

# Wildlife Watchers' Newsletter

Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation

VOL. 13, NO.1 Winter 1994-95

## Wildlife Diversity Requires Funding Diversity

Do you know where most of the money that supports wildlife conservation and management comes from? Most of it comes from excise taxes collected from purchases of hunting equipment through the Pittman-Robertson Act and is spent to conserve and manage game animals.

In Alaska, 95% of the money for wildlife conservation is directed toward only 12% of the state's species. Although some additional federal money is designated for protection of endangered species, there are hundreds of other declining species such as seabirds, owls, songbirds, and amphibians whose conservation is seriously jeopardized because they are neither game animals nor listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

The reason for this vast disparity in funding is plain and simple. Years ago, hunters and anglers took it upon themselves to foot the bill for game and sportfish conservation programs through license fees and surcharges on sporting equipment.

The results have been remarkable. Game populations once critically depleted in the lower 48, such as white tailed deer and wild turkey, have been restored to historic levels of abundance. Hundreds of thousands of acres of wildlife habitat have been purchased, safeguarded and enhanced, and opportunities for hunting and fishing are now widely available to the public. Today, most people have more opportunities to see game animals than at any other time in their lives.

Fortunately, many projects whose main thrust was improving game or sportfish populations have incidentally benefited many species not hunted or fished. The fact remains, though, that hunters and anglers have been the principal financial supporters of many programs benefiting a variety of wildlife species.

Now, the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA), along with state wildlife agencies and

conservation groups, including the National Wildlife Federation, the Audubon Society and others, hope to achieve for all wild creatures what has been accomplished for game and sportfish.

IAFWA is spearheading a nationwide campaign, the *Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative*, to create an adequate and reliable funding source that will not only address the needs of nongame wildlife, but also lead to more and better wildlife viewing sites, photo blinds, observation towers, hiking trails and other sorely needed recreational facilities. This money would also be used to fund wildlife education programs for youth and adults to ensure the future of conservation. These funds will reduce the need to divert funds from on-going programs to finance new programs desired by a growing number of outdoor enthusiasts.

The goal is to generate \$350 million a year nationally through a dedicated user fee on recreational equipment and supplies commonly used by birders, outdoor photographers, hikers, and others who enjoy observing wildlife. Eligible items could include bird seed and feeders, camera gear, binoculars, spotting scopes, field guides, hiking boots and camping equipment (for example, a person might pay an additional \$2.50 for a \$100 backpack). The program would be administered just like the very successful Pittman-Robertson funds, with all monies dedicated to wildlife projects.

Americans, and especially Alaskans, have a growing passion for the earth's other inhabitants. Ironically, as greater numbers of people are becoming more interested in wildlife, many

*Continued on back*



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# Bear Viewing Areas: Summer 1994

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## McNeil River: Twenty-two Years of Bear Viewing

Summer 1994 was the 22nd year that the Alaska Department of Fish & Game has managed a bear viewing program at McNeil River State Game Sanctuary. Throughout those 22 years, management of the sanctuary has been relatively constant. There has been a limit of 10 visitors per day. Each group is escorted to the viewing area by an ADF&G guide. The camp is unchanged other than the replacement of old cabins with new ones in 1982. Most importantly, bears still arrive in large numbers to catch and consume salmon.

The sanctuary is managed for brown bears. Human use is secondary and its impact must be minimal. The system has proven effective over the past 22 years. Small groups of humans have spent thousands of hours near dozens of bears and there have been no injuries to bears or people.

1994 saw the third largest number of bears using the sanctuary (excluding cubs). The amount of time each bear spent at the sanctuary, however, was low-possibly due to poor salmon runs. Public interest remains high. In 1994 more than 1,700 people applied to visit and 280 received permits.

Research continues at the sanctuary with three scientific papers to be out soon and new studies planned for 1995. A book, video, calendar and soon a poster featuring the bears of McNeil River have been produced within the last two years.

Statistics on bears and bear use of the sanctuary have been collected every year since 1976. The following milestones are from these records:

- Most bears seen at one time at McNeil Falls ..... 68
- Most bears seen in one day at McNeil Falls ..... 105
- Most bears seen at one time at Mikfik Falls ..... 24
- Most bears seen in one day at Mikfik Falls ..... 33
- Most salmon seen caught in one day at McNeil Falls ..... 1,159
- Most salmon seen caught in one year at McNeil Falls ..... 15,455
- Most salmon seen caught in one day by one bear ... 90
- Most salmon seen caught in one year by one bear .. 1,012

McNeil River remains unique because of the opportunities to observe bears unaffected by human presence. Other areas of the state are beginning to develop bear viewing opportunities and many of them utilize elements of McNeil River State Game Sanctuary management. While all of these areas have their own unique characteristics, there is one common denominator: there is substantially more demand for bear viewing opportunities (of all three species) than currently is

made available by resource managers. The future challenge of managers is to meet the growing need for bear and other wildlife viewing opportunities.

If you are interested in applying for a permit to visit McNeil River State Game Sanctuary, please write to the address below and ask for an application. Because visitation is limited to protect bears and quality viewing opportunities, a lottery is conducted to pick the lucky visitors. Applications are available after January 1st each year and must be returned by March 1st for the upcoming visitor season (June 7 - August 25).

Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Division of Wildlife Conservation  
333 Raspberry Road  
Anchorage, AK 99518-1599  
ATTN: McNeil River



## Pack Creek News: Unusual Incidents at Bear Viewing Site

Two sows each with a cub of the year, made an appearance at Pack Creek this year. This was significant because no new cubs had been observed there for the past two years. One sow was a Pack Creek regular while the other was an unknown bear.

Another unusual event occurred at Pack Creek this season. A bear nicknamed Pest approached a "people only" area and ripped open two backpacks. Pest (or "P") has been a regular visitor to Pack Creek since her mother brought her there as a cub. Although she had a history of taking packs and food and approaching people closely, it had been 8 years since she destroyed a pack. Pack Creek staff have worked hard at conditioning bears and changing people's behavior and travel routes over the past several years and the pack snatching came as somewhat of a surprise to us all. This incident may indicate a need for closer visitor supervision.

Editor's Note: Pack Creek is a Bear Viewing area on Admiralty Island near Juneau and is co-managed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Forest Service. Permits are required to visit Pack Creek. For more information about Pack Creek and how to obtain a permit contact the U.S. Forest Service Information Center, 101 Egan Drive (Centennial Hall), Juneau, AK 99801 (Phone 907-586-8751).

# Waterbird Conservation

## Fishing Line Dangerous To Waterbirds

*This article by Mike Malone was reprinted with permission from the September 1994 issue of the Alaska Fly Fishers Newsletter.*

Recently I was preparing to do some serious fly fishing on one of my favorite Mat-Su lakes when just as I entered the water at the put-in site I heard a "peep peep peep" coming from the water at my feet. When I looked down, I found a very wet and weak common loon chick. The tiny creature was tangled in a mass of monofilament fishing line and its head was just barely out of the water. As a matter of fact, periodically its beak would slip below the surface and it would blow bubbles as it tried to exhale.

I'm aware of all the rules and regulations pertaining to disturbing mother nature, letting nature weed out the weak and all that important scientific stuff about not handling wild immature animals for fear their parents will not return. Well, I could not justify leaving this helpless bird to die a cruel slow death, so I picked it up and removed all the fishing line then placed it on some branches of a tree at water level. Within minutes the small bird was chirping like crazy so I figured it was probably getting its strength back. As a matter of fact, an hour later I could still hear it chirping as I returned a 22" rainbow to the lake.

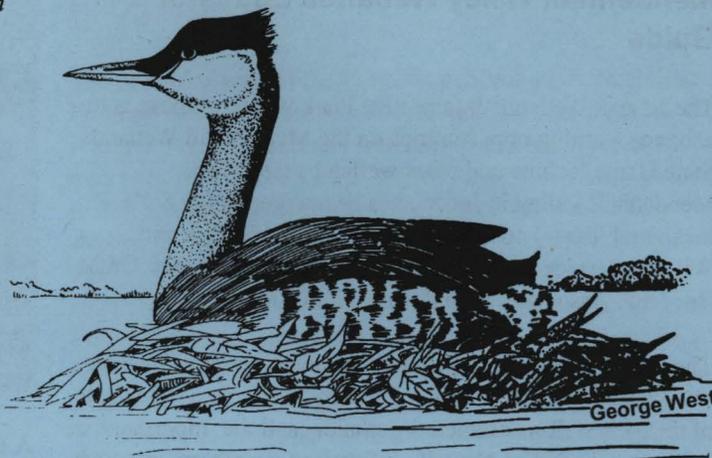
This story has a happy ending, as before long, the parent and the rest of the loon family came and collected its off-spring for a short swim. I continued to catch beautiful "Bows" until my arm got tired . . . or was it until one of the kids got wet and cold and my lovely bride "suggested" we return home.

Anyway, that little deed of kindness really made me feel good, so good that we picked up all the monofilament left by so many thoughtless fishermen at the launch site and on the trail back to the road. There is no way I could have illustrated for my sons the impact of leaving trash and even small pieces of fishing line on the ground if we had not gone tubing that day.

I share this experience with you in hopes you will relate your environmental conservation habits to the beginning and ending of this story.



*Grebes can also be harmed by stray fishing line.*



## Loon Conservation Program Continues

During the last nine years, volunteers have assisted loon conservation efforts in southcentral Alaska by reporting loon nesting areas and efforts, posting signs at loon nesting lakes, and reporting problems inhibiting loon reproduction.

Although volunteer efforts have been very helpful, there are still situations where nesting and nursery areas have been disturbed by development or people. Use of jet skis on nesting lakes has become a growing problem causing nest abandonment and separation of loon families, sometimes even injury or drowning. Fishing line entanglement is an annual problem.

You can help loons and other wetland wildlife by keeping your distance and collecting litter, especially discarded fishing line. Report illegal wetland fill to authorities. Undisturbed shoreline areas are important to fish, waterbirds and other wetland wildlife.

If you would like to volunteer for Alaska Loon Watch, contact Nancy Tankersley at 267-2180.

Attention Loon Watch volunteers! Thanks to those of you who have already turned in your reports. If you haven't, please send them in as soon as possible. Thanks.

# Wildlife Viewing Enhancements

## Juneau Wetlands Interpretive Plan and Mendenhall Valley Wetlands Educator's Guide

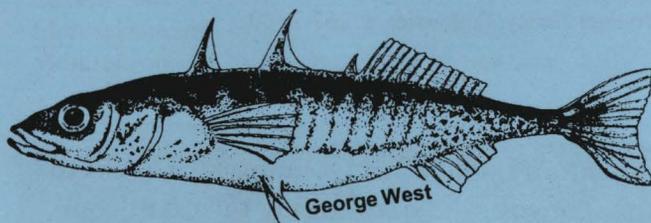
The Juneau Wetlands Interpretive Plan, whose purpose is to enhance learning opportunities on the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge and other wetland sites in the Mendenhall Valley in Juneau has been completed. State, local, and federal cooperators received a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Challenge Grant and contracted with D&M Bucy and Associates who developed this master plan.

The major stories to be told in the Juneau Wetlands Interpretive Plan focus on the value of wetlands in general, the value of the MWSGR as protected wetlands, and the importance of managing the entire glacially influenced ecosystem in which the refuge occurs.

The purpose of the plan is to guide the development of future interpretive projects as funding becomes available. One important project mentioned in the Juneau Wetlands Interpretive Plan is the Mendenhall Valley Wetlands Educator's Guide. This educator's guide was recently completed under a USFWS Challenge-Cost Share Grant.

The guide contains background information on the wetland ecology of the Mendenhall Valley, site-specific information about suggested field-trip destinations, and comprehensive classroom and field activities for students kindergarten through high school. Though the guide emphasizes the Mendenhall Valley, the concepts and activities can be used to interpret wetlands located elsewhere.

The Juneau Wetlands Interpretive Plan and The Mendenhall Valley Wetlands Educator's Guide are available in Juneau from school libraries, including University of Alaska Southeast, public libraries including the State Library, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Alaska Department of Fish and Game Juneau offices.



## Watchable Wildlife Conservation Trust Funds Wildlife Viewing Platform

A brand new wildlife viewing platform in Homer is ready for visitors! Last summer, Kachemak Heritage Land Trust received a \$2,000 grant from the Alaska Watchable Wildlife Conservation Trust which helped to support construction of a wildlife viewing platform near Beluga Lake in Homer on the Trust's Calvin and Coyle Woodland Park.

The Watchable Wildlife Trust is a special fund established by the Alaska Conservation Foundation in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to support wildlife viewing opportunities and wildlife education.

"This is the first private sector project funded by the Watchable Wildlife Trust. The Advisory Committee is excited about this project because it is a citizen effort to enhance wildlife viewing," said Jim Stratton, Program and Finance Director of Alaska Conservation Foundation.



Alaska Watchable Wildlife Conservation Trust

The wildlife viewing platform and accompanying nature trail provides environmental education opportunities for residents and visitors. Located within walking distance of Paul Banks School, the facility provides a convenient setting for educating the public about the importance of habitat for wildlife in the area including moose, songbirds, eagles, black bears, coyotes, and porcupines. The trail and platform are also an ideal setting for enhancing community awareness of the significant wildlife values of land within the city of Homer.

The Calvin and Coyle Nature Trail and Wildlife Viewing Platform also received generous financial support from National Bank of Alaska and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.



*Volunteer Naturalist Diann Stone tells a visitor about the nesting bald eagles in the back of the marsh.*

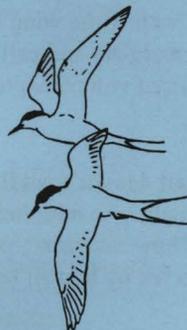
## Proposed Developments at Potter Marsh

An interpretive development plan has been finalized which includes educational and recreational proposals for Potter Marsh and the rest of the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge.

Proposals include a joint nature center with the Bird Treatment and Learning Center, more signs about wildlife and human history, an expanded naturalist program, school education kits, a stream protection program, and audio-visual materials about the wetlands.

Public approval for the proposals has been very high, so detailed design work and fundraising has begun on the nature center and a few signs. Preliminary costs for the nature center are \$7 million for a 15,000 square foot building, which would include presentations, exhibits, aviaries, and a bird treatment clinic. Public and private funds are being pursued.

If you have additional questions or would like to help on these projects, please contact Nancy Tankersley at 267-2180.



## Potter Marsh Boardwalk Naturalist Program

The second season of the Potter Marsh Volunteer Naturalist Program ended August 26. Throughout the four month season, over 30 volunteers staffed the boardwalk for 102 hours and over 2,748 people signed the visitor book. Visitors to Potter Marsh came from all regions of Alaska, all fifty states and over thirty foreign countries. Viewing highlights this season included nesting bald eagles in the back of the marsh (visible with spotting scopes provided by the naturalists) and scores of silver salmon, as well as a few kings and pinks, which were visible right under the boardwalk. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer naturalist at Potter Marsh next summer, please call Liz Williams at the Anchorage office, 267-2196.



## Creamer's Refuge Center Opens April 1995

On November 12, 1994, the Creamer's Refuge Visitor Center hosted a "Sneak Peek" viewing of newly installed exhibits to allow participants in the development of the center and the displays a first look at the results of 6 years of hard work. Restoration of the farmhouse began back in 1988 and has culminated in the installation of nature and human history exhibits in the farmhouse visitor center. A few finishing touches remain to be completed on the exhibits before the official public opening in April 1995.

More than 25 outdoor interpretive signs were delivered in October. These signs depict the wildlife found on the refuge in winter, where the migratory birds go when they leave Creamer's, and a historical sign describing the dairy and how it became a refuge. The first two signs will be changed seasonally to tell about spring migration and arrival dates, summer breeding season, and fall migration.

All of these interpretive signs and exhibits were made possible by a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Challenge Grant match with funds and services provided by ADF&G, the Alaska Duck Stamp Program, Ducks Unlimited, Arctic Audubon Society, Friends of Creamer's Field, Alaska Craftsman Home Program, Lions Club, and North Star Center. Funds to improve access, parking and restore the historic barns are being provided by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act through the Alaska Department of Transportation.

# Urban Wildlife

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## Caution! "Aliens" Invade Southcentral Settlements!

Every winter, hundreds of alien beings invade Alaskan towns. Don't be fooled by their big, brown eyes and long, dark lashes. Humans are subconsciously programmed to believe big, dark eyes are receptive and trusting. That may suffice for judging the intentions of other humans. But who really knows what thoughts lurk behind the steady gaze of a moose?

Humans tend to believe that all animals think like we do. But other species are like alien beings because they sense things differently and respond differently. To a moose, a mountain ash tree is a tasty snack; a human can be a threat to a cow and calf; and a wolf is something to run away from.

In winter, moose spend much of their waking hours eating. Obviously, they are perfectly capable of feeding themselves. But a lot of people seem to have a deep-seated need to feed moose human foods. Some are just trying to get a close-up photo or video; others feed moose believing they are helping them survive the winter. This growing trend is not good for moose and it's not good for people either.

Moose are wild animals. Just because they are standing in your back yard doesn't make them any less wild. They are not pets. Moose thrive best on natural, wild foods. Of course, they may prefer some human handouts to their natural diet. Most of us prefer candy to Brussels sprouts—that doesn't mean candy is good for us.

A bigger problem is moose behavior and human safety. Moose that are fed by people often become aggressive when looking for more handouts. Some moose will charge the next person they see, simply because that person has no food to offer. This problem is magnified in densely populated areas where lots of moose and people are living in one another's back yards. Several Anchorage residents have been injured or killed this winter, with little or no warning, by moose. These people inadvertently crossed the threshold that allows humans and wildlife to share the same space, and consequently the moose had to be shot by law enforcement authorities to prevent more serious human injuries.

Most of the attacks this winter have been by moose that have been fed by people. Please help by not feeding moose and by reminding others that any moose they feed may become hazardous to people and have to be shot. Enjoy watching moose from a safe distance.

## Alaska's Urban Ravens: Where Do They Come From, Where Do They Go

Every fall and spring, Anchorage area dumpsters experience a "changing of the guard." In summer, the city reverberates with the hysterical, high-pitched screaming of gulls. Most of the gulls fly south for the winter, and their feeding niche is filled by several thousand ravens. Though some ravens are local birds, most come from elsewhere. Where do these ravens nest and spend their summer vacations? No one knows.

Most of our wintertime ravens are commuters. They spend cold winter nights roosting in sheltered locations in the Chugach Mountains. But every morning at first light they can be seen streaming into town from the east. An hour or two before dusk they leave their day jobs and fly back into the mountains. Where exactly do they roost? Again, no one seems to know.

The Department of Fish and Game has received funding from Fort Richardson to find where our ravens nest in summer and roost in winter. This winter, biologists will capture 60 ravens and fit them with radio transmitters and wing tags. The transmitters weigh approximately 2-3% of

the average raven's weight. The ravens will carry them like tiny backpacks; other studies have found that ravens quickly get used to this arrangement. The batteries are designed to last two years, at which time every attempt will be made to recapture the ravens to remove both the transmitters and wing tags.

We suspect some wintering ravens are roosting as far away as Bird Creek, perhaps farther. In summer, some of "Anchorage's" ravens may nest as far away as Talkeetna, Tyonek, or Prince William Sound.

If you see any ravens with white wing tags, please note the tag number, location, and date and call Rick Sinnott at 267-2185. Also, we may need volunteers to help us radio-track the birds.

So little is known about Alaska's wildlife. Hopefully, these ravens will allow us a glimpse into their lives, helping biologists understand how ravens adapt to their environment and how they are affected by human land uses.

## Project WILD Action Grant Program

This year the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the Alaska Department of Education offered the Project WILD Action Grant Program to teachers and students interested in helping Alaska's wildlife and improving wildlife habitat.

The purpose of the program is to involve Alaska students in a "hands on" experience that will lead to an appreciation of the need for wise use and conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Current research shows factors affecting people's likelihood to take responsible action involving wildlife and the environment include these critical components: knowledge, skills, attitudes of appreciation and a belief that the action will make a difference. Acquiring the conviction that "I can make a difference" is dependent upon achieving success, even in small ways. This success is a critical component of what is necessary for learners of all ages to move from awareness to responsible action.

The Project WILD Action Grant program is intended to facilitate this process. After studying about wildlife, habitat and principles of conservation with their teachers through Project WILD curricula, Project WILD Action Grant projects give students an opportunity to work on a project that includes appropriate and responsible actions to help wildlife. Because these projects are student generated, they are projects that the students personally care about, which are within their reasonable reach to accomplish—and when they actually succeed—it can be life changing. This is a powerfully effective way to support and reinforce lifelong skills of responsible citizenship.

Eight Project WILD Action Grants were awarded to Alaska schools:

Wildlife Attraction Garden, Tok School, (Sally Young)  
Swamp City, Willow Crest School, Anchorage, (Cami Dalton)

Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project, Anchorage Co-op Preschool, (Sally Bruce)  
Habitat Improvement Project, Glennallen Elementary School, (Karen Stenberg)  
Mountain View Naturescape, Mountain View Elementary School, (Janaan Kaufman)  
Waterfowl Nesting Island for Cordova, Prince William Sound Science Center, (Elizabeth Trowbridge)  
Native Plant Rehabilitation, K-12 Alternative School, Anchorage, (Mark Lyke)  
Bird House Project, Dillingham Elementary School, (Larry Van Daele)

The Project WILD Action Grant Program is supported by grants from the Phillips Petroleum Foundation and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

## Fish and Game Goes Electronic

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game has joined millions around the world who communicate and share information with computers. This has two implications for computer-connected wildlife watchers. First, you can now communicate with us on the Internet. Our E-mail address is [agwild@tundra.alaska.edu](mailto:agwild@tundra.alaska.edu) or [74111.713@compuserve.com](mailto:74111.713@compuserve.com). Second, we have begun to develop a section ("Alaska") on CompuServe's Outdoors Support forum (GO OUTSUP). This section is designed to allow people who have an interest in Alaska's wildlife to post messages to one another and to share files. We welcome your contributions of messages, "uploads" about Alaska's wildlife, and suggestions for what kinds of information you would like to see us contribute. For additional information, contact Miguel De Marzo at 907-267-2180.



### Please check appropriate boxes and return this coupon to the Anchorage office:

Please add my name to your mailing list.

Address Correction:

Suggestions for projects or newsletter topics:

#### FOR TEACHERS/YOUTH LEADERS:

Send me more information on donating to the Alaska Watchable Wildlife Trust Fund, to support Chilkat River Bald Eagle Preserve, McNeil River Brown Bear State Game Sanctuary, Round Island Walrus Sanctuary, Stan Price Wildlife Sanctuary, Alaska Wildlife Curriculum and other conservation and education projects.

Send me information and an order form for the award-winning K-12 grade Alaska Wildlife Curriculum produced by ADF&G.

Send me more information about Project Wild workshops and activity guides.

Continued from page 1

species and their habitats face growing threats as human populations expand and place more demands on habitat.

The time for cost-effective conservation is when species and their habitats are common and healthy, not after they become threatened or endangered. For conservation to be successful and cost effective, we need better wildlife population and habitat inventories, more research and frequent monitoring, better wildlife education, and more recreational opportunities for the public to develop increased appreciation for wildlife and habitat.

The success of the Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative hinges on gaining the support of Congress, as well as the backing of companies that manufacture and sell outdoor equipment. This will only happen if you, their constituents and customers, make your wishes known. You can do this by writing letters to outdoor manufacturers and congressional representatives to let them know that you support the *Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative* and are willing to pay a small dedicated user fee to insure the future of wildlife.

*Portions of this article were reprinted from a press release by David Waller from the Wildlife Resources Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.*

## Biennial Review of Alaska's Endangered Species

The Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has the responsibility to make a determination of what species or subspecies of fish and wildlife in Alaska are threatened with extinction, publish a list of those species, and conduct a biennial review of that list. The last review was completed in October 1993. Species currently on Alaska's Endangered Species List include: short-tailed albatross, Eskimo curlew, right whale, blue whale, and humpback whale. The department will begin another review this winter. Contact John Schoen at ADF&G, 333 Raspberry Rd., Anchorage, 99518, 267-2280 for additional information.

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