
PANEL
Management Considerations

Moderator: James King, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Juneau, Alaska

Panel Members: Michael Smith, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Anchorage, Alaska
Bruce Turner, Canadian Wildlife Service, Edmonton, Alberta
Jim Bartonek, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Portland, Oregon
Dan Timm, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Anchorage, Alaska
Pete Shepherd, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, McGrath, Alaska

KING: We have a very distinguished group here today on this panel. I'm impressed. Some of them you've already met, and maybe some not. I'm sure the out-of-towners have noticed that a good many of the local people are watching with a great deal of interest the election results that have been appearing in the paper and on the news. . . . You've probably gathered also that we tend to be fans of the Hammond Administration, and one of the reasons for that is that Hammond has brought people like Mike Smith into the State government, and we feel we wouldn't have that sort of people with a change of administration. Mike, of course, is a wildlife biologist, and worked for the Game Department, and as you heard this morning, has got some really imaginative things going in the State Division of Lands. So, we're glad to have Mike here. Bruce Turner has also been a very effective participant in this meeting, and is an acknowledged authority, and has done a great deal of detailed work with the Trumpeters in the mid-continent in Alberta. On my left is Jim Bartonek. Most of you know him. He's got a long association with Alaska, but we lost him, at least in part, to the rest of the Pacific Flyway last year. He's now the Pacific Flyway Representative, stationed in Portland, Oregon. He is a very accomplished field biologist, and just recently got into a political job. Is that the right term?

BARTONEK: Sounds fine. I hope the pay's commensurate.

KING: And Dan represents the waterfowl interests of the State of Alaska in a very capable fashion -- Dan Timm next to Jim -- and as you heard this morning, has a very strong and effective interest in the non-game species, which is most encouraging. And Pete Shepherd, whom you also heard this morning, has had a long association with Trumpeter Swans. He's sort of an expert in bush Alaska, and Fish and Game uses him for all their thorniest problems in the rural areas because the going never gets too rough out in the hinterlands for Pete to make the scene. He's an expert on furbearers and big game, as well as waterfowl. So, we have a lot of people here that are directly associated with the management in Alaska, and a good spread of talent. With that I'd like to -- let's see, would you like to lead off with a few words, Mike? We'll work down and everybody have a little time.

SMITH: Say, Jim, I think I'll take the opportunity to ask that you might either start with Bruce or start at the other end because, as I mentioned this morning, it was only when I appeared here that I realized I might be asked to speak on the panel. So, I think I can pick up fairly quickly, but I'd just as soon not lead off.

KING: Pete, do you want to lead off? Or shall we start in the middle?

SMITH: Sorry, Pete.

SHEPHERD: I'd like to beg off too here for a minute because . . .

KING: Dan has broad shoulders.

TIMM: I'm not sure we can divorce Trumpeter Swan management from providing habitat for Trumpeter Swans, but I'll try. It's the area of involvement that the Alaska Department of Fish and Game would be in as pertains to Trumpeter Swan management. I'll outline these things, and maybe a few things we've done in the past. I'm sure you'll ask questions about the things we haven't done, but the Department certainly acknowledges that it's in the best interest of State, Federal government, Natives, and citizens at large, that the Trumpeter Swan should remain in secure status, and certainly not become threatened or endangered. Such a status has all sorts of unpleasant ramifications connected with it. The Department of Fish and Game's statutory authorities are primarily limited to the animals themselves. I'll read you our authorities granted by the Constitution. We have the authority to "manage, maintain, improve and extend the fish, game and aquatic plant resources of the State in the interests of the economy and general well being of the State." And further laws have pretty well limited our authority with some exceptions, as I said, to the animals; for example, setting hunting seasons. The Department of Natural Resources has the primary land management authority in Alaska. There are a few exceptions. We have direct management authority on refuges, critical habitats, and anadromous fish streams. And the Commissioner of Fish and Game can also enter into cooperative agreements with other State and Federal agencies. We get a hand in land management in that fashion, except it's other people's land.

As per Federal law, it is illegal in Alaska to shoot swans -- any species of swans -- but illegal take does occur. I'm generally aware of maybe a half a dozen cases made each year on swans being shot during the general waterfowl season -- people mistaking them for Snow Geese. I'm sure the actual incidences are many times that. But of course, judging from the results of swan surveys by Jim King -- both for Trumpeters and Whistlers -- the Trumpeter population certainly isn't being limited by the illegal kill. As for the Whistling Swan population, I'm not sure of the precision of Jim's breeding pairs surveys, but the population appears to be static, perhaps carrying capacity. The only place I'm aware of in the State that we have purposely tried to eliminate the take of swans as mistaken birds, is in the Juneau area where we closed the season on the Snow Geese. There can't be any mistakes for swans or geese because it's illegal to shoot Snow Geese there now. That action, I might add, was taken at the prompting of perhaps the most avid waterfowl hunter in the Juneau area. But as Sig described, read the paper from Walt Pedersen earlier today -- it frequently takes immense prodding to get government to do anything. We recognized that problem down there [Moose River] a long time -- just kind of ignored it -- until members of the public really forced us to get off dead center, which we did. Fish and Game's involvement in population surveys has been limited to,

of course, this little thing that I did with the cabins, and we as part of the cooperative agreement with the Forest Service on the Copper River Delta, we flew three surveys -- 1968, 1972 and 1974 -- spring surveys. And of course, the other management activities involved in issuing of permits for taking of adults or eggs of primarily Whistlers, but we get requests for Trumpeters also. Of course, this is part of the dual authority with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Perhaps one thing that I might suggest . . . I wonder if we should be setting a desirable population objective for Trumpeter Swans either for the State of Alaska or for individual populations; because as disturbance increases and encroachment on Trumpeter habitat increases, we're more and more going to have to be deciding how firm a stand we should take on this particular area or this group of lakes, or whatever. If people want to go in, if Division of Lands wants to sell land for cabin sites, wants to put a road through, or whatever, we can say, "No, can't do that; Trumpeter Swans are there." Well, how many Trumpeter Swans do you want? What effect is it going to have? What's your goal? We've got maybe 4500 now. Are 9000 better? How about 15,000, or would we be just as happy with perhaps 3000? I don't know. I don't like to do that myself (set objectives). I don't like to put population objectives particularly on, even on goose populations. But there's a practical need for that, and it's becoming more and more evident. Just exactly what do we want to accomplish? I just throw that out as a suggestion, perhaps. Population levels, I think, could well come -- desirable levels could well come from The Trumpeter Swan Society.

KING: Thanks, Dan. I'm sure that's an important consideration. My first thought was, we don't have control of the Trumpeter. It's setting its own population at the moment. If we let it drop back to 3000, could we hold it there? Jim, would you like to give us a few comments from the Federal side?

BARTONEK: Policy towards management of Trumpeter Swans must ultimately reflect the wishes of the public. George Brakhage presented earlier in this conference the Fish and Wildlife Service's management policy on Trumpeter Swans which is rather passive when compared to that effort for the endangered Aleutian Canada Goose. The comparatively passive efforts towards Trumpeter Swans is understandable because the population is stable and because heretofore there has not been a great concern by the public as to how the Service is or is not managing the species. New information about this species could change current policies and practices. New information could come from the states which are likely to initiate many non-game wildlife activities should Congress provide the necessary assistance in funding. The Trumpeter Swan Society could, if it chooses, provide the impetus and suggest new directions in policies and the management and research efforts of those Federal and state agencies having responsibility for managing swans and their habitats.

I suspect that there is no person in this room who believes that Trumpeter Swans should not be maintained at least at their present status, and most here would like to see them increase in numbers and have a wider distribution. However, the desire to have these swans increase and spread is not universally shared by the public. Some wildlife administrators and biologists are apprehensive over the expansion in range of any rare or scarce species because of the potential problems associated with managing, especially hunting, other species. While previous speakers have suggested the desirability of classifying Trumpeters as endangered or threatened, I do not believe that such designation is warranted. Nothing, however, would preclude states from giving these birds such special protection. If the Society believes this protection is necessary, they should educate the public and then petition the states and even the Federal governments (including Canada) for protective classification.

It is apparent to me that what is needed by everyone is a management plan for Trumpeter Swans. Such a plan would lay out for all to see where we are headed and how we are proposing to proceed. The plan should detail goals, short- and long-term objectives, identify the procedures and schedule for achieving them, assign responsibilities, and provide for periodic review of progress. Most of the concerns expressed by various speakers at this conference would likely be addressed, i.e., the desirability of expanding the range of Trumpeters, preserving critical habitat, and collecting certain kinds of information, and priorities and responsibilities would be assigned. A management plan would provide for all the guidelines we should follow and we could be reminded to follow should we not meet our obligations. Certainly, The Trumpeter Swan Society could play an important role in influencing the nature of a management plan.

KING: Thank you, Jim. Bruce, could you give us a few words from the Canadian Wildlife Service point of view?

TURNER: Well, I'm certainly in no position to talk about policy, but I can say rather unequivocally that Canadian Wildlife Service has no jurisdiction over the habitat base in the Grande Prairie area. It's strictly a provincial concern and a private concern. Much of the land is privately owned. There is one lake that is designated as a Federal sanctuary, but jurisdiction over the area is weak because it's privately owned, and the fate of that piece of property is solely up to the discretion of the landowner.

I agree with Ron [Mackay] that the population is dangerously low, and probably should be identified as an endangered population on the basis of the figures which I showed you this morning. The breeding populations fluctuate between two and 25, which in my opinion, is dangerously low. I think that the potential for the population to expand in that area is good, but at the same time, the habitat which is currently occupied is very critical.

The point which Jim [King] brought home this morning about a management committee, to me, has tremendous merit, not only for the Pacific population, but also for the Interior population. The Interior population, is considerably lower. There seems to be more government bodies involved in the Tri-state area. And the same would apply for the breeding area in Canada in terms of Canadian Wildlife Service, the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division, Alberta Environment, and the Peace River Regional Planning Commission. So, there is tremendous merit in that, and I just hope that this area can be pursued, maybe at a later point during the meeting, about a management committee or sub-committee established for the two populations. The point I mentioned concerning Canadian Wildlife Service, Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division, Alberta Environment, and Peace River Regional Planning Commission -- there's a definite need for increased liaison, particularly with Alberta Environment and the Peace River Regional Planning Commission. I've been working fairly closely with the provincial authorities and we're taking steps in that direction.

As I indicated yesterday, most of the swans breed on privately owned land, although there is a sizable amount of breeding habitat occurring on land which is still subject to disposition of the Public Lands Act. All of the lakes which occur on these areas currently have a 500-yard buffer zone which precludes any road construction, drilling operations, or seismic

operations of the oil industry. So, I think that is a very positive step for the area. In terms of the population itself, and my personal objectives with the population, I plan to continue aerial surveys to monitor the status of the population, and how the encroachment of agriculture is affecting the distribution of the birds. That will be comprised of a July survey and a September survey. The current collaring program which we have will be terminated at the end of this graduate program.

KING: Thank you, Bruce. Mike, I apologize for not filling you in a little better, but one of the major concerns that's come up over and over again here is habitat welfare. Nobody is better prepared to speak on that subject, I'm sure than yourself.

SMITH: Thank you, that was a perfect lead in. I might say before I get into my comments any further, when I first began working with the Department of Fish and Game, I was in the Habitat Section. In fact, I took Pete Shepherd's position when Pete decided Anchorage was a little bit too big and moved out into the bush. I very early on became hopelessly addicted to the need for habitat protection with respect to all wildlife species. My reason for leaving Fish and Game and going to the position of Director of Division of Lands was simply because I felt I could do more for wildlife by being in that position, which pretty much determines what happens to State lands, than I could ever have been based in the Fish and Game Department. It's on that basis of somebody now, who after 3-1/2 years can talk about what's happened with respect to land use and how that affects habitat, that I hope to make these following comments.

Dan's [Timm] question before -- what's the maximum population level for Trumpeter Swans -- is really interesting because I think I can use that as an example of the type of real world political questions and decisions that have to be answered on a day-to-day, or at least month-to-month basis within the Division of Lands, and how I think it ultimately affects wildlife populations. Any land manager, particularly a land manager in a position that people in the Division of Lands finds themselves in now -- that is, under what appears to be fairly intense public pressure for major land disposal, and yet a national constituency talking about protecting land -- has got a very fine line to walk. And these are two strong constituencies, each of which must be answered. In order to answer those questions, decisions have to be made, at times, within some very tight time frames. And if I can say one thing, I think particularly to wildlife biologists, and I feel like I can be somewhat critical, having been raised and teached as a wildlife biologist, there are times when decisions have to be made that none of us like to make, and as professionals we're asked for answers upon which major decisions are going to be made, and you feel like you just can't make them. Nobody in Wildlife Biology 101 ever said that somebody's going to call you on the phone and say by the close of business today I've got to know what's the most important 10,000 acres of swan habitat in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta area or the Upper Tanana, or something like that, because I've got to make a decision which may affect it. Hence, the response that occasionally comes in, which is frustrating, is, "My God, how can I say what that is?" I guess my suggestion is, you do the best you can, because like it or not, that decision's going to be made at 4:30 that day. This type of situation can be somewhat ameliorated. I think we've gone a long way toward ameliorating it now in our planning process by making sure that the people that are concerned with this, i.e., representatives from the Department of Fish and Game, are aware of the time frame of what's happening in land use decisions in the future, whether it's a month, 6 months, a year, 3 years, and can begin to move research to the extent that they can manage decisions to aid and abet that type of decision.

I know that when the Native Claims Settlement Act was first passed in the early 1970's, when I was still with the Department [of Fish and Game] and it was obvious that large areas were going to be put into some of the d-2 withdrawals, that people who were concerned with hunting really decided that we needed to get some more information on these areas. Suddenly the goat populations and sheep populations that were going to be censused for the first time in areas that were not going to be affected by this legislation were just dropped, and we started going into areas where we were going to be asked these questions. A lot of information has come out in the last 6 or 7 years that we never would have had had we kept going in the way we were going. Therefore, I think it's very important that agencies or organizations, such as The Trumpeter Swan Society, that are concerned about the species and the integral relationship it has with its habitat, find out what's happening with respect to the ultimate future of that habitat. Is there a program underway that's ultimately going to result in that land being in private ownership? It's often shortened in cities, I should say. It's a little bit each year. But patterns develop. And if that's the case, and you've got important habitat in the way of civilization as it's marching out, or whatever happens, you've really got to be out there early to protect those interests, because as I say, the real world is that these things are going to happen. When it comes right down to the question of somebody that's got a 2-million-dollar project and somebody that can stand up and say, "Gee, there's a couple of Trumpeter Swans in this area," I know where my sympathies lie, but I know very often that the real world political decisions are that the swans just aren't going to win. So, when an agency like the Division of Lands looks at an area like the lower Copper River, the Cordova area, and there are some determinations to be made about lands that will be made available for public use, private ownership, other areas that will be used on a more multiple-use/sustained-yield basis where we may have to have timbering or may have to have mining, that's the time when people have really got to get out there very quickly and establish, and be ready to draw a line on the map, and say, "Yes, if we could have this, we're ready to live with this," and then defend it in the future. And if that means you're going to say you're only going to have a population of 1400 in that area, or whatever, then that's what you go for. You did the best you can and you make that determination. But, if the response is, "Well, gee, we just don't know; we won't know for another 10 years," 10 years later that decision is going to be made.

I am optimistic in Alaska, however, with respect to the outcome in land use planning, because we're lucky in that when we have these face-offs, they're usually not an absolute "yes" or "no" with respect to one particular thing. It isn't always the question of a highway versus, say, Trumpeter habitat. Usually now, as we're hitting these areas, doing these studies, land has not been committed. There is a considerable amount of land out there. The Delta study I mentioned earlier this morning is an example. We have a bison herd up there, and most of the range for that bison herd has been recommended through that study, with great local support, that it be put aside as some type of refuge. That's because there was still ample land to be made available for people, for residences, for recreation, for timber harvesting or mine development. These trade-offs can be made now. It's not a question of, "Well, gee, if we protect habitat here, we're never going to have any mining, because there's other areas to timber and mine over here." And as the people make the decision now, there's deference here to some recreation or preservation of habitat and over here to development concepts. But these are ingrained in that area, and before the real conflicts come up, it's going to be 15, 20, or 30 years, and the people are going to have learned to live with that. They're going to have been raised in this area and they're going to respect those bison, and they're not going to want anybody messing around with that. So, I think we've got a real good chance to do it. But I say again, you've got to realize that you have to be ready to stand up when the question is asked, to say what your druthers are, because that's what will be plugged in to the decision-making process.

KING: Thank you, Mike. Pete?

SHEPHERD: Let's carry on a little on this habitat protection which I feel is one of the most critical issues in the Interior. The State does have a vehicle for selection of critical habitat areas. In the Interior there are several that are concentrated areas of Trumpeter Swan use, which incidentally are very important moose and furbearer habitat in our own State lands. I think the possibility of selecting some of these areas may be a great future. Another thing that I'm sure everybody is aware of is, Interior Alaska has always been under, every summer, a lot of wildfires. Wildfire, while not always destructive to habitat, can cause temporary problems. Now, last year I ran into a problem -- and the State has been working very closely with BLM on wildfire, either suppression or letting fires go -- on the north fork of the Kuskokwim we had two Trumpeter Swan nests in an area of very intense wildfire. Also, this area is a highly important furbearer area. Conferring with BLM, an agreement was made to put the fire out with everything they had, and fortunately they were able to stop this fire before it destroyed the nests and the young -- well, the eggs weren't hatched in the Trumpeter nests in this area. This is not to say that a fire wouldn't be beneficial to the area, but at the time it would not be beneficial to the Trumpeter, because the fire was so hot it was burning the marsh grasses in the entire swamp area. So, I say that the agreements with other agencies, such as fire suppression agreements with the BLM, would be necessary and continue to protect and maintain Trumpeter habitat.

Another point is the possibility of farming along some of the river flood plains, which of course falls into the category of land planning. Many of the oxbows and river scours do develop into top quality Trumpeter habitat in the Interior. This would have to be taken into consideration when selecting lands for farming. Timber cutting is a possibility on some of the major river systems, such as the Kuskokwim River, and most of that timber at present is owned by the native corporations. This would require some agreements with corporations and joint management agreements with the other agencies, as we have heard today that there has been made just recently, to see that nesting areas were left with at least a little of the original habitat surrounding them. I think it all boils down to the fact that it's not only a State responsibility, but it's a responsibility of many agencies to get together and protect some of this habitat.

KING: I'm glad you brought up the critical habitat.

SHEPHERD: For instance, I can mention . . . there is a vast area across from Fairbanks which we categorize as Sub-unit 20A, which at one time supported a moose population, probably close to 10,000 moose, here in Alaska. In 10 years, this population has decreased considerably due to many factors. On the same area, there is a large number of nesting Trumpeters and subadult Trumpeters. It is also a very important fur area, and most of it's in State land or in military lands. This is one of the possibilities I was mentioning as an [critical] area -- it's actual use would be for the resources that are there now. The Kantishna River drainage is another area that has some State land, which is a concentration area of Trumpeters, and part of the Minto Lake Flats, which is State land, has nesting Trumpeters on it. This area has a possibility maybe in the future of being selected as some sort of State management area.

KING: The critical habitat designation has to go through the legislature, is that right?

SHEPHERD: That's correct, and I think maybe Mike can explain it further.

KING: I think that would be nice if we could hear a little bit more about that.

SMITH: The State's classification system, until about 6 weeks from now, has not and will not have any classification set aside specifically for wildlife. With 6 weeks, we hope to finally adopt regulations which will take care of that. It's one of those things I felt very strongly about when I took this position. What we envision doing as we go through our planning classification process, is taking those areas that are important for wildlife habitat purposes and classifying them for retention in State ownership, with wildlife habitat protection or wildlife resource use, being the dominant use, you might say. And other uses which are not incompatible with that being permitted as the need arises. Those areas which are really critical, and we're not talking about areas like the size of Unit 20A, which is 100,000 acres, actually probably more than a million, but rather areas that are very critical, say winter moose browse, what have you, or something like Trumpeter habitat, and having those be proposed to the legislature for legislative protection. That's the ultimate. An administrator can't get in the way of that type of thing. But, politically you've got to limit those to those that are really important, because if you don't, if you try to just legislate every little bit of land use, you're not going to get there. People are just going to get tired of seeing that. This leads to a point that I meant to mention before, and didn't, and it's in line with my suggestion earlier that you've got to be ready to stand up and say what our interests are if you try to identify particular areas.

One of the most important things that a resource specialist can know is the relative value of a particular area with respect to all other areas within his province, state, whatever, as far as his resource is concerned. For instance, I can't find in this State a 10,000-acre area, which if I said I wanted to open it for mining, or wanted to make a park out of it, or something, I can't find two resource experts who are going to fight each other because there's some mineral potential there, but there's also some habitat there, and you can always find this type of argument. And after about a year of trying to mediate between these two, it just became an impossible situation. And so what we did, and the way our system is set up now, and it has worked beautifully, is to say to the miner or say to the timber man, "Look, of all the lands in the State, where is that 10,000 acres to support [you]? Is this your most important 10,000? Is it your last 10,000? Where is it?" You force them to prioritize before you have to answer these questions, and after that, it's usually a very simple question. Somebody comes in and they want to open an area up for mining or stripping of coal, or something, and they find out that on a percentile basis it ranks somewhere in the 70th percentile for good coal lands in the State. And the biologist is sitting across the table and says that's in our top 10 percent of waterfowl habitat. You know who's going to win the argument. The waterfowl guy's going to win the argument. He's going to lose some areas which are down low on his priority list to coal or some other resource, but he's going to win the big ones and the important ones. It's happened time after time after time. Now, Pete mentions this point about 20A, which I find interesting, about it should perhaps be used for the benefit of the resources that are there now, wildlife resources, and yet we're under tremendous pressure and are looking right now at massive disposals of land for agricultural purposes in those areas. Good agricultural lands are often synonymous with other types of good habitat. But, in the area east of Rex and Nenana, going into the Wood River areas, we're looking at disposals for basically the field season of 1980, and this is where the input from the Department of Fish and Game is going to be very important. How important is that area in the whole Tanana Valley to moose, to furbearers, to those swans? And if it's high enough up on those priority lists, as compared to other places, there's going to be a much stronger argument for those key

areas not being disposed of. And, depending on where the agricultural people put their priorities, that's going to make the decision easier or harder. I can't say where it's going to come. But, that's the importance of being able to say how that compares to every other area you've got, because if you try to argue on a case-by-case basis you can always find something valuable.

KING: I fly transects across all that area you were just mentioning -- the Wood River, and then on west of the Nenana River to the Kantishna. It always looked to me like if I was going to plow something up, I would want to go west of the Nenana rather than east, because it's much better drained land.

SMITH: It may well be. I'm not that familiar with the sample soils assessment.

KING: The Ag people aren't looking at that?

SMITH: Well, they are. I'm just not familiar with it. We have that information. In fact, the Soils and Conservation Survey is out this summer doing some soil analysis in more detail in some of these areas that we're taking a look at.

KING: Well, I think we'd like to have some participation from the audience now. Before lunch, Bob Richey brought something up, and I wonder, Bob, would you like to start off.

RICHEY: Just in passing I did mention some area with Jim. Both Jim and I have gone on some of these Trumpeter Swan surveys, and I think there have been several comments here on the necessity of public input, I'm sorry that Walt [Pedersen] isn't here to sit in on the panel, because I think his input probably would concern the public input, and how important that input is to the management concerns we may have on some of these lands. I do have a couple of comments in this regard. I know that on the refuge [Kenai National Moose Range] we might be involving under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, we might have up to 160,000 or 170,000 acres that might be "lost" to all the management control that we presently enjoy on that area. What I'm saying is that some of the surface as well as subsurface area will be definitely lost. A village now is still in litigation and it may take up to three additional townships from the refuge. But we're also under the Cook Inlet land exchange or swap -- might be involving another 70,000 acres of subsurface. That means that if the Natives wish to go in and work some of this subsurface area, we're going to be in conflict with these surface waters with up to 12 or more Trumpeter Swan nesting sites. This is something that maybe the general public needs to know, and groups such as The Trumpeter Swan Society, and their input's going to be very important on what we do or what we don't do in some of those areas. But, what I discussed with Jim was the importance, as I mentioned yesterday, of the west side of Cook Inlet and that Trumpeter Swan area over there which seems to have in square miles, at least, vastly more birds nesting and more production than on the Kenai. I'm talking about this 360 square miles, rather than 10,000 perhaps, and wondering what can be done. This is on State land, and it's an area that Mike related to, not that particular area, but areas like it throughout the State that might be flagged as to their importance to habitat and the species. I'm thinking directly across from Kenai there, whether or not that could be considered critical habitat, as perhaps you have a critical habitat area designated off Kachemak Bay. I believe that's critical habitat

KING: Got any response to that?

TIMM: Kind of an extension of what Mike was talking about just recently. This past week, I spent about half a day going through inch-to-the-mile maps, and as Mike was saying, I'm delineating critical swan areas on State lands, in this case, which we're requesting DNR [Alaska Department of Natural Resources] not to sell or dispose of -- put in private hands. I was doing it along with the sheep people, moose people, caribou, etc., and I'd just got done writing this paper on cabins, and, gee, here's a chance to put some of that information into play. I sat down and circled a fair number of these larger lakes that don't have cabins on them right now, thinking that I circled probably twice as many as need be and thinking that the number will get cut by half or two-thirds. Perhaps if the State doesn't dispose of these areas, why there will be a fair number of these larger lakes left over there without cabins put around them. I thought about that area, too, as a potential for critical habitat, but it's such a large area. More important areas we've gotten refuge classification, except for Redoubt Bay, and that's important for swans; there were 141 swans on that area in 1975. It's been proposed for refuge and the legislature turned it down the last 2 years.

SMITH: Jim, I'd just like to say something. Bob, was it the Redoubt Bay area you were talking about, basically?

RICHEY: No, I don't believe so. That's over in the Kustatan area, Mike, between McArthur River and Kustatan River is that Redoubt?

SMITH: Yes, that's the one. For those of you who aren't familiar, starting about 5 or 6 years ago, Fish and Game began requesting the legislature produce refuges, starting northeast of Anchorage, and basically going right around the Cook Inlet and headed down the coast. They started with the Palmer Hay Flats, and they went to Goose Bay. They've got the large one, the lower Susitna River Wildlife Management Refuge. They've got the one just south of the McQuawk [sic] Indian Reservation -- what's that, Trading Bay? The Trading Bay Refuge, and the only other major one now is Redoubt. I am cautiously optimistic that that will become a refuge within the next 1 or 2 years. One of the reasons it has not moved is that the Kenai Borough, which is the municipality, nice local government control mainly on the Kenai, which boundaries extend across, is opposing any type of permanent withdrawal right now, until their land entitlement issue is settled. We've been working very hard on that the last 2 years, and I'm very happy to say, the legislature this year passed the legislation which established their entitlement, which was the first big question. And now we're in the process, in fact we're just talking to the Borough here this morning, of trying to identify which lands they will get. And once they know that they're going to get their entitlement, then I think that they will probably support that proposal. That will be a big political obstacle out of the way. They have no reason particularly to want to own it. It's not good land as far as they're concerned, but it's just that they're holding all their options open getting every lever they can. But that's why I say, whether you like it or not, if you're interested in wildlife in this State, you're interested in politics. I don't mean the dirty, seedy side. I mean that there are legitimate constituencies out there that are concerned about some things, and wildlife is intimately woven with it, and you've got to realize this and be ready to work. That may mean that some habitat on the Kenai Peninsula which is good, which is not as important as the Trumpeter stuff, may have to go to the Kenai Borough for some ultimate other use to save that Trumpeter habitat across the way. And this is what I said. You've got to realize. You've got to take your priorities, go for the big ones. So, we may lose a little bit of winter moose browse along some of those rivers on the Kenai Peninsula that we would otherwise like to keep. But, we may also keep the whole west side, the Redoubt Bay area, in a range.

TIMM: We lost Redoubt this year, but we got the Copper River Delta-Orca Inlet-Controller Bay tidelands as critical habitat -- 460,000 acres.

SMITH: Right. That's true.

KING: Bill.

SLADEN: What you're saying about Susitna Flats and Kenai, we go back to thoughts of doing some research. I reckon that's the same habitat, in fact, probably the young birds from the Kenai go out to the Susitna Flats. We haven't really got positive evidence of this yet from our neck-banding program, which we've done for three or four seasons now in Kenai. We need to know exactly how that whole population in that area works before we can make any very sensible recommendations.

Second point I wanted to ask Mike about was, when you talked about a State wildlife refuge, which you were I presume, does this mean that all these refuges allow 100 percent hunting only?

SMITH: I might just take a second to backtrack and correct something that Dan said earlier when he indicated that Fish and Game had management authority on refuges. They really don't. Maybe if they like to think so, that's good because everybody's happy. Refuges as created under Alaska statutes are still a responsibility of the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Lands and Management. However, our management flexibility is definitely restricted by the fact that the legislature said that the highest use of that area is for wildlife and related habitat. Therefore, once we have the oil and gas leases, as we have under most of these refuges, because often sedimentary basins that are good for waterfowl are good for oil and gas, we still have to allow a person to fulfill the terms of his lease. We issue the permit, we do the monitoring in the ground generally, but the environmental stipulations, protection stipulations, are generally put there by Fish and Game, and we're pretty much bound to stay with it, and we make every attempt to do just that.

Now, with respect to the hunting on these lands -- the hunting, the setting of bag limits, methods and means of take, are not at all the responsibility of the Department of Natural Resources. That is completely the Department of Fish and Game. So, on those lands, as on all other State lands, and all private lands, the Department of Fish and Game does have that responsibility and they handle that themselves. We do not.

SLADEN: But, when you're talking about a refuge in the east, and correct me if I'm wrong, a Federal refuge, a lot of the land is non-hunted. It's just entirely left to the animals.

SMITH: I'll pass off to more experts, but I know there was hunting on some of them.

SLADEN: It's a little different in Alaska, isn't it? I'm just trying to fit in some of the words that have been spoken about with swans breeding and successfully raising their families as a result of surveys from hunting. I just wanted to get that point clarified. Are there any refuges that can be put aside in Alaska that can be exclusively for protecting the birds without any hunting?

SMITH: There could be, but that would be a call of the Department of Fish and Game, or I should say the Fish and Game Board that actually sets the bag limits. But the Department would be pre-eminent in making that recommendation, so that Dan would be the person to respond to that.

WILLUMSEN: For the geese, now take for instance in Regina, our area, Fred Barrett, about 25 years ago, he started to create a nesting area for the Canada Geese. There wasn't any at that time. He brought them in. Today, there's geese by the thousands. In my district, I started with one pair and we now have hundreds of them. And now, Ducks Unlimited is creating nesting areas and habitat for the Canada Geese, and we have geese in Alberta -- there is no end to them. Why can we not do the same thing with our swans? Why can we not create habitat for them and then distribute them throughout the area, because eventually the wild areas are going to be utilized? There won't be any wild areas. So, let's start and distribute them and create habitat for them in more or less similar areas. That would be my idea. I've been raising swans for years and you can raise them anywhere. Trumpeter Swans are the most gentle of all birds. Let's distribute them. Let's get them down to the prairie country. If we can raise the geese, why can't we do the same for the swan? And now with the Whooping Crane, with the transplants taking place now, it's quite a tremendous success, I think. We should do the same for the swan. We shouldn't rely on the north only.

KING: Who would like to respond to that, or would you like to direct your question to somebody specifically? Have we got a response from the panel?

TURNER: Well, I could respond to part of that question. With regard to habitat improvement, we've tried unsuccessfully in Grande Prairie with nesting structures. There were at least three lakes on which pairs occurred consistently. We didn't know what age these birds were, but superficially [the lakes] looked suitable for swans. There weren't muskrats around in the same numbers that occurred on the other areas, and we thought maybe there was a scarcity or lack of a suitable nesting site. So, we constructed some nesting platforms, but the swans did not respond to them at all. But there were problems involved in that, as well, with fluctuating water levels. Concerning your comment about establishing a population of swans in the prairie region, I think Grande Prairie could serve as a source flock for transplants, but the critical factor to be considered is where are the birds going to overwinter? I would certainly not be in favor of any transplant program which would result in the birds going to the traditional overwintering area, the Tri-state area, right now.

WILLUMSEN: When we had the meeting in Grande Prairie, you will remember, we were taken out to right in the middle of town and one pair of swans were nesting right in the middle of town. So that shows how docile they actually are.

TURNER: Yes, I'm sure they can be raised in captivity.

KING: I think that's a point that we really haven't considered greatly in Alaska, Lars, and maybe we're not ready for that yet here, or our perspective is a little different at the moment. But, it is certainly something that's going to have to be considered in the future, I'm sure. Thank you.

MARY LOU KING: I want to ask Mike Smith something, and give an example. For instance, in Juneau you could probably attend three meetings every night on something to do with our environment, and you don't know what's going on and you never know until it's too late, or almost never. For instance, Jack Hodges discovered that they built a candy-striped dock for tourist boats 5 feet from an active eagle tree. Well, they didn't even know about it, and that's his area of concern. And the same thing in relating it to swan habitat -- how are these people who are interested in Trumpeter Swan habitat going to know what the State Lands people are doing, like the Kenai Chamber of Commerce is holding up a refuge area, but the refuge manager didn't know that the Chamber of Commerce is holding it up. He didn't even know about it, because the swan people don't tend to be politically oriented, right?

SMITH: That's kind of the message I'm saying. You've gotta be. It's just a way of life, at least at this time in the State to understand what's going on. Let me ask you a question. Is that candy-striped dock -- is that that Westours dock?

MARY LOU KING: That's it.

SMITH: Is that right?

MARY LOU KING: There's an eagle tree right there!

SMITH: I could spend 10 minutes telling you the story of that Westours dock. Anyway, there is no way that anybody can see the whole big picture of what's going on. I supposedly sit somewhere up here and am able to watch them, and there's no way even I can do it. What happened on that situation is the request came in that the dock be put there. It was looked at by our people and thought to have enough merit to at least go out to start asking other people. So, the municipality was asked, the Juneau Borough was essentially asked as to what their opinion was. The Department of Fish and Game was asked what their opinion was. The Department of Environmental Conservation was asked what their opinion was. They were all given the opportunity to comment. When I signed that classification order, as I read every one of those things, I had down, "no adverse comments were received." And when the Department of Fish and Game in writing says to us that there are no wildlife concerns-- at that point, I have nothing, I mean, unless I have some personal knowledge, which compared to obviously everything in the State is extremely limited, I have to say, "Okay." Now, where is the breakdown? I don't know. I would say that someone in the Department of Fish and Game darn well ought to have a map of where eagle trees are around Juneau, and when that kind of request comes in, should say, "Hey, wait a minute. This is right next to an eagle tree," an active one I would assume.

MARY LOU KING: Then you're saying Fish and Game should have a map showing where the critical Trumpeter habitat is.

SMITH: What I'm saying is . . . well, very much so. Right on. And we would expect when we write to South-central District, which is this whole south-central Alaska here south of the Alaska Range -- when we write to the Department of Fish and Game in Anchorage asking the Habitat Section for comments on a seismic operation that's going to be over there in, say, the proposed Redoubt refuge area, we will darn well expect the comment we're going to get back to them [the operating company], "Okay, if you've gotta move equipment through here, the area in the circle is where you keep equipment out." But if they [Fish and Game] come back in and say they have no problem with the plan of operation of the proposed company, there's not much we can do, but to just say, "Fine." They're the State's experts.

MARY LOU KING: Well, is there any way that, for instance, if the council were organized, or any other group having interest in other things, is there a way to get information from [Division of] Lands directly, or does it have to be like, do you have to be politically oriented to Fish and Game to get your information?

SMITH: That's a good point. There's two ways to do it. One is to try to insure that the agency, the professionals that are suppose to be aware of this, are in fact. The other way is to indicate to the Division that a group has particular concern. As far as I'm concerned, if the group were to tell me that they were very interested in any activities that occurred along the strip of water between downtown Juneau and Saint Terese, or out at Echo Cove, or wherever, and that any State classification actions or proposed disposals, that they would be notified, I will guarantee you that anything that comes out of our shop will automatically have that point on a mailing list, and you would be aware of what happens. We obviously can't notify everybody about every activity, but when somebody steps forward and requests that, very much so. I promise that we can do that.

MARY LOU KING: Thank you.

KING: Skip.

LADD: Mike, you bring up an interesting point on the fact that Fish and Game should have that information available and make it available to Lands before these decisions are made. We have a situation in Alaska, just like everywhere else, where you have kind of dual responsibilities between, say, Fish and Wildlife Service in the Federal government, and Fish and Game in the State government. And, as Mary Lou brought out, Fish and Wildlife Service has done one heck of a lot of work on eagle nest identification in southeast that is much more extensive than what Fish and Game has done. Had some of these decisions been brought to the attention of the Fish and Wildlife Service at the same time that it was brought to the attention of Fish and Game, I suspect that eagle nest would have been identified. So, how does the Division of Lands gain input, say, from Federal agencies, namely, Fish and Wildlife Service, on some of these decisions that may affect national species or migratory bird species that are a national responsibility?

SMITH: Again, it depends upon what kind of action occurs. But, basically on State lands, the State has its own counterparts to the Federal agencies, i.e., Fish and Game vis-a-vis Fish and Wildlife Service, and in that situation, we went to our people, and assuming that what Mary Lou said is correct, [they] did not know about it. I guess I fault three-quarters Fish and Game and maybe one-fourth Fish and Wildlife Service that if you've got all this information, how come your counterpart agency which is responsible ultimately for selecting more acres, and managing more acres than the entire refuge system in the United States, doesn't know where eagle trees are. So, I put a 25 percent there on Fish and Wildlife Service and the rest I would say Fish and Game should certainly not be doing that kind of thing without, in fact, I'm very surprised

that they do not have a map. In fact, I'm surprised that it actually isn't in the hands of our Southeastern District Office with those trees actually identified on it. I'm scribbling out a note right now to make sure to take care of that problem.

LADD: Then, what you're saying is that when some of these decisions are made, or when you look at these decisions, there is no mechanism for the State to provide the information to Federal agencies, is that correct?

SMITH: For the State to provide, do you mean when some action is going to happen? Yes. There's nothing right now, except a perceptive district manager would take care of that. He might make that contact and set up some type of liaison to do that. But there's no formal structure right now.

KING: Tom?

ROTHE: With my background as a biologist, it seems to me that one of the key problems we're facing here is habitat, as we've been discussing recently, but also parallel development of good basic research that's also worked into applied research, however you define those things. Listening to things, from learning about the prairie population and the Alaska population, to birds in the mountain states, what I'm wondering about, and I'm addressing this primarily to Jim Bartonek and Dan [Timm], is since we do have the benefit of so many swans here in Alaska, first of all, why haven't we perhaps invested a little more time in research on breeding biology, on breeding ecology, on dealing with nutritional problems, that are [being mentioned] in these meetings, and also, perhaps a little more emphasis on any related productivity? I would like to sort of get an answer from the Federal side and the State side. But, one thing also bothers me about the things Jim said, that perhaps there isn't a national urgency or public concern right now, but I'm wondering if it isn't an objective of the public not being aware of the status of the prairie population compared to the Alaskan population. And also, I was a bit disturbed by Fish and Wildlife Service taking the viewpoint of -- well, certainly we've been mandated to act on public concerns but also it's rather disappointing that perhaps we haven't taken a stewardship role, looking down the line a little bit farther

BARTONEK: I believe that you have answered some of the questions yourself. You are correct that the Service has not provided the wherewithal to obtain all the information that is needed to manage swans, and the same could be said of other species. Take the Yellow-billed Loon, for example. What better place than arctic Alaska to study the Yellow-billed Loon? Yet, there have been only token efforts towards studying the nesting ecology of this species and comparing its requirements with those of the other two species of coastal loons. There are about 375 species of birds that regularly inhabit Alaska and most have been similarly ignored. About 35 species of birds in Alaska are hunted and have been recipients of most State- and Federal-funded studies of wildlife. Of these 35 species, perhaps a half a dozen, maybe a dozen, have been studied sufficiently so that there is a good understanding of their habitat requirements and population status. Why have we studied some and not others? Well, because the public (often the hunting public) has demanded that we manage more closely those species that we have the greatest potential for mismanaging. I agree with you that we should be conducting more investigations on Trumpeter Swans and other species, but at the expense of which ongoing studies?

Program planning has provided direction to the Service to meet long-term objectives in management of migratory birds. However, some of our activities are poorly planned, addressing the "crisis of the moment" that is typical of government. The Service is attempting to weed out "hobby research" and certain management activities that contribute little to the overall migratory program and are often costly in money and manpower. Indeed, the Service should be (and I contend is) a steward of the wildlife resources. The Service has been responsive to the Endangered Species Act because the public, through Congress, demanded that society had better do something differently than was done in the past. The Service will be developing its non-game wildlife program to meet other public needs. The changes in how and what governmental agencies do is seldom made in a vacuum. What I am stressing is that The Trumpeter Swan Society can importantly influence public demands upon the Service if it feels that it is essential to the well-being of swans.

My answers to your questions are not wholly satisfying to me, but I can rationalize why the Service has not provided support for certain studies that are deemed important by certain groups but has supported others. Only 6 years ago, we knew infinitely less about approximately 52 species of marine birds in Alaska than we did about Trumpeter Swans. We have gained a better understanding of these birds than previously known because of the "shot in the arm" of government provided by public interest. Who knows where the next "shot" may be directed. Public pressure has recently made the Fish and Wildlife Service give greater attention to management of Sandhill Cranes. On the whole, I suspect that we know much more about Trumpeter Swans than we know about cranes even though the latter is more numerous and more widely distributed. The point I wish to make is that when you have only so much money to spend on wildlife investigations and habitat protection you are going to need a Solomon to divide it among the various needs. Without a Solomon, I would spend my money on certain species perceived to be threatened and about which we know less than we do about Trumpeter Swans.

Mike Smith was castigated because his staff in the DNR [Alaska Department of Natural Resources] did not know of an eagle nest in a particular area being considered for development. Each and every agency need not have the staff with this information, but the Fish and Wildlife Service could provide the DNR and others with that information on eagle nests throughout Southeast Alaska. The Service, however, could not provide that kind of information for south-central Alaska and the Aleutian Islands because comparable attention has not been given eagles in these regions. Is the Service at fault for placing emphasis on Southeast Alaska or should we have spread our energy more widely and superficially?

The questions you raised as to why the Service is not doing more for Trumpeter Swans cannot be answered to everyone's satisfaction.

ROTHE: As far as the Federal involvement goes, perhaps it's just something to throw out to the group that the Kenai Moose Range seems like an excellent place to do some intensive studies, and in fact benefit the prairie populations from what we learn, especially in the feeding ecology.

BARTONEK: Currently, both the Service and state wildlife management agencies generally rank Trumpeter Swans as being of relatively low priority when competing for funding of other wildlife projects. Periodic swan surveys, operation of swan refuges, and minor funding of research projects shows that swans are not being ignored or neglected. The Service is not likely to change what it is doing with swans unless somebody like your Society, a new President, or a new Secretary of the Interior points the new direction. Former Secretary C. B. Morton, who lived on Cheasepeake Bay and had a particular interest in swans, was undoubtedly responsible for the Service undertaking investigations on Whistling Swans in the area. If the Service increases its efforts on Trumpeters, it could be at the expense of some other effort, e.g., more swan studies on the Kenai National Moose Range could be at the expense of less garbage being picked up on the Range.

Most studies on waterfowl, including those on swans and those pioneered by Pete Shepherd in Alaska, are only reconnaissance studies. Just enough time was spent in the field, usually the 2 to 4 years necessary to meet M.S. or Ph.D. requirements, to take the cream off the top of the information on a particular species. Seldom are studies multidisciplinary so that all facets of the ecological requirements can be appreciated and of sufficient duration that the dynamics of populations of long-lived species, like swans, can be understood.

ROTHE: Dan, is that sort of what you're under too -- budgetary and priority restraints?

TIMM: Yes. I really feel that work Pete [Shepherd] did, Will Troyer, and Bob [Richey] is doing on the Kenai right now is -- the things they've found are really adequate for managing Trumpeter Swans in Alaska right now. I can see disturbance becoming more and more of a factor, and that aspect probably affects Trumpeter Swans. Could probably be touched on a little more, but in view of other demands for money tying things up here, it's now academic as far as I'm concerned. And it's doing well

KING: I think our time is about to run out, but I see some people that appear to have some real urgency to make a short contribution.

ST. ORES: Just a little bit about the philosophy of prioritizing wildlife habitat -- some of the dangers inherent therein. It has been my experience over the years that as soon as you draw your list from 1 to 100 in competition with development, you immediately lose the bottom 50 percent. After that's gone, you reprioritize the remaining 50 percent from 1 to 100, and as development for that budget continues, you lose 50 percent of that. Carried to extremes, you end up -- let's say if you're talking about wetland habitat -- with two wetlands left, and someone says, "Which one is most important?" Maybe this is the only way we can preserve habitat, Trumpeter Swan habitat, by prioritization. We ought to be looking for another way, other than that priority because it is a very dangerous thing to be using. Whether it be a gubernatorial order, all swan habitat is taken care of, or what. If you could get an agreement, or an understanding, or a promissory note, or contract that said once the first lower 50 percent was gone nothing else would be touched, that would be all right, but it doesn't work that way.

SMITH: Let me say, if you lose the first 50 percent and you totally reprioritize without having gotten anything for losing that, i.e., the lower 50 percent of the developer's list also was lost to him, then, one of two things is happening: either your input hasn't been very creditable, or the constituency that you represent is so powerless in the halls of the legislature that you're not going to win anyway.

ST. ORES: The only difference is, the developer has nothing to start with, where the Trumpeter Swan does. So, there is now a taking and a giving. There's always less and less to want more and more of. Do you get my point?

.....

KING: Ruth, you had a comment.

SHEA: We had the comment before about passive management. What I hear about management plans in Alaska is enlightening compared to what we have down in the Tri-state area. I'd like everybody in the Society to be aware, and I need to focus attention, that in terms of priorities, we only have one main wintering area, and we're not talking about planning for it. I get requests to the effect that, "We're planning to clearcut the Targhee National Forest, how many feet do swans need left around a lake?" We're to the point that maybe Alaska will get to in the future. The crunch is here, where division took place years ago when swans were not a major item of concern. The only areas under Federal protection are Red Rocks Refuge, which is stuck with a grain feeding operation, and Yellowstone Park, which is marginal. The main winter habitat has no management I've learned that the Fish and Game Department thought our Mute Swans were Whistling Swans. That really scared me. So, I just want to direct attention, in terms of management concerns, there is no management. The main wintering area right now is in an Idaho state park. They're hoping to manage it as a natural area, but they're not quite sure. The public doesn't know that yet. They don't know that they're not going to be allowed in there in wintertime. And we don't know what kind of political pressure will arise when they learn that. Can we stand up and say, "Yes, maintain this," or will it go under a wave of taxpayers' revolt if they won't pay for a state park that's dedicated to swans. There's just a lack of public education about the problems with management down in the wintering area. The Trumpeter Swan Society needs to get that information out, being so many agencies that own the land are not aware that that's even the only wintering area. They were surprised to learn that this summer. So, it's a long way to go, both in information and recommendations to them on what swans need management-wise.

BARTONEK: I would like to comment on that, Ruth. From the discussions I have heard today, there is a definite need for a management plan for the eastern population of Trumpeter Swans, as soon as possible. Because problems do not appear as great for the western populations there is not the similar urgency for such a plan. Region 6 of the Fish and Wildlife Service is unilaterally developing a Trumpeter Swan management plan. Development of such a plan is worthless unless all management agencies in both the U. S. and Canada are parties to it and agree to adhere to the prescribed guidelines. The Trumpeter Swan Society should make their input to any plan that is developed. Bob Croft of the Fish and Wildlife Service in Denver indicated that they would make the effort to develop a plan for the eastern population.

KING: I hate to cut this off, because I'm learning lots myself. I think it's a valuable discussion, but coffee is cooling off, and so, maybe if you clap loudly enough, the panel will make themselves available for some coffee break discussion.

* * * * *

Proceedings & Papers

**of the
Sixth Trumpeter Swan
Society Conference**

**David K. Weaver
Editor**

**Published in cooperation with the
U. S. Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service,
the Tennessee Valley Authority
and the
Hennepin County Park Reserve District
Maple Plain, Minnesota**

**The Trumpeter Swan Society
August 1981**