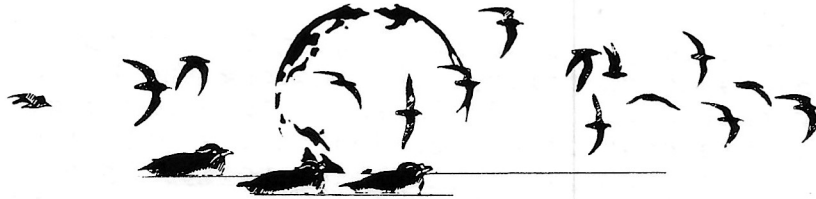


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## **Pacific Seabird Group**



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DEDICATED TO THE STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF PACIFIC SEABIRDS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

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Craig S. Harrison  
Vice Chairman for Conservation  
4001 North 9th Street #1801  
Arlington, Virginia 22203

January 14, 1993

Kenton Wohl  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1011 East Tudor Road  
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

### **Re: Draft Alaska Seabird Management Plan**

Dear Kent:

Thank you for the opportunity to review FWS Region 7's draft Alaska Seabird Management Plan on behalf of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG). As you know, PSG is an international organization that was founded in 1972 to promote knowledge, study and conservation of Pacific seabirds. Its members are drawn from the entire Pacific Basin and PSG has a vital interest in the health of seabird populations in Alaska. Among PSG's members are biologists who have research interests in Pacific seabirds, state and federal officials who manage seabird refuges, and individuals who are interested in marine conservation. Our comments are both general and specific. The general comments are probably more important.

### **General Comments**

After spending a great deal of time reviewing the management plan, its purpose remains unclear. It seems to try to be all things to all people in the seabird world. In general, it emphasizes gathering and archiving data and "coordinating" but rarely specifies actions that need to be taken. Scores of biologists and managers have worked on and thought about the problems of Alaska's seabirds for the past twenty years, and we can recommend many specific management actions. Some of these actions do not require a single additional datum or another field season. In short, the plan fails to convey the "vision thing."

PSG strongly supports Region 7's decision to announce a regional seabird policy. We enclose the Regional Marine Bird Policy that Region 1 declared in 1979 and suggest that Region 7 incorporate most or all of Region 1's policies. We recommend that Region 7 remove the seabird policy from the Alaska Seabird Management Plan and issue it as a separate, stand-alone document to insure that it is not bogged down in the review process for the management plan. The seabird policy should enumerate crisp management goals that set forth specific milestones. After reading the regional policy one should have a good grasp of what should be done within the next two years and what should be completed by the year 2000. The regional seabird policy should not be a laundry list of every idea that surfaced during a brainstorming session.

PSG believes that FWS should give two factors primary weight in determining regional priorities. First, how many seabirds are affected by a particular problem? This could be assessed on an annual basis using long-term information where the problem is episodic (e.g., oil spills). Under this criterion, killing some 400,000 seabirds each year in the high seas driftnet fisheries in the North Pacific would be a higher priority than the killing of 400,000 seabirds in the Exxon Valdez disaster because huge oil spills do not occur each year. Using this same criterion, we would rank the restoration of seabird colonies (or former colonies) to their natural condition as the highest regional priority. As you know, rats and foxes that were abandoned by fox farmers depress the breeding population of seabirds on the Alaskan Maritime National Wildlife Refuge by several million each year. FWS should humanely end the suffering of foxes that were deserted in this foreign and hostile environment and barely survive by depredating seabird colonies.

The second factor that FWS should consider in establishing regional priorities is whether a problem so seriously affects one or more species that the stability of the Alaska population is in jeopardy. Marbled murrelets and logging may be one example. Pollack or other fisheries may be affecting the populations of certain seabirds. This factor should include apparent declines of species such as red-legged kittiwakes and whiskered auklets that face "unknown" problems.

When FWS establishes priorities, it should clearly state the criteria that it has used. While PSG may ultimately disagree with some of the region's conclusions, we could accept them more readily if FWS sets forth its reasoning. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of setting priorities in this document. Otherwise, the process and the document are a waste of everyone's time.

### Specific Comments

i and 2. The authorities section fails to note this nation's commitments to protect seabirds embodied in treaties with Japan and the USSR. Article VI of the U.S. Constitution states that treaties are the supreme law of the land. Article VI(c) of the USA-Japan Migratory Bird Treaty requires this nation to endeavor to take measures "to control the introduction of live animals and plants which could disturb the ecological balance of unique island environments."<sup>1/</sup> Article IV(1) of the USA-USSR treaty requires this nation to "enhance the environment of migratory birds" and to "abate" "detrimental alteration of that environment."<sup>2/</sup> These treaties require FWS to control introduced animals that are detrimental to the environment.

The authorities section also should include the Endangered Species Act.

iii. We disagree with the statement that understanding and resolving all seabird problems requires more information. To the contrary, in many instances FWS does not need additional information. It only needs to act.

iv (Preface). Rewrite the first sentence to state "The Alaska Seabird Management Plan describes the Service's goals to manage and restore seabird resources in Alaska by the year 2000."

iv. What is meant by the goal "To encourage public awareness of the management of seabirds in Alaska?" Is this intended to make people interested in seabirds? Is this a public relations exercise so that people will sympathize with seabird managers?

y. Why does FWS need an "operational plan in the future?" The Alaska Seabird Management Plan should be the operational plan. The region's goals and policies should be set forth in a short stand-alone statement similar to Region 1's policies. We are afraid that writing and reviewing an operational plan will extend this management plan process indefinitely. We do not want the troops to be pinned down at headquarters while the war is being lost.

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<sup>1/</sup> Convention for the Protection of Migratory Birds and Birds in Danger of Extinction and Their Environment, Mar. 4, 1972, Japan-USA, 265 UST 3329, TIAS 7990.

<sup>2/</sup> Convention Concerning the Conservation of Migratory Birds and Their Environment, Nov. 19, 1976, USA-Russia, TIAS 9073; 1134 UNTS 97.

4. The policies are in arbitrary order. The most important should be first. "Coordination" should be much lower. Enforcing prohibitions on introduction of exotic animals to FWS lands should be a separate objective from restoring seabird colonies by removing predators that are already on the colonies. Both of these objectives should be within the top three, superseded only by the objective of preventing species from becoming endangered or threatened. We suggest that, like Region 1, Region 7 implement the spirit of the USA-Japan and USA-USSR treaties by adopting a policy to "remove all introduced predators from marine bird colonies on all National Wildlife Refuges and encourage their removal from all other colonies."

19. The list of management objectives should be in order of priority. Why list mining second and exotic animals ninth? Distinguish between managing FWS refuge lands (i.e., FWS' role as a land manager) and regulating activities off FWS lands (i.e., FWS' role as a regulator).

41-43. Items J (Unstable populations) and K (Monitoring) should be integrated. Some of the points belong elsewhere. Monitoring marbled murrelets belongs under P (forest development). The decline of red-legged kittiwakes might belong under fishing or subsistence use.

46. Item L (Basic Information on Seabird Biology) is too vague. Endorse research on whiskered auklets, red-legged kittiwakes or any other species but do not refer to research on some vague "selected species." In other words, DECIDE.

53. Item O (Coordination and Communication) should be deleted and integrated into issue-specific areas. Coordination with NMFS and the fisheries division of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game belongs in the fishing issues, etc.

56. Mission, Goal and Objectives. This section seems either redundant or out of place. Why is this different from the regional policy? We suggest integrating into the remainder of the document (e.g., items A through O discuss goals and objectives).

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Alaska Seabird Management Plan. We are interested in reviewing additional drafts, especially concerning the priority given the issues. If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 778-2240.

Sincerely,

*Craig*

Enclosure

## REGIONAL MARINE BIRD POLICY

1. BIOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Marine birds have been one of the more neglected natural resources of the world. Although knowledge of these birds is significantly less than for most other avifauna, hundreds of millions are known to exist in and depend on large geographical areas in the Pacific Basin. They are an international resource, and their protection and management depends to a great extent on international treaties and cooperation. The responsibilities and authorities of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for protection and management of marine birds in the Pacific Basin are based on Migratory Bird treaties with Canada, Mexico, Japan, and the Soviet Union and several pertinent acts of Congress. These responsibilities pertain to all lands, not just refuge lands; and to all divisions and programs of the Service, not just Refuge Management.

Marine birds have distinctive characteristics which make management and protection difficult. Most are long-lived and have deferred maturity and low reproductive rates which indicates that extended periods would be necessary for recovery from severe population reductions. They are highly vulnerable to catastrophic losses since entire populations are often concentrated on islands during the crucial breeding season. Large marine bird concentrations also occur in areas heavily used by humans such as the continental shelf and fishing grounds and are thereby vulnerable to severe impacts. The most important threats to these concentrations of marine birds are oceanic pollution especially from extraction and transportation of petroleum and other minerals, human disturbance, introduced predators and human competition for the fishery resource.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the U. S. fish and wildlife Service within Region 1 to:

1. Implement to the fullest extent possible those Migratory Bird Treaty provisions dealing specifically with marine birds, especially those within the recent Japanese and Soviet Union treaties.

These treaties include the following articles:

- 1) Prohibit the taking of birds or eggs;
- 2) Endeavor to establish sanctuaries;
- 3) Take appropriate measures to preserve and enhance the environment of birds;
- 4) Exchange data regarding research and cooperative research programs; and
- 5) Provide special protections to species or subspecies, which

Within Region 1 the treaties and associated acts (i.e. NEPA) give us authority to prevent or mitigate destruction of habitat through land development, pollution or human disturbance. We are also charged to prevent illegal taking of birds or eggs and introduction of plants or animals that may degrade habitat or directly affect populations.

2. Maintain all marine birds occurring on National Wildlife Refuge lands and waters at not less than current population levels, in their natural diversity and on native habitat throughout their range.
3. Utilize all available programs and divisions of the Fish and Wildlife Service to influence the maintenance of the population and habitat conditions in No. 2 above on all non-Service lands, especially other federally owned lands.
4. Recognize that most marine bird colonies, roosts and loafing sites are important to their survival and work toward the establishment and active protection of these habitats and their adjacent waters as marine bird sanctuaries by private, local, state or Federal interests.
5. Encourage formulation of comprehensive land management plans, effective regulation of offshore oil and mineral development and stringent tanker safety laws - to provide adequate protection for marine birds and their habitats in areas which may be developed.
6. Encourage appropriate research and surveys on marine birds and their ecosystems especially work related to long-term monitoring of populations and habitats and identifying species nearing threatened status.
7. Remove all introduced predators from marine bird colonies on all National Wildlife Refuges and encourage their removal from all other colonies.

### III. NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE LANDS

The following is a listing of National Wildlife Refuges within Region One established primarily for marine bird uses or having significant marine bird use in addition to its primary reason for refuge designation.

#### Washington:

1. Copalis National Wildlife Refuge
2. Quillayute Needles National Wildlife Refuge
3. Flattery Rocks National Wildlife Refuge
4. San Juan Islands National Wildlife Refuge
5. Willapa National Wildlife Refuge
6. Protection Island National Wildlife Refuge

Oregon:

1. Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge
2. Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife Refuge
3. Cape Meares National Wildlife Refuge

California:

1. Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge
2. San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge
3. Farallon National Wildlife Refuge

Hawaii:

1. Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge
2. Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge

American Samoa:

1. Rose Atoll National Wildlife Refuge

U.S. Possessions in the Pacific:

1. Johnston Atoll National Wildlife Refuge
2. Baker Island National Wildlife Refuge
3. Howland Island National Wildlife Refuge
4. Jarvis Island National Wildlife Refuge



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Regional Director

November 15, 1985

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Date