U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Alaska Peninsula/Becharof National Wildlife Refuges

Newsletter - Summer 2013

"The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System 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."

National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997

In This Issue:

Courage, New Pilot..... 2
Meet Field Staff 3
Education 4
Speaker Series, Moose..... 5
Calendar Contest..... 6
Swallows 7
Deputy Moving..... 7
Maintenance Staff 8
Big Game Guides 9
Owls, Friends 10

Port Heiden, and Port Heiden residents with Refuge Manager Susan Alexander (far right). Photos USFWS/Julia Pinnix and Orville Lind

Orville Lind as an RIT in Port Heiden, 1992. USFWS

Visiting and Listening in Local Communities

In 2012, the USFWS produced a resource book for Service staff called "Visiting and Listening," intended to promote beneficial communication between federal employees and Alaska Native communities. The two groups often have different styles of communication, and the guide offers tips to bridge the gap. The Service is seeking feedback on the guidelines and how they might be improved. The publication of the guide coincided with the arrival of Susan Alexander as the new Refuge Manager for Alaska Peninsula and Becharof National Wildlife Refuges. Being new to this part of the state, Susan wants to get to know the people who live in and around the refuges.

These events resulted in a "Visiting and Listening" pilot project meeting held with Meshik/Port Heiden in March 2014. Refuge Ranger Orville Lind, who lived in Meshik for 24 years, set up the meeting with the Village Council. Two Service employees from the Regional Office in Anchorage, as well as Federal Wildlife Officer/Pilot Jim Wittkop, also attended for USFWS. In attendance from Meshik were 11 tribal members, 5 high school students, and one elder.

Attending the meeting allowed the village residents to question Susan and other staff directly concerning the health of wildlife and what programs or surveys the USFWS is currently doing. It also allowed both parties to open the door for future communication and possible opportunities to work together for conservation.

Also in March, Susan and Orville met with the 7 local Paug-vik Village Council members in Naknek. The purpose was to meet members, introduce Susan, and express her interest in learning from the Council how... *(continued on next page)*

Visiting and Listening, continued...

(Continued from front page) ...to enhance the working relationship between the Council and the Refuge. Orville and Susan visited Perryville in June. They met with 20 adults and 12 youth to introduce Susan to the Village Council and open lines of communication. Susan and Orville plan visits with other local communities in the coming months.

An additional concrete step towards building stronger connections with local communities is through a revival of the Refuge Information Technician (RIT) program. RITs act as liaisons between rural communities and the Refuge. Orville was originally hired as an RIT to do outreach and education and facilitate village visits. He has built a career with the USFWS. We hope to create this kind of opportunity for youth through an internship program, partnering with Bristol Bay Native Association. Interns will be trained in communication and education, and will play a key role in helping the villages and the Refuge continue to have productive conversations.

Perryville. USFWS/Susan Savage

Dan Pepin with a beautiful rainbow trout..

We Welcome New Pilot

Since Pete Finley's retirement in 2012, we have been short a pilot. As Refuge Manager Susan Alexander puts it, that's like having just one person on staff with a driver's license; and to get our work done, we all need him to chauffeur us! We have now filled the position and are thrilled to welcome Daniel Pepin as a Pilot/Biologist.

Dan has worked for Grant Aviation since 2012 and Peninsula Airways from 2008-2012, building experience flying all over Southwestern Alaska. His more than 3,840 hours of flight time includes time with float- and ski-equipped tailwheel aircraft. Nearly all his flight time has been logged in Alaska.

His biology background includes work in Maine with the Biodiversity Research Institute, running aerial surveys documenting waterfowl and small mammal behavior; tracking environmental mercury levels in soil, fish, crustaceans, and waterfowl eggs; and banding waterfowl, waterbirds, and raptors. He earned a Bachelor's Degree in Wildlife Conservation from Unity College, Maine.

Wildlife Biologist Dom Watts and teacher Ronne Richter at the 2013 Science and Culture Camp. USFWS/Julia Pinnix

Wildlife Biologist Nationally Recognized for Courage

When Wildlife Biologist Dominique Watts woke at 4 a.m. on March 16, 2013, he had no idea his life was about to change. His courage then at a time of crisis led to his receiving the Department of Interior's Citation for Valor this spring.

Noticing the power was out and hearing odd sounds, Dom got out of bed and went downstairs, where he discovered the wall of his dining room was on fire. Reacting quickly, he called 9-1-1, then grabbed the fire extinguisher from the kitchen and doused the visible flames. He stepped outside, shoeless, and picked up the propane tank that was dangerously close to the fire, running with it around the house to throw it a safe distance away. Dom now had burns on both hands and one foot.

It was 15 degrees Fahrenheit outside, but rather than stop to put on warm clothing, Dom went to the other side of the duplex and pounded on the front door to wake his neighbor, Supervisory Biologist Ron Britton. Not hearing a response, he ran to the back of the house, intending to break in through a window, but found the door unlocked. He made his way upstairs in darkness and increasing smoke and warned Ron, now partially awake, of the fire.

Both Ron and Dom were able to evacuate the house with a few personal belongings before smoke overwhelmed the interior and the Bristol Bay Borough Volunteer Fire Department arrived. The house was lost to the fire, along with most of the two men's possessions. Dom's quick action and bravery certainly saved Ron from death or terrible injury. For his courageous action and the great personal risk he assumed, Dom was granted the Valor Award of the Department of the Interior. He received his award at a ceremony in Washington, D.C., on May 8.

Meet This Year's Field Staff

For five young people, this will be an exciting summer of field research in a wild setting. A field camp is stationed at Puale Bay for ongoing monitoring of seabird colonies, while landbird surveys and swallow monitoring are planned. Wildlife Biologist Susan Savage is supervising.

Seabird Intern Jacob Looze hails from Wisconsin, where he graduated from UW-Stevens Point with a Bachelor of Science in Biology with a zoology emphasis. He's greatly looking forward to three months in a remote field camp and hopes to get experience as a field researcher this summer. He then plans to spend the rest of his life doing field research all over the world studying all kinds of animals! This is Jake's first time to Alaska, so he also plans to explore a little of the vast wilderness around Puale Bay, taking in the sights and studying whatever fantastic animals may cross his path!

Seabird Intern Sarah Wartman hails from Minneapolis, Minnesota. She attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities where she received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Biology. Sarah spent 42 days backpacking in Wrangell St Elias National Park in 2008 after graduating from high school, and worked in Yakutat, AK, for four months in 2013 with the US Forest Service as an SCA intern. She looks forward to spending the summer "sitting on a cliff staring at birds and could not be more excited! I'm looking forward to three months of isolation in Puale Bay monitoring seabird colonies and getting to know the local brown bear population."

Sarah Wartman in Yakutat, Alaska; and Jake Looze with a snowy owl.

Seabird Intern Carrick Rice was born and raised just outside the city of Chicago, Illinois, but spent a lot of time growing up on the family farm in south-central Michigan. The outdoors and wildlife have always been his passion. He received a BA in Biology from Drake University in 2012 and since then has worked on various ecological projects in central Iowa and in Oregon. He also worked as an intern at a bird sanctuary and rehabilitation center in the Florida Keys before coming to King Salmon. "I'm pretty excited to go out to Puale Bay this summer, and I'm hoping to gain a lot of experience doing intensive avian field work, as well as just have an enjoyable time working in such an amazing and unique environment."

Carrick Rice with a snow leopard cub.

Landbird Intern Jessica Howell was born and raised in Dayton, Ohio. She just graduated from Ohio University with a degree in Wildlife Biology and Certificate of Environmental Studies. Her work has been primarily with birds, passerines in particular: mainly banding and point counts. She has also done some freshwater ecology and wildlife rehabilitation work. Jessica has always wanted to come to Alaska, and she's hoping to gain more experience with remote fieldwork using GPS and GIS, as well as learning about a region that is ecologically very different from Ohio. "I am looking to learn as much as I can and having a great adventure here at the same time!"

Jessica Howell with a yellow warbler.

Born in the rural mountain town of Winthrop, Washington, Biological Technician Jaime Welfelt graduated from Western Washington University with a BA in Environmental Education and a BS in Environmental Science and Wildlife Conservation. She spent several summers in the Pacific Northwest studying mountain goats, fisheries, wolves, and great blue herons. Most recently she worked as a Biotech for the National Park Service at Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park in Southeast Alaska studying amphibians, bats, and birds. She's looking forward to spending another season exploring and studying a different part of Alaska. "I'm in love with wild places and it seems that the Alaska Peninsula is about as wild as it gets." When she's not working, she spends her time hiking, backpacking, backcountry skiing, and, of course, birding.

Jaime Welfelt with a mountain goat near Leavenworth, Washington.

Spring School Visits Accomplished

Every year, Visitor Services Manager Julia Pinnix tries to visit as many schools in the region as possible with educational presentations. With the help of volunteers, she has put together kits on insects, paleontology, and wolves to use in delivering programs. This year's programs were focused on mammals.

We have a good collection of skulls, usually on display in the office exhibit cases. Julia selected a number of them to use as the heart of the mammals program. Students look for characteristics to tell them whether the skulls belonged to herbivores, carnivores, or omnivores. They examine the skulls for clues that reveal gender, age, and health.

Other items in the kit include rubber and plaster tracks, fur, bones, teeth, and claws. Everything is meant to be handled, since hands-on experiences are remembered better, according to research. Research on education techniques also guides the selection of activities, chosen to reinforce concepts. "Predator tag," for example, teaches students the interactions between populations of prey species and their predators, important concepts learned through a physically active game.

Julia Pinnix with students in Chignik Lake. Photo: Melissa Ward

Pilot Point students solve a walrus flipper "puzzle." USFWS/Julia Pinnix

A challenge for older students is re-assembling the bones of a walrus flipper. Careful observation is called for to identify each bone and put it in its correct place. Some younger students also prove adept at this three-dimensional, real-life version of a jigsaw puzzle.

Julia took the mammals kit and other kits to deliver programs to schools in Perryville, Chignik Lake, Port Heiden, Pilot Point, Newhalen, and Egegik, as well as Bristol Bay School in Naknek and a homeschool group in King Salmon. 123 students spent 28 hours exploring the natural world with Julia.

Tom Prang teaching Nathan Burgraff and Paul Hansen how to use a GPS unit. USFWS/Julia Pinnix

Experimental Outdoor School Program Run

Felicity Powers, teacher for the Bristol Bay School 4th and 5th grade class in 2013-2014, asked Visitor Services Manager Julia Pinnix about trying an experimental approach to learning for her 20 students. Felicity has taught in outdoor-oriented programs in other locations, and wanted to give it a try here.

With the support of principal Jim Dube, Julia worked out a curriculum, and the program began in March. Goals included: providing hands-on education emphasizing scientific thought and practice, improving observation skills, being active outside, and instilling a sense of connection to the natural world.

Julia invited guest instructors as well as leading activities herself. These included Bart Grabman, the Emergency Medical Services Coordinator for the Bristol Bay Borough Fire Department, and Fire Department Volunteers Anne Shankle and Kimberly Smith; and educator Tom Prang. Parent and school employee Maria Comeaux also provided invaluable assistance.

Students learned to use equipment like binoculars, thermometers, and anemometers (for measuring wind speed) to explore and investigate. They recorded their observations in Rite-in-the-Rain journals, learning how to track data and make useful drawings. They learned basic first aid skills, like Refuge field staff do. Some students learned how to use compass and GPS to navigate.

Despite challenges, from weather to testing to the effect of being in an unfamiliar learning environment, the students were at the end of the program able to create a long list of activities that had an impact and new skills they learned. They hoped the program will continue next year, and said all students should get to participate!

4th Annual Speaker Series Short And Sweet

Each winter into spring, we bring in guest speakers to expand our local horizons. This year, Alaska Geographic funds supported bringing a guest in March and another in April.

Archaeologist Debi Corbett, recently retired from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, visited King Salmon and Perryville to talk about the complex and diverse human history of the Alaska Peninsula. She brought actual artifacts with her for people to handle.

The plan was to bring her to Perryville to do an in-person presentation, then return to King Salmon for presentations

Stacy Studebaker presenting at Bristol Bay School. USFWS/Julia Pinnix

there and in Naknek. Weather complicated the schedule, and the Naknek program had to be cancelled. But thanks to the helpful teachers and staff of Lake and Peninsula School District, she was still able to deliver her program to approximately 116 students and teachers via the internet.

In April, retired teacher and author Stacy Studebaker delivered presentations in both King Salmon and Naknek about her leading role in recovering, cleaning, and preparing a gray whale skeleton for display in the Kodiak NWR Visitor Center.

She also did interactive readings of her children's book, "Hey Bear Ho Bear." Teachers requested extra readings, as they were so popular, and Stacy graciously obliged.

Moose Reproduction Project Updated

Wildlife Biologist Dominique Watts has been flying daily whenever possible this spring, tracking 26 radio-collared moose cows. His aim is to find out when and where they give birth, how often they produce twins, and how many of the calves survive to become adults in the population.

Moose have been an important resource for subsistence and sport hunters on the Alaska Peninsula since they colonized the region during the early 1900s. The population grew rapidly and peaked during the late 1960s, but has declined considerably since. Because the willow communities preferred by moose occur primarily on the Refuges, these lands support some of the highest moose densities on the Alaska Peninsula. Refuge and Alaska Department of Fish & Game biologists regularly conduct cooperative surveys and research projects to collect information on moose populations in Southwest Alaska.

Dom began collaring moose for the current study in 2010. The collars include both a radio transmitter and a GPS unit. The radio transmitter allows biologists to find and observe individual moose throughout the year, while the GPS allows location data to be downloaded via satellite. Residents regularly report observing some of these study animals along Big Creek where they spend time during summer and autumn; radio-collared cows are easily identifiable by a large numbered tag that is attached to the collar. One of the main objectives of the ongoing moose study is to gather information on twinning rates and calf survival in the study area. In spring, radio tracking is used to locate the cows and monitor calving from the air.

Within moose populations, the number of cow moose giving birth to twins compared to the number having single calves is influenced by nutrition. Biologists use twinning rates as an indirect measure of a moose population's nutritional condition and overall health. Twinning rates in the study area suggest that habitat is not a primary factor limiting moose abundance. In addition, captured adult and yearling moose appeared to be in good to excellent body condition, further suggesting good nutritional condition among moose in the area.

Chronically low calf survival on the Alaska Peninsula appears to be limiting population growth, and the timing of calf deaths suggests that predation was probably the primary cause of calf mortalities in our study area. The actual causes of calf mortality cannot be identified without intensive calf collaring projects which are very expensive to conduct. However, sometimes there is clear evidence: this year Dom found a bear on top of the carcasses of a radio-collared cow and her calf during his tracking flights. Location data show that radio-collared cows often move out into open tundra habitats to give birth, which may be a predator avoidance strategy.

In addition to information gained from calf surveys, Dom typically flies moose surveys in winter to monitor population size and trends. However, these surveys are only accurate when there is snow on the ground and moose can be easily spotted from the air and counted. Because there was not enough snow to be able to fly any surveys this past winter, there is no data for winter 2013/2014. He hopes to fly surveys in the coming winter, if conditions allow.

The information gained from all of these types of surveys is important to agencies when making management decisions, but there is still much we do not know. Because reproduction and survival may vary among years due to a variety of factors, it is important to gather several years of data to provide an adequate representation of the moose population. Moose reproduction and survival was relatively good during 2013, and Refuge biologists will continue to monitor collared moose and their calves during 2014 to gather more information.

Refuge biologist Dom Watts attaches a GPS radio-collar to an adult cow moose near Big Creek. This cow has produced twin calves every year since she was collared in 2010. USFWS

Calendar Contest Draws Winners from Alaska Peninsula

This year's winners in the 2015 Alaska Migratory Bird Calendar contest were selected by Refuge staff and volunteers. The theme was "Super Seabirds." Some of the local winners went on to become state winners, too, and will appear in next year's calendar. Congratulations to all the winners, and to every participant!

Contest Winners

(State winners and entries that will appear in the 2015 calendar are shown in yellow)

Grade	Student	Art	Lit.	School
K-2	Walt Gooden	X		Igiugig
	Arianna Anderson	X		Chignik Lagoon
	Kolton Anderson	X		Bristol Bay School, Naknek
	Arianna Anderson		X	Chignik Lagoon
	Tatianna Anderson		X	Chignik Lagoon
	Moriah Bindon		X	Bristol Bay School, Naknek
3-5	Ella Gooden	X		Iguigig
	Lucy Young	X	X	Port Alsworth
	Owen Young	X	X	Port Alsworth
	Katie McGee		X	Port Alsworth
6-8	Ethan Agli	X		Bristol Bay School, Naknek
	Lakota Thompson	X	X	Bristol Bay School, Naknek
	Katrina Torino	X		Bristol Bay School, Naknek
	Kaitlyn Blom		X	Port Alsworth
	Sydney Erickson		X	Port Alsworth
9-12	Allen Palmer	X	X	Bristol Bay Christian Learning Center
	Lei'Lani Kiana	X	X	Bristol Bay Christian Learning Center
	Miranda DelKittie	X		Nondalton
	Kylie Aspelund		X	Bristol Bay Christian Learning Center
All	Lucy Young	X		Manager's Choice
All	Lucy Young		X	Manager's Choice

State Poster winner, grades 9-12, by Lei'Lani Kiana.

Super Seabirds (by Kaitlyn Blom of Port Alsworth)

Sailing through the sunset sky,
Flapping on course as they fly.
Pecking on the crystal sand,
Looking oh, so grand.
Traveling through the air,
In one or two or in a pair.
Flapping off to who knows where,
There they go, we watch and stare.
Here they come, the super seabirds,
Here they come in decorative herds.
To the endless seas they go,
Where the harsh winds blow.
To company the sailors,
To follow them like trailers.
There they go at different paces,
There they go to visit many places.

Cormorant taking off, by Allen Palmer.

The Key to the Super Seabirds (by Lucy Young, Manager's Choice winner)

Watch the birds swim in the bright blue ocean,
Mixing in with the crazy commotion.
Taste the sharp sea air as you wade near a cliff.
Above me are Murres, of which I get a whiff.
Smell the guillemots bringing in fish,
Hoping for more with a little wish.
Hear the marbled murrelets splashing each other,
Searching for their wet and hiding brother.
Feel the cold of the salt water that puts me at rest,
Along with the tickle of the Crested Auklet's crest.
Use your senses, because this may be your key,
To the amazingly super birds of the sea.

Calendar Contest, continued...

The Alaska Migratory Bird Calendar Contest gives students throughout the state a chance to celebrate birds in art and literature each year. The Refuge has long been a strong supporter of the contest, visiting schools of the Alaska Peninsula to demonstrate drawing techniques and to provide relevant educational programs.

Volunteer Carl Ramm, Refuge Ranger Orville Lind, and Wildlife Refuge Specialist Liz Julian visited Bristol Bay School in Naknek several times during the winter to encourage students in their artistic efforts. Ninety-seven students benefited from their combined expertise. They paid a visit to the Bristol Bay Christian Learning Center, too, whose students are frequently recognized in the state calendar.

Four day old tree swallows. USFWS/Jessica Howell

Deputy Moves to Chugach Forest

Kelly Chase, who arrived in 2012 to serve as Deputy Refuge Manager, has accepted a position as Recreation, Minerals, Lands, and Heritage Staff Officer for Chugach National Forest. She moves to Anchorage in July.

Kelly served during a time of change, as we said farewell to retiring Refuge Manager Bill Schaff, were led by two interim managers, then welcomed current Refuge Manager Susan Alexander. Government sequesters, the sinking of a Refuge boat, and the loss of a Refuge house to fire were additional challenges. Kelly has worked for the USFWS since 2001. This is her first position for another agency. We wish her well in her new venture.

Kelly with student in Newhalen. USFWS/Julia Pinnix

Ethan Agli's drawing of a tufted puffin.

Swallow Monitoring Intensified

Landbird Intern Jessica Howell is taking part in a variety of projects while she is here this summer. One of her primary tasks is monitoring tree swallow nest boxes in King Salmon. Aerial insectivores like swallows are generally on the decline throughout North America. Since tree swallows are tolerant of humans and readily nest in provided boxes, they are an easy species to study.

Jessica will be collecting data to measure fledgling success, as well as banding as many adult and young birds as possible to see return rates in the future. Katmai National Park's Nicole Kleponis is assisting with the monitoring. This model project was designed by Wildlife Biologist Susan Savage, in conjunction with Katmai NP Wildlife Biologist Sherri Anderson. The project began with 36 next boxes (27 of which were built by Maintenance Worker Kevin Payne this spring). Two were taken over by chickadees. Nine had no activity, while of the remaining 25, 18 had chicks or eggs as of June 17.

When the nestlings are still small, they have a lot of fatty tissue on their legs, so banding has to wait until they are 10-12 days old. By the time they are 14 days old, they might jump out of the nest too soon if they are handled; so Jessica has to keep a close eye on the timing for each nest.

Typically, the young spend about 20 days in the nest. Most should have fledged by late July, in our area. Tree swallows typically spend the winter in Mexico or Central America.

Many species of neotropical migrants are experiencing population declines, in many cases due to loss of habitat. As cities expand and forests are cut, they lose critical nesting, feeding, and migratory staging areas. Within cities, human-tolerant and invasive species of birds outcompete other avians. Jessica previously worked on a study on the response of birds to urbanization. She studied purple martins in Rochester, NY, in 2013, noting that they appear to have become heavily dependent on nest boxes provided by humans. A drop in the number of people putting out purple martin houses may be part of the reason behind the species's decline in population.

An ornithology class that revealed the great diversity of birds put Jessica on the path of studying them. Birds are easy to observe and find, very different from other animals in their behavior and physiology, and are good indicator species for environmental issues.

Maintenance Staff Shoulders Many Tasks

In the Refuge Headquarters compound, there are a dozen structures. Housing outside the compound includes nine more buildings. Six vehicles, a snow machine, an ATV, assorted heavy equipment, and the 24 foot-long vessel Refuge Runner are also a responsibility. And that doesn't count any of the cabins we maintain on Refuge lands. All of this and much more is tended to by two employees: Marion Burgraff and Kevin Payne.

Marion has worked for the federal government since 1999, first for Katmai National Park, then for the USFWS's Fisheries and Ecological Services, and finally for us. For quite a few years, he was the only full time maintenance employee for the Refuge. Kevin Payne came to the Refuge as a seasonal Biological Technician. When we advertised in 2012 for a term maintenance worker position, he applied. A man of many talents, Kevin has proved to be a valuable addition to the maintenance staff.

Marion and Kevin tackle a wide variety of projects. One day they might be changing all the studded winter tires on all the vehicles for summer ones. On another day, they might be repairing a boiler at one of the houses, replacing a window, or installing new appliances. The job of a maintenance worker is to be alert to problems, proactive and prompt in response. This year will involve a special challenge: one of the largest buildings in the compound is scheduled for removal, and everything in it must be relocated or eliminated.

Marion Burgraff at work in the shop. USFWS/Orville Lind

Constructed between 1957 and 1961, Building 4 housed the Refuge offices from 1983 until 2002, when the current office building was occupied. A new shop was built in 2010, which changed the way water drains through the area and flooded adjacent Building 4. Efforts to correct the drainage problem were unsuccessful. Moisture siphoned up into the walls, spangling them with black mold. Mushrooms sprouted from the first floor carpeting. With so much water damage, staff agreed that it was better to remove the building than to renovate.

Building 5, the other large warehouse-style building on the compound, is soon to be home to salvaged gear from Building 4. Kevin has spent weeks already reorganizing Building 5 and preparing new storage areas.

Another major project this year was preparing the Puale Bay Field Camp, where a staff of 4 will spend several months. Weeks of pre- and in-field work are necessary to get camp set up. Volunteer Bob Blush helped Maintenance Worker Kevin Payne set up the Puale Bay field camp in June, a project he has helped with in other years as well. They also installed anchors at the top of the cliff where the crew will be working, so they can rope in for safety; and rebuilt the tent platforms.

Other projects include: repairs to field cabins; rehabilitating the dock after winter ice damage and erosion; preparing 4 bunkhouses for summer use; restoring the site of a house fire; grading the road; and responding to emergencies like burst pipes.

Building 4, on left, slated for demolition. New shop on right. USFWS/Julia Pinnix

Kevin Payne setting a temperature array in Becharof Lake. USFWS/Jim Wittkop

Big Game Guide Use Areas Allocated

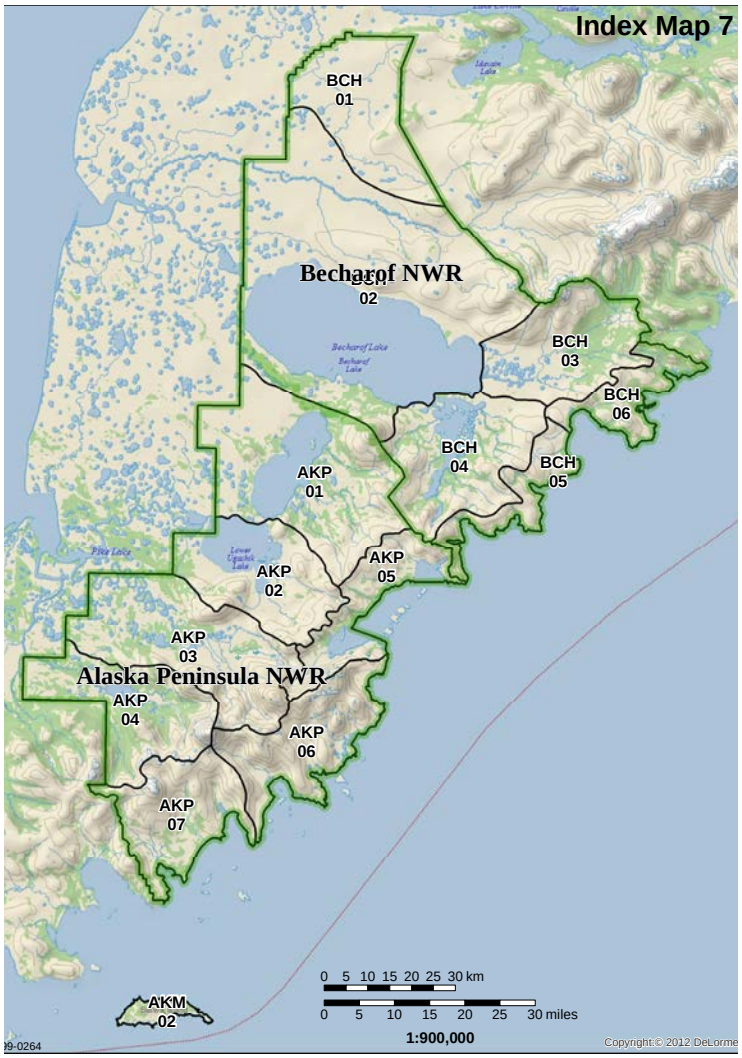
Big game hunting on Alaska Peninsula and Becharof National Wildlife Refuges attracts hunters both locally and from around the world. Like all commercial services, big game guides operating on the Refuge are authorized by means of a Special Use Permit. However, unlike other commercial activities, one or two big game guides have exclusive use of each designated guide use area, and are selected through a competitive process.

The objective of allowing commercial big game guiding is to make available a broader range of hunting opportunities on the Refuge, when such activities are compatible with the Refuge's purposes as well as resource and management objectives.

In order to remain compatible, commercially guided hunting must reflect well on the Refuge and on the tradition of hunting. It must promote positive hunting values and hunter ethics such as fair chase. It should provide participants with reasonable harvest opportunities, and little or no crowding or conflicts between hunters. It should ensure that disturbance to wildlife and other impacts on refuge resources are minimized. Commercial guiding activities authorized on refuge lands contribute to these values and objectives.

A big game guide's permit is good for 5 years, with an option to renew for an additional 5 year period based on the guide's adherence to the law and to permit stipulations. When the permit period is up, the permits are made available again via a competitive process. Nearly all of our big game guide use areas were opened to this process in February 2012.

Guides submitted extensive application packages which were evaluated by a panel of USFWS employees based on the following criteria:



1) Ability to provide a high quality hunt and guiding service to the public;

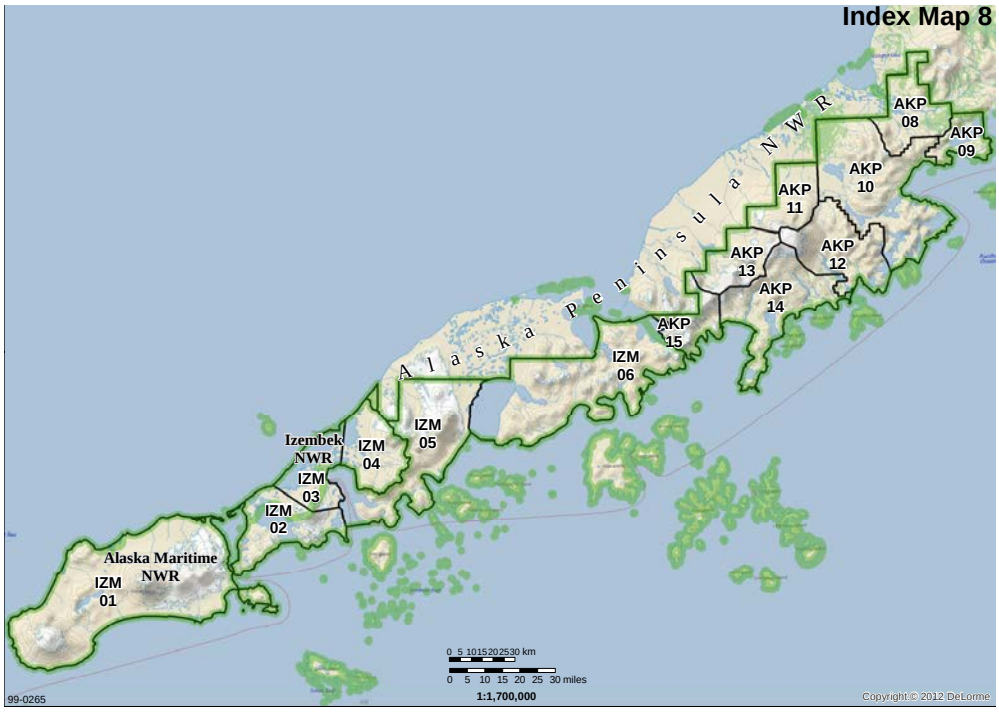
2) Safety record, training, equipment, and operating plan;

3) Demonstrated experience and knowledge of the guide use area, and the terrain, climate, and species to be hunted;

4) Impacts of the proposed operation on wildlife and other refuge resources such as water quality, vegetation, soil, and wilderness character;

5) Impacts of the proposed operation on other refuge users, including subsistence users; and

6) History of compliance with state and federal hunting, fishing, and guiding laws, regulations, and permit requirements.



Based on panel recommendations and his own evaluation of guide applications and interviews, former Refuge Manager Bill Schaff made guide selections in all the units before retiring.

In five of the units, his decision was appealed, and the Regional Office and current Refuge Manager Susan Alexander have been working through settling those appeals.

We expect the appeals to be wrapped up soon and plan to publish the list of selected guides in our winter newsletter.

A Little Help from Our Friends

This summer got off to a good start with a little help from our friends. Annual training for the whole staff, as well as new training for seasonal staff, can be overwhelming for a refuge with a small number of people. We regularly offer help to our neighbors; and they return the favor, partnering with us to get both our and their programs accomplished.

Fish Biologist Theresa Tanner joined us from the Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office to train staff in Wilderness First Aid. Heavy Equipment Coordination and Logistics Manager Thomas Siekaniec of the Office of Budget and Facilities Management spent a week helping Wildlife Biologist Dominique Watts teach seasonal staff to handle and use shotguns for bear protection. Thomas and Dom also certified everyone on staff who needed to carry a shotgun in the field. Wildlife Biologist Susan Savage provided bear safety training.

Three training programs involved Katmai staff. Wilderness District Ranger Wendy Artz taught the aviation safety course. Chief of Interpretation Roy Wood and Pilot Allen Gilliland taught "dunker" training, a water ditching class required for all Department of Interior employees and volunteers who fly over water or in floatplanes. Chief of Resources Troy Hamon, Biologist Whitney Rapp, and our Refuge Ranger Orville Lind taught the multi-day Motorboat Operator Certification Course (MOCC).

While our own pilot was on leave, three others cycled through to keep our biology programs going. Airplane Pilot Ken Richardson arrived from Izembek NWR for about 10 days to assist with flying moose surveys. From Kenai NWR, Wildlife Biologist/Pilot Nate Olson came for another 10 days for the same project. Regional Aviation Manager/Pilot Kevin Fox spent 21 days assisting during our busiest time. He shuttled gear and staff between headquarters and the Puale Bay Field Camp as it was prepared and then occupied, assisted with moose surveys, and flew staff to multiple locations for annual bird surveys.

Theresa Tanner training seasonal staff. USFWS/Orville Lind

Thomas Siekaniec providing shotgun training. USFWS/Julia Pinnix

Roy Wood leading training in the pool. USFWS/Julia Pinnix

MOCC training in action. USFWS/ Julia Pinnix

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