



# Kk'oonootne Tene

## Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge Spring 2012

### In This Issue

**Kanuti Welcomes New Pilot to Bettles.....1-2**

**Just for Kids!.....2**

**Moose Population Survey Results .....3**

**Radio Telemetry Study Uses Space to Study Moose!.....3**

**Annual Kanuti Moose Survey Provides a Bird's Eye View of the Refuge.....4**

**Local Leader, Subsistence Advocate and Friend will be Remembered.....5**

**Predator Control. What Does it Mean for Kanuti?.....5**

**For More Information.....6**



USFWS

*Kanuti's new Wildlife Biologist-Pilot Les Dillard, who lives and works out of Bettles, Alaska, which is also the headquarters of field operations for Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge, has become a familiar face in the villages of Allakaket, Alatna, Bettles and Evansville.*

## Kanuti Welcomes New Pilot to Bettles

If you see the refuge plane flying overhead, chances are it is Les Dillard, Kanuti's new Wildlife Biologist-Pilot stationed in Bettles. Les was selected for the job in May 2011 and holds pilot ratings up through multi-engine commercial instruments. Prior to earning his pilot qualifications, Les worked in biological positions at Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge and two National Park units (Badlands National Park and Cape Lookout

National Seashore). Les also served in the Peace Corps in Madagascar. Both Les and wife Jennifer are world travelers, avid outdoor enthusiasts, and enjoy meeting new people, seeing new landscapes, trying new foods, listening to new music, and experiencing different cultures. Les also enjoys fishing, backcountry camping, and is learning how to play the mandolin.

Bettles is a new challenge for Les



## Kanuti Welcomes New Pilot to Bettles continued

but he is really enjoying it. He appreciates the simplicity of living in a place like Bettles, especially not being tied to a cell phone. Although he once lived in Wisconsin where it was a bit chilly, he most recently moved from Florida. Thus, he is still learning how to survive in the arctic; what winter clothes are best, where to get firewood, how to run a chainsaw at -20 degrees Fahrenheit, and how to ride a snow machine.

In his new job, Les is facing new challenges he didn't face as a pilot in the lower 48. The first thing he realized about flying in bush Alaska is that there aren't many runways to land on! Most of the flying Les did before moving to Alaska was in Florida, where he says there were

airports every 30 miles or so with paved runways and warm weather, no icing to worry about, no mountains and plenty of places to get fuel.

To be a good pilot in Alaska, Les says that he is developing a whole new set of skills including flying on floats, skis, and big tundra tires. He is also learning about a whole new set of potential risk factors that he must think about before and during each flight. Fortunately, his job allows Les to fly with some very experienced mentor pilots that are helping Les through the transition process. Les says the challenges of his job are worth it and he loves being Kanuti's new Wildlife Biologist-Pilot; his job combines the two things that he is

most passionate about - aviation and conservation. He also feels blessed to see Kanuti's beautiful landscape from the air, loves looking at how all the rivers and lakes are connected, how wildfires over time have created a mosaic of habitats, and how the colors and textures change from season to season and even from week to week. Les says he feels simply fortunate that he gets to work with a great group of people - local residents, tribal leaders, and government staff - who care as much as he does about being good stewards of Kanuti's natural resources. 🐾

### Just For Kids!

Spring is the time of year when snow melts away and the beautiful colors of Kanuti Refuge return.

Celebrate spring by cutting out these colorful puzzle shapes, then try to solve the puzzle. Good luck! 🐾



## Moose Population Survey Results

The 2011 moose census survey on Kanuti Refuge was very successful. The census area has been surveyed 6 times in the past decade. This year's results revealed that the count this year is one of the more precise estimates of the moose population that has been made to date.

The moose population estimate for the survey area was 797 moose, resulting in an estimated density of 0.29 moose per square mile on Kanuti

Refuge. These results, taken with data collected in the past, indicate that there has been very little change in the moose population on the Kanuti Refuge over the past decade.

A high proportion of bulls was again found in the population. The number of yearling bulls was about the same as in past surveys, but the proportion of calves may have been a little higher than average (41 calves per 100 cows).

While this may indicate that the population has the potential to increase, other factors influence population growth also, so only time will tell if that happens. 🐾

## Radio Telemetry Study Uses Space to Study Moose!

Since 2008, a cooperative moose radio-telemetry study has been ongoing in Game Management Units 24 A and 24 B. The project is a joint effort between U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Kanuti NWR), Bureau of Land Management (Central Yukon Field Office) and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

Currently, 52 moose on or near Kanuti Refuge have collars, while 72 moose are collared further north in Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve and on BLM managed federal public lands. Most of these collars are on cows and are the standard VHF type collars that require use of airplanes with tracking equipment and human observers, but 8 moose on or near Kanuti and 21 moose further north have recently been equipped with exciting new technology -GPS collars!

Collars equipped with global positioning satellite technology (GPS) utilize satellites located in space to record locations of instrumented animals. That information is then sent from the satellites back to computers on earth and is providing a brand new means of remotely tracking moose movements.



Jack Reakoff

*Collared moose on Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge, in nearby Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve and on nearby BLM federal public lands are helping biologists who have partnered together to learn about Alaska's interior moose populations.*

So what are we learning by using this new technology? One of the most interesting discoveries so far is that bull moose tend to move pretty far, while cows tend to remain close to the area where they were first collared. The study has also revealed that the incidence of disease in the moose study area is very low compared to other locations in Alaska. Finally, collared cows are helping determine

twinning rates in the area, which helps tell if the population is in good nutritional shape. They have found that the twinning rate of the moose in the study area is very high. The fieldwork portion of the study will continue through at least 2012 and a final report will be complete sometime in 2013. 🐾

## Annual Kanuti Moose Survey Provides a Bird's Eye View of the Refuge

During the annual moose survey in November 2011, Biologist Timothy Craig and Kanuti Refuge Manager-Pilot Mike Spindler spotted a variety of wildlife. The fixed-wing aircraft is flown fairly low to the ground (<500agl), allowing biologists to gain a closer view of the landscape below.

They are also able to record sightings of other wildlife and learn more about natural occurrences on the refuge. When there is a sufficient amount of light available, biologists are able to identify animal tracks in the snow. Moose, caribou, wolves, fox, lynx, wolverine, otter, marten and snowshoe hare tracks were all spotted in the refuge in November.

Considered rare in Interior Alaska, a Snowy Owl was seen flushed from a large Spruce tree, displaying lots of dark markings along its back and wings. Previous to this sighting, there has only been one recording of a Snowy Owl inside Kanuti Refuge.

Walking leisurely across the middle of a lake, a lynx was spotted. Lynx are often difficult to come across and are best known for their secretive and elusive behavior. When flying over the lynx, the animal froze, believing it was concealed and camouflaged within the snowy white stretch. The lynx later dashed for the shoreline seeking cover and protection from the trees, becoming one swift and elongated brownish streak.

Wolves were also seen feeding on a recent moose kill. The snow was colored and flattened with tracks and two dark colored wolves were side-by-side feeding on the kill. Nestled below the trees and appearing satiated, an additional two gray wolves were laying and watching the two feed on the kill.



USFWS

*Animal tracks in the snow observed from aircraft during surveys on Kanuti Refuge allow biologists to record sightings of wildlife and learn more about natural occurrences on the refuge.*

One of the wolves lying on the ground appeared much larger than any of the others and had a broad, massive head. This led the observers to guess that it was likely the alpha male in the group.

On a snow-covered lake, two otters were spotted running across in tandem like a team of yoked horses dashing for the next opening in the ice. Biologists first noticed otter tracks radiating out in all directions from small gas holes. These holes are little, round openings in frozen water where methane rises and bubbles up from rotting vegetation causing warm water to circulate upward. Due to the arrival of snow before extremely cold temperatures, there

is an abundance of open water in streams between lakes, resulting in these gas holes.

Other observations on the refuge included a Common Raven, a Northern Goshawk, several foxes, and ptarmigan. Flying during moose surveys certainly allows for the viewing of spectacular sights inside Kanuti Refuge. 🐾

## Local Leader, Subsistence Advocate and Friend will be Remembered

It is with heavy hearts that we include this article to honor the late Ron Sam of Alatna, Alaska. Ron was an outstanding Native leader for the Koyukuk River area and Interior Alaska and held leadership positions with his village and tribe, the Tanana Chiefs Conference, Doyon Ltd., and the Koyukuk River Alaska Department of Fish and Game Advisory Committee.

Over the years, Ron cultivated many professional relationships with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service staff and was a deeply valued participant at USFWS public meetings, processes and events. Ron also became a personal friend to countless people along the way, sharing his joyful nature and laughter with everyone around him. He was welcome everywhere.

Ron also served the Western Interior Regional Advisory Council (WIRAC) as Chairman for over 12 years beginning in 1996. During this time, Ron freely shared his life experiences

and insights, and his leadership while participating on the WIRAC was critical to the development of subsistence management for the Western Interior Region. His efforts and tireless dedication provided an invaluable bridge between the worlds of western science and traditional ecological knowledge, as well as cooperative relationships between resource users and managers. Through his tireless voluntary efforts, comprehensive solutions to issues were reached that will benefit Alaska for many generations to come.

Ron Sam, community leader and dear friend to so many, who always had a smile to share, thank you for all that you were, all that you did, and all that you selflessly gave. You taught the younger generation how to live and reminded everyone how to work together for the common good. The world is a better place because you were here. With reverence, we honor your life, your work, and your legacy. You are truly missed and will be remembered. 🐾



*Ron Sam receiving an award of special recognition when he retired from serving the Western Interior Regional Advisory Committee.*

Jack Reakoff

## Predator Control. What Does it Mean for Kanuti?

Last fall, ADF&G began a predator control program in the upper Koyukuk area (game management unit 24B) with the hopes of “managing for more moose for the people of Allakaket and Alatna.”

The goal of the ADF&G five-year intensive management project is to “ensure that wolves take less moose and people get more.” So what does predator control mean for Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge, since the Refuge lies within game management unit 24B?

To answer this question, it’s informative to look at how Kanuti Refuge is managed: Working with the State, USFWS manages fish and wildlife populations on Kanuti Refuge in compliance with Kanuti’s ANILCA established purpose to “conserve fish and wildlife populations in their natural diversity,” and “to provide, consistent with the [natural diversity purpose], the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents.”

Our policy on Biological Integrity,

Diversity, and Environmental Health states, “We manage populations for natural densities and levels of variation.” In short, though predator control is not taking place on Kanuti Refuge lands at the moment, nor are there plans to do so in the future, we aren’t precluding predator control on Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge, but such a program would need to be justified as “necessary to maintain or restore natural diversity,” not to increase game populations for recreational and/or subsistence hunting. 🐾

**Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge**  
**101 12th Ave. Rm 262**  
**Fairbanks, AK 99701-6237**

**Phone: 877/220-1853 or 907/456-0329**

**Fax: 907/456-0506**

**Web: <http://kanuti.fws.gov/>**

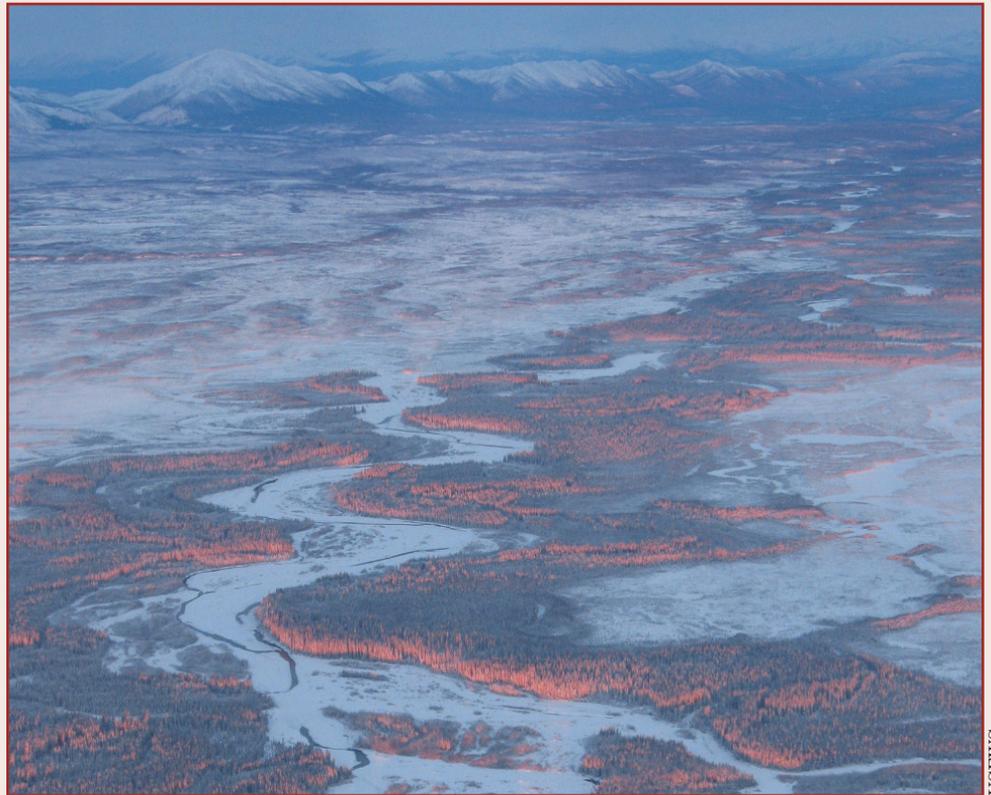
**e-mail: [kanuti\\_refuge@fws.gov](mailto:kanuti_refuge@fws.gov)**

## ***For More Information***

To learn more about Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge, please visit our web site at <http://kanuti.fws.gov/> or call us toll-free at 1-877-220-1853.

We also welcome e-mails. Our e-mail address is [kanuti\\_refuge@fws.gov](mailto:kanuti_refuge@fws.gov).

To contact the editor of this newsletter with questions or comments, please call Kristin Reakoff at 907/678-2028 or e-mail her at [kristin\\_reakoff@fws.gov](mailto:kristin_reakoff@fws.gov). 🐾



*Sunset on the South Fork of the Koyukuk River on Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge with the Jack White Mountain Range in the background.*