

**FEDERAL AID  
FINAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME  
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION  
PO Box 115526  
Juneau, AK 99811-5526

**Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
State Wildlife Grant**

**Grant Number:** T-3 **Segment No. 1**  
**Project Number:** 3.11  
**Project Title:** Verifying status of the Eskimo curlew (*Numenius borealis*) in Alaska  
**Project Duration:** July 1, 2006 – June 30, 2010  
**Report Period:** July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2009  
**Report Due Date:** September 30, 2009  
**Partner:** Alaska Department of Fish and Game

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**I. PROBLEM OR NEED THAT PROMPTED THIS RESEARCH**

Currently, both the State of Alaska, Department of Fish and Game Endangered Species List and the federal (USFWS) Endangered Species List suggest that the Eskimo curlew (*Numenius borealis*) is close to extinction, existing, if at all, only at extremely low numbers. In March 1967, they were officially designated as Endangered throughout their entire range. Numbers declined precipitously in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in response to changing habitat and uncontrolled market hunting. From 1905-1945, Eskimo curlews were believed to be extinct. However, between 1945 and 1995, 68 sightings, including one specimen and two photographs, were recorded. A collection of photos was taken in March 1962 near Galveston, Texas. There are reports of individuals and pairs of Eskimo curlews seen on breeding grounds in the Northwest Territory of Canada during the past 10 years, but these sightings have remained unconfirmed. Because of extremely low populations, efforts should be made to verify reports of its existence.

In summer 1989, a report of Eskimo curlews nesting in a remote and largely inaccessible area north of McGrath was received. Because of access difficulties and conflicting time constraints, no effort was expended to confirm or deny this report until 2003, at which time, no confirmation was made.

**II. REVIEW OF PRIOR RESEARCH AND STUDIES IN PROGRESS ON THE PROBLEM OR NEED**

We are aware of only one recent research project in Alaska investigating the presence of Eskimo Curlews. During the period 7-10 July, 2003, an 18.5 mi<sup>2</sup> segment of the northwest quadrant of the Sunshine Mountains in Central Alaska was surveyed on foot for presence of Eskimo curlews by J. Whitman, ADF&G Nongame Biologist. During the 4-day period, a total of 48.4 miles was traversed, through a variety of upland habitats, ranging from wet sedge meadows to dry alpine tundra and rocky, mountainous terrain. No Eskimo curlews were found.

### **III. APPROACHES USED AND FINDINGS RELATED TO THE OBJECTIVES AND TO PROBLEM OR NEED.**

OBJECTIVE 1: Attempt to confirm or refute the existence of the Eskimo curlew at a reported nesting site in western interior Alaska.

During the period 22-27 June 2007, J. Whitman, ADF&G Nongame Biologist, surveyed Bitzshtini Mountain near Lake Minchhumina in central Alaska for the presence of Eskimo curlews. J. Whitman accessed the area with a Robinson R-44 helicopter and hiked on foot daily from a base camp situated at 64.4313N, 151.9641W. Weather was uncooperative, with frequent rain squalls, periodic high winds, and mountain obscurations by low clouds. However, periodic breaks in the weather allowed foot travel, and approximately 68km were traversed over the course of 5 days looking and listening for Eskimo Curlews. No Eskimo Curlews were found.

In 2008, J. Whitman retired from his position and T. Booms replaced him in January 2009 as the Nongame Biologist for Regions III and V in Alaska and inherited this project. After detailed review of this project, the results from the 2007 field work, and discussions with leading experts on Eskimo Curlews, it was determined that it was highly unlikely that Eskimo Curlews persist in Alaska and that further field work is not warranted given other conservation priorities. If Eskimo Curlews do persist, search efforts should focus on areas where they had been documented breeding, which is outside of Alaska. Therefore, T. Booms made the decision to end this project sooner than planned.

### **IV. MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

Our findings are consistent with the current belief that the species is likely extinct. Though it is impossible to confirm a negative finding, our results support this conclusion. If further surveys for this species are desired, they should be conducted within the species historical breeding range (Canada) or on its historical wintering range (Southern USA) where the odds of finding the species, if extant, are greater.

### **V. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON JOBS FOR LAST SEGMENT PERIOD ONLY (July 1, 2008 – June 30, 2009)**

JOB/ACTIVITY 1A: For a 4-6 day period in each of the 4 years of the project, access a different alpine tundra “sky-island” in the Kuskokwim Mountains system. Access will be by helicopter. Each of the selected areas will be surveyed on foot in an attempt to find Eskimo curlews.

No field work occurred within this reporting period because J. Whitman retired from his position in April 2008 and T. Booms was not hired until Jan. 2009.

### **VI. PUBLICATIONS**

None.