

Pacific Seabird Group Aleutian Tern Technical Committee Meeting Notes
February 20, 2024, 8AM-10AM PST
Portland Rooms A and B, Grand Hyatt Seattle, Seattle, WA

Facilitators: Jill Tengeres, Mike Goldstein, and Susan Oehlers

In-person attendees: Don Lyons, Robin Corcoran, Tim Lawes, Yat-Tung Yu., Chun Ting (John) Chung, Megan Boldenow, Heather Renner

Virtual attendees: Patty Szczys, Trent McDonald, Anne Schaefer, Kristen Sowl

Brief Background/history of technical committee: In 2007 an informal group was formed due to the growing concern over the status of the species in Alaska. A list of action items related to research & monitoring was developed in 2014-15 and the Aleutian Tern TC was formally established in 2016. Subgroup within the TC focusing on statewide survey plan & implementation.

Technical committee updates and action items:

- Committee leadership: Since 2016 Susan and Mike have been co-chairs of the TC, Mike is stepping out of the role and Jill is volunteering to step up as a new co-chair (unanimous vote of those in attendance in favor).
 - Suggests at least one co-chair be in a rotating role on a 2-3 year schedule.

Post-meeting Action Items:

- **Storage of working and final documents somewhere accessible (PSG channels and public).**
- **Need to update original goals and objectives document from 2016 (coming soon in shared platform).**
- **Update 2015 Conservation Synthesis document.**
- **Need for a data repository for tern colony data.**
- **Revise Birds of the World Account.**

Committee member update round robin

- Robin Corcoran (USFWS Kodiak NWR) – Remaining 2 Satellite tags deployed in 2023 in Kodiak, poster presentation at PSG 2024 on 2019-2023 Nome & Kodiak satellite tag results; conservation concerns related to terns nesting along the Kodiak road system including a proposal to AK Migratory Bird Co-management council to rescind the Kodiak Road area closure to Spring/Summer migratory bird subsistence harvest – ALTETC has requested a letter be sent from the PSG Conservation Chair to USFWS Alaska regional director requesting the road system remain closed to Aleutian and Arctic tern and Short-billed gull harvest (due to mixed species colonies)
- Yat-tung Yu & Chun Ting Chung (The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society) - Through the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) Indonesian members looking for opportunities to cooperate, might be able to offer assistance with AK state-wide survey.
- Heather Renner (USFWS AK Maritime NWR) & Martin Renner (Tern Again Consulting, Inc.) – monitored colonies on the Kenai Peninsula, highlighted need for data repository since tern colonies are not on refuge lands.

- Megan Boldenow (USFWS ES) – Visited colonies along the road system on Kodiak Island during the 2023 breeding season.
- Trent McDonald (McDonald Data Sciences) – continues to assist ALTE TC with developing AK statewide survey, report for 2023 SE Alaska survey nearly completed.
- Patty Szczys (Eastern Connecticut State University) – DNA extraction from eggshells was not as successful as hoped, n= 67 samples with 18 microsatellites for potentially combining tagging and genetics into a publication. Results of data analysis will be completed this spring and shared with the group in early summer. She has grant money from ES for analysis of genetic samples from Russia that are unlikely to make it to the US anytime soon. Wants to discuss what should happen to these funds – Megan will check on terms of grant agreement since she was not the person who developed the contract/agreement.
- Patty also mentioned that for anyone doing ALTE field work in 2024 new samples from anywhere in the state would be useful for genetic monitoring. However, if estimate of effective population size is the goal than tissue sampling would need to be designed to answer that specific question. Follow up with Patty on what type of samples would be most useful? Currently the sample sizes for colonies are:
 - Nome = 7
 - Kodiak = 12
 - Lily Pond = 15
 - Black Sand Spit = 19
 - Yakutat = 14
- Susan Oehlers (USFWS Yakutat Ranger District) – references ALTE TC report which includes list of presentations & outreach efforts will be on the PSG website. Continued Yakutat colony monitoring in 2023, Black Sand Spit was moderately successful this breeding season. Nate Catterson, who has been actively involved in ALTE monitoring in Yakutat & elsewhere for many years, is the new FS District Ranger in Yakutat.
- Anne Schaefer (Prince William Sound Science Center) – AK statewide survey coordinator, led & participated in aerial surveys, currently working on finalizing final report from 2023 w/Trent & input from TC subgroup focused on statewide survey. Planning 2024 survey - field work dates: 4 June – 6 July.

2024 field season plans and priorities

- Statewide survey-2024 western Alaska
- Genetic samples – see Patty Szczys comments above
 - Collection of tissue surveys during field work this summer was strongly encouraged.
- Colony monitoring

Tech committee goals and objectives revision

- Susan drafted objectives for upcoming years for discussion/consideration (see Action Items at top of document). Heather suggested adding data management to list (see Action Items). Megan suggested adding final documents/reports to PSG slack channels so that they are more accessible & sharable. Heather suggested we look into a repository for final reports (ARLIS (AK

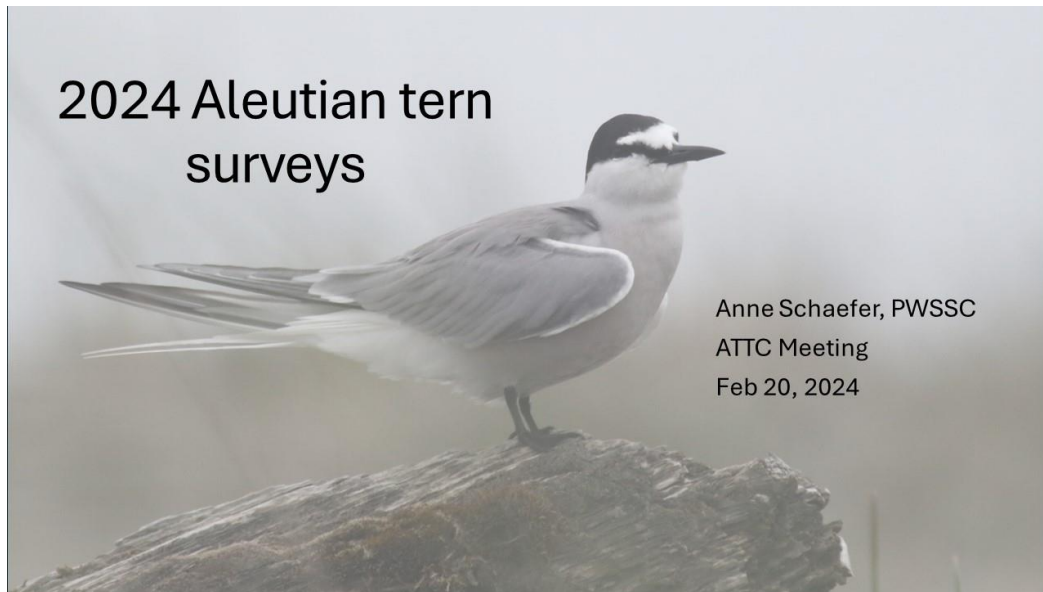
Resources Library & Information Services), USFWS ServCat, ?) Jill will investigate options (see Action Items).

- Conservation Synthesis revision recommended (see Action Items).
- Birds of the World account needs to be updated (see Action Items). Mike and Jill will work on this in March with input from the rest of the TC. Heather suggested timing for update might be extended due to busy field season scheduling.

Funding – status and future funding needs/opportunities

- Need funding to pay for satellite tagging data analysis 2019-2023 for publication. Should wait on reviews of 2017-2018 satellite tagging manuscript (submitted to Marine Ornithology) before moving forward.
- USFWS AK ES funding to Patty for genetic analysis of samples from Russia was discussed again, Don's idea for getting potential samples from Russian breeding birds would be to capture/sample wintering birds (accessible beaches in Australia). Could genetics be used to identify Russian breeding birds? Additional satellite tagging might be useful.
- Chun Ting (John) Chung mentioned that Russian scientists are still members of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership, and he will check to find out if they can still work with US scientists through this group.
- At AMSS there was a meeting of a small group of non-govt. scientists who are still interacting with Russian scientists, but word is that samples are not moving out to Russia soon.
- Susan mentioned that we still need funding for statewide ALTE survey, Don said having a number would be good. Anne added that current 2024 budget estimate (~125k) does not include in-kind contributions or USFWS plane costs (?). Contract with Trent for 2024 estimated at \$48k, 2025 estimated at \$30k.
- Kristine might be able to connect us to potential funding sources through Alaska Region I&M Program.

Anne Schaefer presentation slides:



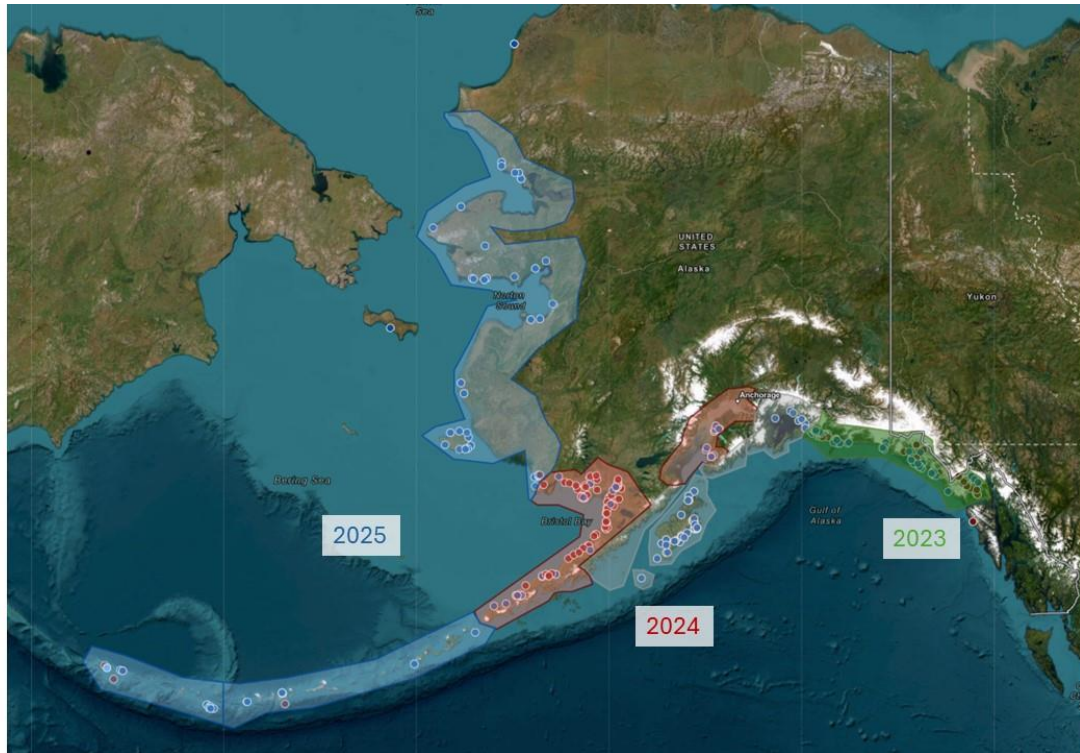
Collaborative effort

USFWS, USFS, National Audubon Society Seabird Institute, Oregon State University, NPS, Tern Again Consulting, McDonald Data Sciences, PWS Science Center



Background

- Statewide survey
- Objective: Aleutian tern abundance estimate for Alaska
- 3 field seasons



Survey methods:

- Aerial surveys

- Objective: Detect tern colonies
- Double-observer line transect sampling
 - 2-3 observers + pilot observer
- Survey area divided into:
 - Stratum 1: 0-1 km from coast
 - Stratum 2: 1-6 km from coast
 - Habitat model



- Ground surveys

- Estimate total number of terns & species composition (ALTE vs ARTE)





Logistics

- 2 FWS aircraft
 - 4 June – 6 July
- Coordinating with Refuges, NPS in study area
- Outreach to communities

- Study area coastline:
 - Cook Inlet: 3490 km
 - Bristol Bay: 9285 km