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AKW

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
1011 E. TUDOR RD.
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99503



MAR 13 1992

Craig S. Harrison
Pacific Seabird Group
3731 North 6th Road
Arlington, VA 22203

Dear Mr. Harrison:

Thank you for your interest in the seabird management program on the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). We believe the systematic and complete removal of introduced predators (foxes and rats) on seabird nesting islands is extremely important. I am sincerely committed to this effort and recognize it as one of our highest wildlife priorities; particularly for the Alaska Maritime Refuge. The Refuge has slowly been removing introduced foxes from islands under its jurisdiction in the Aleutian Islands over the years.

This year we planned to dedicate \$50,000 to continue this effort. Unfortunately, Congress allotted the Service \$4 million dollars less for Fiscal Year 1992 than 1991 for the operation of the National Wildlife Refuge System. This reduction required the Service to reduce or defer a number of projects throughout the nation and forced us to reduce our efforts on every refuge in Alaska. Six refuges had their operational programs reduced to custodial levels. This will provide the refuge staff with funds to keep their offices open, administer permits, oversee cooperators, continue one or two of their most critical wildlife surveys, and maintain their ability to respond to emergencies. Each of our Alaskan refuges were forced to significantly scale back wildlife surveys and census projects. We made these cuts with heavy hearts. Although originally the sailing schedule for the M/V Tiglax was reduced by three weeks and direct funding for fox removal was eliminated, we have since been able to add some sailing days back into the schedule and reprogram some funds to continue a minimal program on the Aleutians.

These project cuts were necessary because remaining funds needed to be provided to continue high priority projects like; restoration of arctic nesting geese; implementation of the federal subsistence program; completion of public use management plans for Arctic, Kodiak, Alaska Peninsula/Becharof, and Yukon Delta Refuges; development of environmental education programs; and gather improved population and distribution information on Steller's and spectacled eiders to assist in the restoration of both species.

We also worked closely with each refuge to find other ways to accomplish important programs indirectly or as part of funded projects. We were able to continue the fox control program by deferring training, travel, the production of leaflets, reducing the operational costs of the M/V Tiglax, and detailing employees from other refuges to help with this project. We plan to start fox removal on Bobrof Island and, if time permits, on Ugamak Island. In addition, we will recheck the following islands to determine the success of past fox

control efforts: Amitignak, Ulak, Kasatochi, Little Tanaga, Carlisle, Adugak, Uliaga, Igitkin, Chagul, and Tagadak. Enclosed is our 1992 Action Plan that provides the background and status report you requested.

In summary, by reprogramming overhead costs, taking full advantage of the M/V Tiglax's funded schedule, and using personnel from other refuges, we are able to continue our fox removal work. We have 21 islands left for fox eradication. In three years, we hope to have removed introduced foxes from all of the islands small enough to utilize trapping and shooting. We are considering the use of toxicants to eradicate introduced foxes and restore seabirds on the remaining islands. The cost of gaining the public's consent and registering the appropriate toxicant will be high. However, we believe that it is worth the effort to restore millions of seabirds throughout the islands.

We view our 1992 planned efforts as the minimum necessary to continue this important work. I hope we can count on your continued support for this effort.

Sincerely,



Regional Director

Enclosures

1992 Action Plan for Predator Management - Colonial Nesting Seabirds, Fox Eradication on Aleutian Islands of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge

Objective

To eliminate introduced arctic foxes from Aleutian Islands which formerly supported large colonies of nesting North Pacific Seabirds.

Background

Predator control efforts have been conducted in recent years on some Aleutian Islands, including Adugak, Amatignak, Carlisle, Chagul, Igitkin, Kasatochi, Little Tanaga, Tagadak, Ulak, Uliaga, and Umak. Arctic foxes may have already died out on Bobrof Island in the last several years and no foxes were observed on the island during a recent brief visit by Service staff. However, on that visit little bird life was also observed, indicating that foxes may still be present on this three square mile island with eight miles of shoreline. Although it is small, work on Bobrof Island is among the highest priority of the remaining 21 targeted Aleutian Islands. Before fox introduction it was termed a "little Buldir", presumably because of its tremendous abundance and diversity of seabirds, similar to which currently exist on the larger Buldir Island. Another island with known fox populations is Ugamak Island. This is a small, five square mile island located in Unimak Pass. It is also rated high on the refuge priority list of islands with high seabird nesting potential.

Proposed 1992 Activities

The above islands, all in the Aleutian Islands Unit, Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, will be "rechecked" for fox sign during 1992. Crews will search beaches, old den sites, and previous trapping stations on the islands. Work on Ulak, Uliaga, Amatignak, Carlisle, Adugak, and Kasatochi will be conducted off the M/V Tiglax during the 1992 season. The remaining islands will be rechecked from smaller refuge craft during the season. If foxes or recent fox sign is found on Bobrof Island, trapping, shooting and excavating dens will be used to eradicate the introduced foxes. If there is a healthy population of foxes on the island Service staff will probably not have time to eradicate all the foxes on additional islands where fox populations are known to occur. If there are no foxes, or very few, Service staff may be able to complete eradication and then move to Ugamak Island. By picking the two small islands of Bobrof and Ugamak in 1992 there is maximum flexibility of operations in this budget-stressed year. The work on Bobrof and Ugamak Island will be supported by the M/V Tiglax this summer.

Budget

All fox eradication work on the Aleutian Islands Unit in Fiscal Year 1992 will be accomplished by reducing staff training, reducing equipment maintenance, delaying brochure printing, and by Challenge Grant funding of the ferry naturalist program. Service staff from other Alaska refuges with reduced operations funding will be utilized in this program.

Future Plans

Eradication of introduced foxes on these remote islands is a continuing program with significant logistical considerations. Significant increases in eradication effectiveness may be dependant upon approval of use of chemical control methods combined with existing staff-intensive work.