



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### SERVICE BEGINS ACTIVE PROGRAM IN ALASKA ON LARGEST WILDLIFE REFUGE ON CONTINENT

An active program for the conservation of all forms of wildlife on the Aleutian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, largest wildlife sanctuary in North America, is now underway following 10 years of intensive investigations on most of the 1,000 islands of the 1,200-mile long area, the Fish and Wildlife Service reported today to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes.

The Service's 114-foot boat, the Brown Bear, already has been placed on a year-round schedule to patrol the refuge, while added protection will be given by two resident patrolmen assigned to the islands.

Principal species to be affected by the new program will be the sea otter colony, largest of its kind known to be in existence; petrels, fulmars, and other colonies of North Pacific seabirds using these major nesting grounds; and blue and white foxes, which are collected annually by commercial trappers.

Biggest problem for the wildlife agency was what to do about the fox industry. Blue and white foxes formerly were turned loose on many of the islands that had been leased for this purpose. The foxes foraged for food and habitually raided various bird rookeries. On certain islands, 60 percent of

the foxes' food consisted of birds taken during the nesting period, Service investigations showed.

To provide greater benefits both for the fox industry and for the native birds and fur animals, Secretary Ickes last year approved regulations designed to transfer some fox farms to islands more suitable for this industry and where destruction to birds would be avoided. The blue fox industry on the Aleutians yields annually about 3,000 pelts with a total valuation of some \$100,000.

Fox farms are being transferred to islands good for fox farming but not necessary to the wildlife restoration program and on islands where the fur animals will not interfere with other forms of wildlife.

"No one is being put out of business," declared J. Clark Salyer, chief of the Division of Wildlife Refuges. "There are enough islands to go around. We are merely seeing that the wildlife will receive adequate protection and that industry, likewise, will be placed on a scientifically managed basis."

To increase the food supply for foxes on the islands, the Service plans to introduce two types of rodents, lemmings and meadow mice, on these areas. Biologists are also trying to develop additional marine foods by processing low-grade, coarse fishes.

Only 14 percent of the Aleutian Island chain will be reserved exclusively for wildlife, Salyer indicated.

#### Sea Otters Rare

Particular attention is being given the sea otter herd, which is now estimated to be the largest in the world. Smaller colonies are off the coast of California and off the Kurile Islands, north of Japan. All the colonies

are so small, however, that there is danger of extermination of the species, especially if the animals are unduly disturbed.

"Sea otters do not like the presence of man," explained Dr. H.H.T. Jackson, in charge of the Service's Section of Biological Surveys, "and fox farms in the sea otter areas may cause the otters to migrate, perhaps to some area not adequately protected."

#### Has Large Bird Populations

The Aleutians Refuge is so large that considerable data on the wildlife populations still remains to be gathered. In a recent trip through the refuge, which extends southeastward of the tip of Alaska, Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, reported seeing enormous colonies of Pacific fulmars and Pacific eiders. Other birds included fork-tailed petrels which were "so numerous they could be heard through the rock slides." Great colonies of Pacific Kittiwakes, Harlequin ducks, and several species of murrelets, auklets, and puffins are also reported.

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