who We Are Selawik Refuge Staff

- Lee Anne Ayres  
*Refuge Manager*
- Patrick Snow  
*Assistant Refuge Manager*
- Tina Moran  
*Wildlife Biologist*
- Nate Olson  
*Wildlife Biologist/Pilot*
- Susan Georgette  
*Outreach Specialist*
- Clyde Ramoth  
*Refuge Information Technician*
- Mary Jane Scherer  
*Administrative Technician*
- Shawn Nelson  
*Maintenance Worker*
- Frank “Sonny” Berry, Jr.  
*Maintenance Worker*



*The green line shows the migration route of swans from the Kotzebue area in fall 2008. By early November, the birds had reached southern Canada and western U.S. states. The route of swans from the North Slope is shown by the blue line; from the Yukon Delta by the purple line; and from the Alaska Peninsula by the orange line. This study is being done by Migratory Bird Management (USFWS) and the Alaska Science Center (USGS).*

Alaska Science Center/USGS

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
**Selawik National Wildlife Refuge**  
 P.O. Box 270  
 Kotzebue, AK 99752

Phone: 907/442 3799  
 800/492 8848  
 Fax: 907/442 3124  
 Web: <http://selawik.fws.gov/>



## The National Wildlife Refuge System

The Selawik Refuge is part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The System's mission is 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 within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

## Know the Land

The Iñupiat have long inhabited the Selawik River valley, an area that Congress designated a national wildlife refuge in 1980. Many places on the land throughout northwest Alaska hold deep meaning and tradition for local residents. Standard maps bear few of the Iñupiaq names for these places. Here are two interesting and locally well-known sites in the Selawik area.



James Magdanz

### Putuniq

*This channel (in center of photo) connects the Selawik River with the expansive Inland Lake. Meaning “a hole that was made,” Putuniq was originally dug by Selawik people as a shortcut to subsistence camps on the far side of Inland Lake. Spring run-off has since eroded the channel to its current size and depth.*



Steve Hillebrand/USFWS

### Sauniqtuuq

*This gravel spit at the mouth of Selawik River is a favorite summer picnic area for Selawik residents. In earlier times Sauniqtuuq, meaning “place where bones can be found,” was used to hunt belugas. The animals were driven into the shallow water behind the spit and hunted by men in kayaks. A reindeer corral was also once here.*