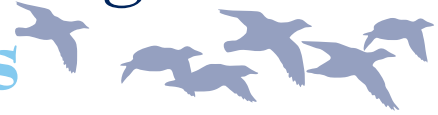




Kamchatka/Bering Sea Ecoregion News



Promoting Science and Stewardship in the Kamchatka Peninsula and Bering Sea

Winter 2006 - 2007

WWF Working on the Frontlines of Climate Change

"Climate Change is the perfect global problem. It requires a profound shift in how we relate to each other and to other species" ~ Educator Craig Johnson, at Climate Camp Alaska

WWWF's education officer, Dave Aplin feared he had lost control of the room as four clusters of Climate Camp Alaska participants, apparently immune to attempts at facilitation, wrestled with strategies to deal with coming impacts of climate change. The setting was WWF's Climate Camp Alaska 2006 at the Islands and Oceans visitors' center in Homer, Alaska. Each group included community leaders from Bering Sea villages, scientists from a variety of disciplines, educators, and members of our WWF staff. Each group was deeply engaged in understanding this "perfect problem." Throughout the 3-day meeting in October, rural Alaskans and scientists confirmed what climate models have predicted: Western Alaska and the Bering Sea region are experiencing early and significant signs of global warming. For example:

- Carol Ladd of the Pacific Marine Environmental Lab reported on significant physical and biological shifts within the Bering Sea, including diminishing sea ice.
- Charlie Johnson of the Alaska Nanuq Commission spoke about the negative impacts of less sea ice cover on the behavior and mortality rates of Polar Bears and Walrus.
- Henry Oyoumick of the Native Village of Unalakleet shared the observations of local families documenting shifts in salmon runs, with red and king salmon returning to rivers where they've not appeared before.
- Glen Juday of the University of Alaska presented data documenting warming atmospheric temperatures, melting permafrost, diminishing wetlands, and shifting vegetative patterns throughout the region.

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■ Margaret Williams and Dave Aplin inside the WWF information booth at the Alaska Oceans Festival held in Anchorage.

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Our Mission in the Kamchatka/Bering Sea Ecoregion

To help restore and conserve biodiversity in the Bering Sea and Kamchatka, ecosystems of global significance, through science-guided education, advocacy, and stewardship



Warmer Oceans Could Get Un-Bear-able



visit www.panda.org/climate

for a living planet

continued from page 1

Evidence was compelling, as was the sense of urgency. Climate Camp Alaska is one of the latest WWF initiatives tackling Climate Change. For more than a decade the WWF-US program has been bringing awareness and action to the issue. Today, the Kamchatka/Bering Sea Ecoregion is working with a variety of partners on the local, regional and international scene to stimulate awareness and action.

Working Locally

WWF is empowering Bering Sea communities to prepare for the coming challenges brought by climate change. Since 2004 the WWF Coastal Communities for Science (CCS) program has linked Bering Sea villages with scientists who undertake research projects of mutual interest. These projects — including installation of ocean temperature monitoring buoys off St. Paul Island, freshwater salmon habitat studies at Unalakleet, and fur seal tooth sectioning research on St. George build local capacity to conduct and manage scientific research that helps communities understand and plan for local impacts of climate change.

Climate Camp and other WWF-sponsored gatherings encourage community leaders and youth to share information and generate new collaborations. For example, Coastal Communities for Science Unalakleet Program Coordinator Henry Oyounick will soon travel to Unalaska to conduct freshwater ecology and water monitoring training to provide for educators and community leaders. Henry will share tools to monitor the local effects of climate change developed during his three-year collaboration with WWF.

WWF outreach activities have provided communities with tools to tell the story of climate change. Audio and video media training workshops conducted in Hooper Bay, Chevak, Anchorage, and at Climate Camp give young people and adult the tools to collect and share important information on issues — including climate change — across great distances to very dispersed audiences over local radio stations and on the internet. WWF is committed to expand media training to rural youth through a new initiative we are launching in 2007.

Across the sea, WWF is also working in Russia where we are helping establish Polar Bear Brigades designed in coastal communities dealing with increased interactions between people and hungry bears stranded on shore by shrinking sea ice. (See article on page 11)

Regional Approach

In addition to work at the community level, WWF is uniquely positioned to build awareness and action on Climate Change issues throughout the region. Ecoregion staff in Russia and Alaska is currently engaged in initiatives to influence policy and practice, including:

- Advancing a bi-lateral polar bear treaty between the US and Russia that will allow for new conservation measures to reduce stress on this imperiled species.
- Working with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and the National Marine Fisheries Service to engage in precautionary and adaptive management of Bering Sea fisheries in the face of climate change.
- Developing a climate change vulnerability assessment for the Pribilof Islands region of the Bering Sea that will synthesize relevant ecological and management information in a Global Information System meta-analysis.
- Organizing a seminar consisting of top climate scientists to be provided to fishery managers, industry representatives, and the public.
- Participating in the Shipping Safety Partnership in an effort to prevent adverse effects to fisheries, marine mammals, and other resource from oil spills or other shipping related disasters from increased shipping in the Great Circle Route of the Bering Sea and ultimately across an ice-free Arctic as a result of climate change.

Many of WWF's initiatives within the region focus on developing adaptive management strategies and bolstering ecosystem resiliency to coming change. Several Kamchatka/Bering Sea Ecoregion projects reach beyond coastal villages to demonstrate the regional impacts of Climate Change to the world. Climate Witness programs in Unalakleet and Huslia, Alaska have provided a mechanism for youth interview document local impacts of climate change through interviews with local elders. These audio and video records that “put a face” on climate change are available to audiences around the arctic. A new initiative will expand this approach in 2007.

Indeed, climate change may be “the perfect problem.” But it would appear that WWF and our partners are up for the challenge. We are learning that through collaboration, commitment, and genuine consideration of science and local knowledge we can make the profound shifts necessary to make real, positive, and durable change.

Letter from the Director

Dear friends and colleagues,

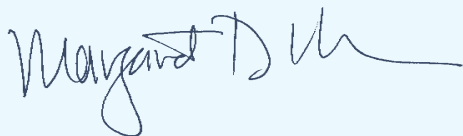
You may have noticed the new title of our newsletter, which now includes the word “Kamchatka.” This name reflects a recent change for our program: in 2006 WWF added the Kamchatka Peninsula to the scope of our Ecoregion work. Kamchatka is a land of superlatives: it is home to tens of thousands of pristine rivers which produce a quarter of the world's Pacific salmon population; a large population of brown bears; snow sheep; reindeer; Steller's sea eagles, and rich coastal ecosystems. Over the last decade, WWF Russia has helped to establish numerous protected areas and developing ecotourism to generate funds to support them. Combining our work in the terrestrial areas of Kamchatka with the Bering Sea marine program is an exciting step toward addressing cross-cutting issues and species (such as salmon) that depend on healthy lands and seas alike.

As this newsletter goes to print, there are several urgent issues facing biodiversity in the Kamchatka/Bering Sea ecoregion. The first is climate change, featured on the front page of this newsletter. WWF is extremely concerned about the impacts of climate change on this Ecoregion, many of which are related to the 20 percent loss of sea ice in the last three decades. The ice edge is a veritable smorgasbord of nutrients for the entire marine food web. But experts are showing that warmer waters are resulting in decreases in benthic (ocean bottom) productivity in the northern Bering Sea, important for wildlife such as walrus. Loss of ice that typically buffers coastal areas during severe winter storms has allowed for significant erosion of coastal habitat and numerous villages. Effects are sure to be felt at the top of the food chain, too. For example, in the Beaufort Sea, biologists point to decreases in the number of polar bears which appear to be linked to the shorter periods of hunting on ice, and resulting nutritional stress.

WWF is working globally to address the source of the climate change problem: excessive emissions of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. We can no longer debate this fact, or the fact that humans are contributing to the problem. At the international level, WWF is engaging governments and the private sector to enact CO reductions and promote the use of alternative energy sources. In this newsletter you will learn about how our team members are addressing many aspects of climate impacts on marine wildlife, commercial fisheries, and coastal communities.

Another urgent issue we are facing here is offshore development of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) in Alaska's waters. In the draft plan for the United States Mineral Management Service next Five Year Plan, four important marine areas from Alaska are to be considered as potential lease sales of oil and gas development. All of these areas are critically important for marine wildlife. WWF considers the possibility to be a travesty. This is a time when the US should be reducing our dependence on fossil fuels - not destroying our oceans in search of new fuel supplies. WWF is opposing this development through a variety of strategies and will keep you apprised of our progress on the WWF web site.

Sincerely,



Margaret Williams

Director, Kamchatka/Bering Sea ecoregion program

Aiming for Higher Standards in Shipping Safety

WWF lays groundwork on Capitol Hill to improve shipping safety in the southern Bering Sea.

Each year, more than 7000 vessels transit the international shipping highway known as the Great Circle Route along the Aleutian Islands and through narrow the Unimak Pass as they travel between northwest North America and Asia. These ships navigate some of the stormiest seas and one of the most productive marine ecosystems on Earth: the southern Bering Sea. Recent at-sea oil spills resulting from the grounding of *MV Kuroshima* in 1997, the *MV Selendang Ayu* in 2004 and the more recent near-disasters of the *MV Cougar Ace* and the *MV Seabulk Pride* in 2006 [see inset], important reminders of the need for improving safety procedures. Any one of thousands of vessels - carrying oil, fuel, and possibly rats or other hostile invaders - could be in need of immediate rescue to prevent a spill or loss of life, but the necessary preventative and rescue measures have not been implemented.

Together with our partners in the Shipping Safety Partnership, WWF is calling on leaders on Capitol Hill to support legislation that will result in real shipping safety reform. The first step: funding a much-needed Risk Assessment for the Aleutian Islands region. Proceeding with the Risk Assessment, an objective analysis of resources at risk and prescribing specific measures needed, will

be a big first step toward achieving our ultimate goal: preventing shipping accidents and associated oil spills in the southern Bering Sea ecosystem.

This year, building on momentum generated by WWF's successful 2005 effort to reinstate the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund (the source of federal oil spill response and clean up funding), WWF staff met with key members of Congress, the Alaska Governor's Office, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, and the U.S. Coast Guard and even the American Petroleum Institute to raise awareness of the need for improvements. With their cooperation, WWF is calling for several realistic and fundable on-the-ground measures to prevent and mitigate the impacts of oil spills and acquiring commitments to fund the Aleutian Islands Risk Assessment. (We are requesting \$1.8 million from the federal government, to be added to the \$250,000 already committed by the state of Alaska).

In the western Bering Sea, WWF is working to track Russian shipping practices, particularly rat prevention measures, on board freighters. In the coming year WWF will conduct analyses to identify particularly sensitive wildlife areas along the Great Circle Route as a step toward developing trans-boundary cooperation in shipwreck response.



Photo by Paul Flint, USFWS

■ An oiled eider - oil contamination primarily leads to loss of feather insulative capabilities and possible hypothermia for the contaminated bird.

Recent shipping accidents like these should be a clear wake up call to everyone. Shipping safety reform is needed now!



Photo by Kevin Bell, USFWS

■ The *MV Cougar Ace* drifts on its side in July 2006.

- *MV Cougar Ace*: In July 2006, the Singapore-based ship, carrying a load of 5,000 new cars and 150,000 gallons of fuel in its tanks, flipped on its side during ballast water exchange, sending the ship adrift dangerously close to the Aleutian Islands. The *Cougar Ace* drifted for 189 hours until a tug arrived and towed the freighter to safety in Wide Bay, Unalaska Island.
- *MV Seabulk Pride*: In February 2006, this Tesoro oil tanker, loaded with 4 million gallons of residual oil product, was ripped from its mooring by an ice floe and grounds on Nikiski Beach in the Cook Inlet.

A reminder of the hostile weather in this region, disaster was averted when the vessel was heroically re-floated on the high tide.

- *MV Selendang Ayu*: In December 2004, this Malaysian cargo vessel carrying soybeans grounded on the shores of Unalaska Island, spilling 335,000 gallons of oil, fuel and cargo. Six crew members perished. Thousands of seabirds were killed and the local Tanner Crab fishery was closed. The cost of responding to the *Selendang Ayu* has already exceeded \$100 million.

Offshore Oil and Gas Development Threatens Alaska's Marine Wildlife

As this issue of the Kamchatka/Bering Sea Newsletter goes to press, WWF is tracking important news regarding oil and gas development in the offshore continental shelf (OCS) of the United States. In a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for a Five Year Plan by the Minerals Management Service, several areas in Alaska's Beaufort, Chukchi and Bering Seas are included in the Plan for potential oil and gas leases.

WWF opposes offshore oil and gas development in all of these areas. These Arctic and sub-Arctic waters are highly productive, harboring critical feeding and breeding grounds for marine mammals and seabirds; nursery areas for the nation's most important fisheries; and many diverse cultural and economic resources. Some of the biodiversity features of these places include the following:

The North Aleutian Basin (Bristol Bay) is one of the most productive marine ecosystems in the world, home to the largest wild sockeye salmon runs in the world; important nursery grounds for red king crab, and important salmon, herring, pollock and halibut fisheries; staging areas and wintering grounds for tens of millions of seabirds; and a feeding ground and migration corridor for marine mammals, including several Endangered species. This area has enjoyed a

long history of protection by Congress and the President. The Congressional Moratorium on oil exploration was lifted several years ago and today WWF and many others are fighting to keep the Presidential Withdrawal from drilling in place.

The Chukchi Sea supports polar bears, walruses, three species of ice seals, beluga whales, gray whales and endangered bowhead whales, and is a staging and molting ground for migratory birds.

The Beaufort Sea is home to ice seals, migratory birds and endangered bowhead whales, and the largest concentration of female polar bear denning areas in North America is found on the coast here.

The Cook Inlet / Shelikof Strait, also in the MMS Five Year Plan, contains critical habitat for endangered Steller sea lions, and the sensitive coastal habitats of Katmai National Park and Kodiak, Becharof, Alaska Peninsula, and Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, many of which were previously oiled by the Exxon Valdez oil spill.

WWF has shared its position with the Minerals Management Service in the form of written comments, which we submitted on November 22 of this year. We will continue to monitor the situation and actively advocate to protect these important areas from offshore development.

RESOURCES AT STAKE

Offshore seismic exploration, drilling, and petroleum transport in Bristol Bay would jeopardize:

- One of the world's most productive fisheries, including fishing grounds for the large Bering Sea Pollock, herring, crab, salmon, and cod fisheries
- The world's largest red salmon run
- Sensitive spawning or juvenile habitat for halibut, herring and red king crab
- A variety of Endangered sea mammals, including humpback and fin whales, North Pacific right whales (see story, page 2), and Steller sea lions
- Staging and feeding areas for millions of seabirds, seaducks, waterfowl, and shorebirds
- The future of traditional subsistence and commercial fishermen, families and businesses throughout Bristol Bay who depend on the health of fish and marine mammals
- Several National Wildlife Refuges (Alaska Maritime, Alaska Peninsula Izembeck, and Togiak)
- The entire regional economy: in 2005, the net economic value for Bristol Bay's commercial salmon fishery, subsistence fisheries, sport fisheries, hunting, wildlife viewing and tourism was between \$130 million and \$213 million



Alaska Marine Conservation Council

Expedition to Commander Islands Strengthens US-Russia Ties

In July of 2006, WWF sponsored an expedition to Russia's remote Commander Islands as part of our efforts to enhance the effectiveness of transboundary conservation efforts. The expedition team's mission was to develop a "sister refuge" partnership between the Commander Islands Nature Biosphere Reserve (CINBR) and the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (AMNWR). The two protected areas are natural partners: despite political boundaries, the Commander Islands, comprising the western extent of the Aleutian Islands, share habitat features and wildlife species with the Alaskan archipelago. (Most of the Aleutians are under AMNWR jurisdiction).

The American delegation was led by ecologist Olga Romanenko on behalf of WWF; and included Arthur Sowls, (*seabird biologist with AMNWR; see profile page 14*) and wildlife biologist Thomas Van Pelt. The group traveled first to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Russia, where they met with WWF Russia staff and CINBR Director Nikolai Pavlov to discuss key issues facing the reserve, and opportunities for United States-Russia cooperation. There, they also led a workshop with local agencies to determine which strategies for invasive rat control and oil spill prevention and response would be most effective in the region.



■ Art Sowls (USFWS), Olga Romanenko (WWF consultant), Sergey Zagrebely (Director of Science, Commander Islands Nature Reserve) in zodiac.

Following their brief visit in Petropavlovsk, the American team flew to the village of Nikolskoe, on Bering Island. For the next week they met with nature reserve staff, local leaders, and other community residents. Sergey Zagrebely, chief scientist for the nature reserve, led field trips to nearby Airy Kamen Island, one of the reserve's most stunning seabird colonies where the group assessed research and conservation opportunities. With education specialist Natalia Fomina, the group shared a methodology to monitor beached seabirds that involves young people tracking changes in ocean life.

As a result of the 2006 WWF expedition, the United States-Russian partners identified the following activities as important programs for future collaboration:

Systematic Seabird Population Monitoring

Seabird populations are excellent indicators of ecosystem health. For 15 years, the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (AMNWR) has maintained a robust database on the productivity, food habits, and population changes at seabird colonies in the eastern Bering Sea. In 2007 WWF will facilitate field visits of Commander Islands staff to Alaska to work with AMNWR on expanding the monitoring program to the Commanders.



Thomas Van Pelt

■ Red-legged kittiwake

With ideal geography and relatively protected status, the Commander Islands group provides haven for abundant and varied wildlife, including species of special conservation concern. For example, the Commanders are home to relatively stable populations of both sea otters, a species that is threatened just next door in the Aleutian Islands, and Steller sea lions, an endangered species in dramatic decline in the eastern Bering Sea. The Commander Islands also hosts significant breeding concentrations of the Bering Sea endemic red-legged kittiwake. These seabirds breed at only four locations on Earth (the other three sites are in Alaska: Buldir Island, Bogoslof Island and the Pribilof Islands).

The Commander Islands are of special conservation interest to WWF. They are recognized by the Audubon Society and Birdlife International as an Important Bird Area (IBA). The islands also comprise of a UNESCO-designated Biosphere Reserve and are identified as one of WWF's Highest Priority Areas in need of conservation in the Bering Sea. To learn more about the Commander Islands and our other 19 Priority Areas for conservation, go to <http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildplaces/bs/pubs.cfm>



Beached Bird Monitoring

A stretch of beach on Bering Island known as Ladyginka is now slated to become the first western Bering Sea site participating in the Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST) ecosystem monitoring program. COASST, whose home base is in Seattle, uses community volunteers to keep track of the number and species of seabird carcasses that wash ashore on local beaches. Patterns of beaching create a “normal” baseline against which many different impacts can be assessed. By collaborating with citizens, natural resource management agencies and environmental organizations, this local program can translate long term monitoring into effective marine conservation solutions.

Seabird Contaminants Monitoring

Under the leadership of the AMNWR, the Seabird Tissue Archival and Monitoring Project (STAMP) is an ambitious initiative to understand the distribution of heavy metals, PCB's and other toxins in the Arctic food chain. Realizing the importance of including the Commanders in this effort, the reserve's staff will begin collecting several murre eggs in 2007, sending them to STAMP coordinator David Roseneau for analysis.

Under the auspices of the Russian nature reserve, young people in Nikolskoe will become pioneers in adding the Commanders to this program, data from which will help to measure changes in the ocean environment, and document the impacts of catastrophic events such as oil spills.

Invasive Rat Prevention

The spread of non-native rats is one of the biggest threats to Bering Sea wildlife, particularly seabirds: predatory rats will decimate populations, preying upon vulnerable ground nesting adults, their chicks and eggs. Preventing and eradicating rats has long been one of the top priorities of the AMNWR and now CINBR will join in the Bering Sea-wide campaign to stop this plague. Beginning in 2007, the status of rat populations on the Commander Islands will be carefully assessed and appropriate prevention measures will be incorporated into the reserve's operations.

For the past three years, WWF has played a key role in sustaining this transboundary relationship, through facilitating and funding exchanges of staff and specialists, providing equipment and training, and supporting field projects in the Commander Islands. We look forward to ensuring further US-Russia collaboration to benefit both wildlife and people of the Bering Sea.

■ Murres on cliff, photographed from sea during the Commander Islands expedition in July 2006.

Photo by Thomas Van Pelt



WWF and Chukotka Villages Work Together Protect Polar Bears and Walruses

Of all of the wildlife species in the Bering Sea, the polar bear is perhaps the most fitting icon for this ecoregion. Its amazing adaptations to life in the harsh Arctic environment and dependence on sea ice are factors which make it so impressive, and yet so vulnerable. Around the Arctic, WWF supports research and conservation projects targeted at polar bears, and in the Bering Sea, our efforts are focused on the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population.

This year, WWF has continued to advocate for the US Congress to pass implementing legislation for a US-Russia treaty on joint polar bear conservation and management. The treaty was signed by both nations in 2000, ratified by the US Senate in 2003, and has approval from the Russian Duma. As this newsletter goes to press, WWF has received information that Congress has approved implementing legislation for the Polar Bear treaty through an amendment to the Marine Mammal Protection Act, an exciting step forward in an important agreement.

Meanwhile, WWF is working on the local level to implement a number of conservation activities that we believe will help the polar bear. In March, WWF traveled to Chukotka, Russia, where we visited several communities to learn more about the status of the bear population; provide information on the US-Russia treaty; and advise communities on bear management issues, a growing concern for Chukotka residents. As changing ice conditions cause bears to spend more time on land the chances for human-bear interactions increase significantly. Sadly, a young girl was killed by a bear in the village of Reirkaipi, on the Chukotka coast, earlier this year.

The WWF-led expedition team included Margaret Williams, WWF Kamchatka/Bering Sea Ecoregion leader; biologist Andrei Boltunov of the Russian Institute of Nature Conservation, and Charlie Johnson, Chairman of the Alaska Native Polar Bear Commission. As a subsistence hunter, respected Alaskan Native leader, an experienced diplomat, and a conservationist, Mr. Johnson was a great

■ L to R: Sergey Kavriy (seated) of Vankarem village on the Chukchi Sea coast, with Charlie Johnson, Chairman of the Alaska Native Polar Bear Commission and Vladilen Kavriy, also of Vankarem.





Photo by Vladilen Kavriy

■ Bear near Vankarem village.



Photo by Viktor Nikiforov

■ Walrus haulout on Cape Vankarem.

asset to our team. He provided extensive advice based on successful examples in Alaska whereby Native Alaskans living in polar bear country have reduced human-bear conflicts, participated in harvest monitoring, and managed other human impacts on this species.

We began our trip in Moscow where we met with Margaret Caton, Science and Technology representative of the US Embassy, and Dr. Stanislav Belikov, the Russian senior biologist from the Institute of Nature Conservation who has helped lead the development of the US-Russia polar bear treaty for the Russian government. Both sides exchanged updates on the status of the treaty in our respective governments so that we could bring the most current information to our Chukotkan partners.

Once in Chukotka, our group was met by Sergey and Vladilen Kavriy, two brothers from the village of Vankarem who have become key partners for WWF. The Kavriys are extremely knowledgeable about Bering Sea wildlife and are skilled leaders, and conservation advocates. They organized meetings for us to exchange information with management agencies, regional authorities, schools, village leaders, and community residents. Over the course of a week, we held several “town meetings” as well as smaller gatherings in four villages to inquire about support and regulatory mechanisms to implement some of our mutually developed ideas.

Among the many outcomes of the expedition were several decisions made by the village of Vankarem. Based on the lessons learned from Alaska native communities, the residents of this village decided to create the first Russian polar bear “brigades” which will involve training and equipping a team of people to frighten bears from the village if they approach. WWF is supporting this effort, as we believe the brigades will help conserve bears and protect human life.

Another decision taken by the community was to move forward on protecting another important wildlife species, Pacific walrus. For the last ten years, walrus have been “hauling out” (resting) on a long, rocky spit just a few kilometers from Vankarem village. Up to 30,000 walrus may gather here in the autumn. In such a high concentration, disturbances can cause huge stampedes and mortality for many animals. Thus, working with WWF in the coming year, Vankarem will be establishing a local protected area to prevent vehicles and vessels from approaching the area but still allow for monitored subsistence hunting.

In the coming year, WWF will continue to support these efforts, as well as research on polar bear habitat. Currently Dr. Anatoly Kochnev is conducting a coastal habitat survey to identify key polar bear foraging, denning and concentration areas along part of the Chukotka coast. We look forward to sharing the results of this work with you next year!

WWF's Kamchatka Salmon Conservation Initiative

Many have asked the rhetorical question of whether a bear “does his business in the woods.” Bears do, in fact, do their business in the woods and scientific studies show a direct link between healthy forests, bears, and the nitrogen-rich salmon found in bear scat. This link underscores the tremendous ecological importance of salmon as a keystone species in the Kamchatka/Bering Sea Ecoregion, providing a critical part of the food web as well as a substantial component of vibrant coastal economies. In 2006, WWF launched an ambitious Kamchatka Salmon Conservation Program in the Russian Far East. Our goals are to (1) substantially improve governance and management of salmon; (2) introduce market-based incentives to encourage sustainability; (3) increase enforcement and combat illegal fishing; and (4) promote and establish protected marine areas for salmon.

Governance

In July 2006, WWF brought together a diverse group of government agencies, fishery industry representatives, indigenous peoples, and other NGOs in Kamchatka to develop and establish a Salmon

Coalition. The Salmon Coalition will advise the Russian government on how to improve commercial fishery management, promote conservation and sustainable use of salmon, protect critical salmon habitat, prevent poaching, and support international and domestic market efforts for sustainable salmon products. Based on analysis conducted by WWF on local and federal fisheries law, members of the Salmon Coalition recently proposed amendments to local fishery management legislation under review for Kamchatka. To further support these governance reform efforts, WWF will bring Russian officials to the U.S. in the spring of 2007 to participate in the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council process to provide ideas and options as Russia continues to improve its management regime.

WWF also coordinated a joint workshop in November in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky with other NGO partners to address the environmental impacts of salmon hatcheries. Workshop participants included diverse representatives from Russia, China, and the United States. This workshop provided an opportunity to educate participants on the potential

economic and ecological effects of hatchery salmon on wild salmon stocks. More importantly, the workshop culminated in a series of recommendations for salmon hatchery use and operation in the Russian Far East.

Marketing

An often overlooked aspect of resource conservation involves the use of the simple economic model of supply and demand. Recent efforts in Alaska to support sustainable market branding and market-related educational campaigns have proven successful in reducing the demand for unsustainable products and supporting more sustainable management of other products. WWF hopes to capitalize on these market-based conservation measures by promoting Wild Kamchatka salmon in domestic and international markets. WWF recently asked the Seafood Choices Alliance to assess consumer attitudes related to salmon conservation and potential interest in buying certified sustainable products. The results of the survey will support a focused marketing approach designed to promote sustainable salmon and, subsequently, salmon conservation.

СОХРАНИМ ЛОСОСЯ
ВМЕСТЕ



WWF Russia

■ Logo of the Kamchatka salmon conservation coalition, with the slogan “Let’s Conserve Salmon Together.”



WWF also worked closely with other NGOs such as Pacific Environment and Wild Salmon Center to develop and distribute a consumer guide comparing farmed and wild salmon in an effort to support sustainable wild salmon. WWF provided substantial input designed to adapt the consumer guide to better suit Russian markets.

Enforcement

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, more generally categorized as “poaching,” continues to threaten salmon stocks in Kamchatka and the Western Bering Sea. WWF and TRAFFIC, a wildlife trade monitoring network, prepared a sociological survey for residents of fishing communities on Kamchatka to assess opinions regarding poaching. WWF will use the results of the survey to promote strengthened enforcement and reductions in IUU salmon fishing. Currently our primary focus is to document and quantify the illegal and legal trade in Kamchatka's salmon products, including caviar. To do this, TRAFFIC is collecting data on IUU fishing and illegal fisheries trade, using official data as well as a network of informants. As a result, TRAFFIC's operatives have acquired significant information regarding the illegal caviar trade in Russia in recent months.

In December 2006, WWF will be conducting a joint training seminar with the Fish Inspection Service of Kamchatka's Agricultural Monitoring committee (Rosselkhoznadzor). WWF invited exper-

rienced trainers from the Primorye Region and the Office of the Public Prosecutor in Vladivostok and Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky to conduct the seminar. More than 150 participants, including fish inspectors from Kamchatka and Koryakia, will be trained in fishery enforcement techniques, natural resource legislation, and methods for addressing IUU fishing.

Habitat Protection

While some of our partners such as the Wild Salmon Center (WSC) are focusing on conserving key salmon watersheds, WWF is looking to protect important salmon habitat in the marine environment. WWF has proposed the creation of a precedent-setting marine fisheries protected zone off the Kamchatka coast to provide for key salmon feeding habitats threatened by planned oil development on the western Kamchatka shelf. WWF is currently conducting a feasibility analysis to determine what type of protected area would be the most effective. Our first step involves compiling and integrating relevant data into GIS maps designed to classify the most important marine salmon habitats surrounding Kamchatka.

To foster support among Kamchatka residents for salmon conservation, WWF contracted with the Apostrophe Film Group to produce a film on salmon and the potential impacts of oil development on salmon and salmon habitat in Kamchatka. Filming began this fall. The film will focus on four main issues: (1) Salmon as a keystone species in the

ecosystem; (2) the history of salmon fishing as it relates to the commercial industry and indigenous peoples; (3) increasing threats from poaching and overfishing; and (4) potential impacts of oil development on salmon habitat. A series of short clips for television will also be developed from the film.

In October, WWF staff participated in the Sakhalin Salmon Initiative (SSI) International Conference organized by WSC in Russia. Sakhalin, a region heavily affected by infrastructure investments by major multinational fossil fuel corporations, provided a valuable forum for addressing poor industrial management in sensitive ecological areas. Sakhalin Governor Ivan Malakhov, WSC CEO Guido Rahr, and Ian Craig of Sakhalin Energy Investment Company signed a declaration highlighting the need for international cooperation to conserve salmon and expressing the desire to continue building the SSI. Among other things, participants at the conference formally agreed to prioritize and protect key habitat, ensure best practices for natural resource development projects, and establish an organization on Sakhalin to coordinate implementation of SSI activities. Furthermore, this conference provided a firsthand opportunity for WWF to observe the impacts of oil exploration on Sakhalin salmon habitat and consider similar habitat issues in Kamchatka.

The Kamchatka/Bering Sea Ecoregion eagerly looks forward to continued progress with respect to the four activity categories.

WWF on the Kamchatka Peninsula: Protecting Terrestrial Ecosystems

Since 1994, World Wildlife Fund has been a strong supporter of the development of protected areas on the Kamchatka Peninsula, located along the eastern edge of Russia. This year, we have focused on strengthening the Kamchatka ranger services and nature reserves, programs building awareness, environmental education, and activism, (particularly activities involving youth), and the promotion of sustainable resource use and alternative livelihoods among indigenous peoples.

WWF has been able to assist the inspectors of Koryaksky Zapovednik with training, uniforms, equipment, and the development of management guidelines for improved protection of the reserve. In the Kluchevskoy Nature Park, we were able to outfit rangers and support a summer expedition to mark trails, and in the Bystrinsky Nature Park, a “Panda-Link” network was created. This network of 13 radio stations was placed in traditional indigenous fishing camps as a means to communicate information between remote locations regarding poachers and other violations in the park.

Understanding the importance of student involvement, WWF organized an inter-regional ecological camp in Bystrinsky Nature Park. Forty five youth participated in activities designed to teach the basics of ecology, plant identification, orienteering, and proper etiquette when dealing with bears. They also helped build trails and foot bridges in the park. “Amto,” a Youth Scientific-Ecological Group, prepared an inventory of natural monuments of Kamchatka to aid in better management of the natural monument system.

There have been several efforts made to increase the depth and scope of public awareness, especially pertaining to the zapovednik, or strictly protected nature reserve, areas. Beginning with the publication of a booklet on Klucheskoy Park designed to better inform tourists and reduce violations in the park, WWF, working with Koryaksky Zapovednik, then launched a monthly new bulletin on biodiversity conservation and protected areas. The bulletin is currently being sent out as an insert in the Olyutorsky District local newspaper, where the reserve is located, and is often reprinted in other area newspapers, as well.



World Wildlife Fund supported the training of Irina Firsova, head of environmental education from Koryaksky Zapovednik (northern Kamchatka) at the Zapovedniks Training Center in Moscow. Irina will lead the eco-ethnographic center in the local community near the reserve which WWF, with support from the European Union, is now helping to create.

In collaboration with the UNDP Biodiversity Conservation Project, the Wild Salmon Center, and the Kamchatka Administration, WWF supported the celebration of the 90th anniversary of the Zapovednik system. It is imperative that the public understand the importance of the preserve system in Russia, especially the significance of Kamchatka's nature reserves.

Ultimately, to assure success for any program impacting local inhabitants, there is a need for sustainable livelihoods which offer realistic sources of income. WWF is supporting master classes for different age groups in the largely indigenous community of Khailino, in northern Kamchatka, to help revive craft making and other traditional arts related to reindeer herding. It is hoped that by

promoting the development of alternative income sources there will be reduced poaching and human pressures around Koryaksky Zapovednik. We support the development of a strategy and business plan for the Korfsky Reindeer Farm and the community of Khailino to help revive reindeer herding as a sustainable form of "nature use" and a key part of the social-economic well-being of the indigenous community.

Great strides and progress are being made in Kamchatka land protection. In the twelve years since World Wildlife Fund became involved with trying to protect these fragile environments, over a quarter of the Kamchatka region is now preserved and managed in the parks and zapovednik system.

Bear Conservation in the Southern Kamchatka Sanctuary

As World Wildlife Fund expands its work in Kamchatka (Russia), we're diversifying our methods for protecting an important keystone species- the Kamchatka Brown Bear. Using equipment provided by WWF, inspectors working for the Bear Patrol Group have been able to combat bear and salmon poaching by patrolling the Southern Kamchatka Sanctuary and destroy poachers' hideouts and nets. We have also been able to take the first steps toward the creation of a preserve on Azhabache Lake, an important bear habitat which is a phenomenally rich area for sockeye salmon reproduction.

WWF supported the "Bear" festival, located in the heart of Nalychevo Park, which encouraged the promotion of ecotourism as a viable alternative to trophy hunting and the unsustainable exploitation of gas and mineral resources. More than 80 people attended the festival, where they participated in educational games, interacted with bear scientists, and learned how to avoid conflicts with bears.

To further increase local awareness of how to behave when encountering a bear and how to prevent unnecessary deaths of humans and bears, WWF distributed films made by scientists at the Wildlife Conservation Society to over two dozen remote communities in Kamchatka and Koryakia. We are pleased with the response and support for these efforts in bear conservation and protection of the Sanctuary. WWF will continue to work with the Wildlife Conservation Society, Russian management agencies, and other partners in Kamchatka to protect the region's brown bear population.



Continued Efforts to Restore Geese to Russia's Kuril Islands Soar

With support from WWF and others, Russian ornithologist Nikolai Gerasimov and his wife Alla have worked for the past 15 years to rescue the Kuril-Japanese population of Aleutian Canada geese (*Branta canadensis leucopareia*) from the brink of extinction at the teeth of introduced foxes. Since 1992, the Gerasimovs have bred the rare Aleutian form of the familiar Canada goose at a breeding center in Kamchatka and, in small groups, have to date released 400 young geese into the bird's native habitat on the northern Kuril Island of Ekarma. WWF and Kamchatka Airlines helped to fund transport of the birds by helicopter to this ancestral island.

Ekarma Island provides ideal habitat for this rare species — here there are no people or predators. In former years, birds released here have adapted well. Recently, tagged birds were sighted in wintering areas in Japan and the Korean Peninsula. Evidence suggests that some of the birds also winter on the Kurils.

“People make nature conservation happen, not organizations,” says Laura Williams, Director of the WWF Kamchatka office in Russia. “This is why WWF is pleased to support the Gerasimovs in their efforts. Thanks to them and all those who support them, the Aleutian goose has been offered a second chance for survival in Asia.”



Photo by Laura Williams

■ On September 8th of this year, a group of Aleutian Canada geese (*Branta canadensis leucoparia*) - 50 more birds - were set free on native soil on Russia's Ekarma Island. Here the 4-month old birds, raised in Dr. Nikolai Gerasimov's breeding center, first took wing. “Now they will get to know the island, flying away and returning anew,” explains Gerasimov. “A bird considers its home to be the place where it first learned to fly.”

Species Spotlight: North Pacific Right Whale

- The North Pacific population of northern right whales (*Eubalaena japonica*), composed of as few as (or perhaps fewer than) 100 individuals, is considered one of the most critically endangered animal populations on Earth. A sighting of several right whales with a calf in western Bristol Bay in 1996 was the first confirmation of reproduction in Alaska waters in decades.
- Populations were decimated by commercial whalers who called it the “right whale” to hunt because of its docile behavior and slow swimming (which made them easy to harpoon), its tendency to float once killed (which made them easy to retrieve), and its very high oil content (which made them commercially valuable).
- Adult maximum length is 56 feet and average weight is 60 tons (about the weight of 10 African elephants). The high arching lower lip and massive head (which comprises 1/3 of the body length) houses long plates of baleen that are used to strain schools of tiny zooplankton from huge gulps of seawater.
- Individuals vocalize with each other underwater using a series of burps and moans. More acrobatic than similarly sized bowhead whales, northern right whales will often exhibit breaching and fin slapping behaviors at the water's surface.
- North Pacific right whales are relatively shallow divers but can remain underwater for up to 15 minutes at a time. Their high blood volume, high red blood cell count, and increased myoglobin in their muscle tissue allow for excellent oxygen retention (in addition to giving their muscle tissue a deep purple-red color).
- Breeding occurs in winter and spring; pregnant females give birth to a single offspring the following winter after a 12 month gestation. One calf is born every 2-4 years. Already 15-20 feet long at birth, young right whales grow very quickly on milk that is 40-50% fat (human milk is 3.3% fat).
- Though protected from commercial hunting since 1935, North Pacific Right Whales are now vulnerable to modern threats such as ship strikes and vessel noise (their home range overlaps with one of the busiest commercial shipping lanes in the world), entanglement in fishing gear, and looming offshore oil and gas development in Bristol Bay (presenting the very real threat of chronic and catastrophic oil/gas spills, in addition to further increased vessel traffic in the southern Bering Sea).
- In the Kamchatka/Bering Sea ecoregion, WWF has been advocating for designation of Right Whale critical habitat; pushing for improved shipping safety in right whale habitat; and is fighting to keep Bristol Bay (known to support right whales) free from offshore oil and gas exploration, development and transportation.

Source: [Guide to Marine Mammals of Alaska](#) (Kate Wynne)

Pribilof Islands Collaborative Convenes on St. George



Photo by Margaret Williams

■ Participants in the PIC meeting on St. George.

On November 4th and 5th, the Pribilof Islands Collaborative (PIC) met in the small Pribilof Island community of St. George. The meeting represented the culmination of three years of mutual efforts to understand and mitigate local wildlife and associated economic declines.

Having this meeting on the remote (and sometimes difficult to reach) Bering Sea island called for an adventurous spirit, but participants were committed to the challenge. Rewarded with excellent flying weather, a hearty welcome from the St. George community, sightings of snowy owls, arctic foxes, fur seals, and the beautiful landscape, PIC participants were struck by the island's appeal as well as the challenges facing St. George.

In the last decade, the Pribilof Island communities of St. Paul and St. George experienced substantial economic declines, coinciding with well-documented (and in some cases, dramatic) long-term declines in several important subsistence and commercial wildlife species, particularly northern fur seals. Over the last three years, participants in the PIC process met formally to address ongoing declines in local halibut and crab fisheries, fur seals, bird populations, and in this last meeting, the struggling economies of St. George and St. Paul.

The diverse PIC membership (conservation groups (fishing industry representatives), commercial fishermen, and community representatives) spent two days in discussion and work groups with respected economists, community development specialists, academics, and government scientists to learn about and propose solutions for the economic

challenges of the Pribilof Islands. The PIC participants also received new information about climate change in the Bering Sea as well as results of recent research on fur seals. Finally, the participants reviewed group agreements and decisions from previous meetings, and updated each other on progress to date.

Despite the challenges and occasional discomfort of participating in a forum with a diverse membership like the PIC, real progress is evident in the PIC's consensus on several items over the last two years. For example, when the PIC first convened three years ago, fur seals had no allocated research budget. Thanks in part to PIC recommendations to Congress, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the North Pacific Research Board, today nearly \$1 million exists for research into the fur seal decline. Within the last two years, this newly funded research has illuminated key questions regarding the fur seal population decline. Another important outcome of consensus action by PIC members was the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's decision to open Area 4D for Pribilof Islands fishermen. This regulatory change allowed Pribilofians restricted to fishing in Area 4C (an area suffering from localized depletion and poor fishing) to fish for halibut in Area 4D, yielding a greater catch and alleviating fishing pressure on Area 4C. Other PIC agreements over the three years included unanimous support for reducing wildlife-entangling marine debris from fishing and other sources in addition to implementing strict policies to help prevent the spread of alien species, primarily rats, to

the bird-rich Pribilofs and other Bering Sea islands. Finally, participants reaffirmed their support of research efforts on the islands and recommended conducting a feasibility study for a Pribilof Islands Research Center.

Although participants came to the November meeting on St. George with the idea that it would be a conclusion of the PIC process, WWF was pleased to learn that all participants wished to continue meeting annually. PIC members cited the information exchange, opportunity to communicate in an open forum, and refreshing approach to collaboration as reasons to continue working together. WWF remains committed to implementing the above-mentioned agreements and will continue working closely with the St. Paul and St. George communities as well as with The Nature Conservancy and other partners in our shared goal of a sustainable future for these globally unique islands.



Photo by Margaret Williams

■ Dr. James Overland of the Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory (NOAA) and Dr. Doug Demaster, director of the Alaska Fisheries Science Center on St. George Island for the PIC meeting in November.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WWF Kamchatka/Bering Sea Ecoregion Program Expands

In September WWF celebrated the official opening of the new Bering Sea/Kamchatka Ecoregion office in Petropavlovsk, Russia, on the Kamchatka Peninsula. The opening concluded a three-day strategic planning workshop in which WWF ecoregion staff working on transboundary ecoregion issues updated and agreed upon the WWF Ecoregion Conservation Action Plan.



Laura Williams



David Aplin



Alfred "Bubba" Cook



Evelyn Yobera



Denise Woods

The new Kamchatka office is in good hands with Director [Laura Williams](#). Laura has lived and worked in Russia for 13 years, since she moved to Moscow in 1993 to start up WWF's Russia program. Since then she has managed a number of conservation projects in Russia. In 2006 she moved out to Kamchatka to open the WWF Kamchatka/Bering Sea Ecoregional office. Laura earned her bachelor's degree in environmental policy from Cornell University and has a Master's degree in Conservation Biology from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Laura's Kamchatka team includes Office Administrator Ekaterina Lipatova, Communications Officer Alexandra Filatkina, and Office Assistant Nikolai Pozdnyakov. *(See photo, right)*

This fall WWF opened a new field office in Homer, Alaska. Education specialist [David Aplin](#) will run the office and coordinate WWF's science and education programs with Bering Sea coastal communities; our climate change leadership effort, and our partnership with the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, which is based in Homer. Aplin holds a masters degree in resource management from the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point and has established and managed visitor centers and educational programs Wisconsin, Iowa, Alaska, Washington and Hawaii. Before returning to Alaska in 2005, Dave worked as the Outreach Director for Sea Studios Foundation on the award winning PBS / National Geographic series *Strange Days on Planet Earth*.

A new addition to the Kamchatka/Bering Sea Ecoregion team is Senior Fisheries Officer, [Alfred "Bubba" Cook](#). Bubba will be working on both sides of the U.S./ Russia maritime boundary on Pollock and Pacific salmon fisheries issues as well as marine habitat conservation in priority areas such as the Pribilof Islands. Previously, Bubba has worked for NOAA Fisheries Services in the agency's Juneau regulatory office. Bubba has a bachelor's degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Science from Texas A&M University and a J.D. with Environmental Law Certificate from the Northwestern School of Law at Lewis & Clark College in Oregon.

To ensure that WWF's expanding program is kept running smoothly, we have also hired Financials and Administration expert [Evelyn Yobera](#). Originally from Busia, western Kenya, Evelyn has been in the United States pursuing her undergraduate and graduate education. While studying for her master's degree in Environmental Science at Alaska Pacific University (which she completed in April 2006), Evelyn worked for an engineering company and as a graduate assistant, she analyzed a World Parks Congress delegate survey on protected areas management. In Kenya, Evelyn gained experience in project management when she coordinated the "Environmental Economics Network for Eastern and Southern Africa," a project administered by IUCN (The World Conservation Union).

WWF says adieu to Research Assistant [Denise Woods](#) who, for the past four years, has edited the Bering Sea Ecoregion News and coordinated many of our efforts in the Bering Sea, including the Pribilof Islands Collaborative, the campaign to stop invasive rats, and efforts to prevent oil spills. Denise is bidding a fond farewell to Alaska and WWF to pursue conservation work near her home town in northern California. She will be joined by her biologist-husband Shane and two year old son, Sage.

A Personal Perspective on Climate Change

- by Adam Rothman, WWF Intern

For me climate change isn't about flooding, famine, or fears of even worse things. What I think is scary about climate change is all the little things. Losing the small things that make my life what it is - the things that I enjoy doing. The thought of losing the lifestyle that I have learned, about being outside and enjoying the wilderness around me - this is what is scary about climate change. When I first thought about this it seemed petty, especially when compared to the large scale calamity that could ensue, but immediate risks seem just as frightening, losing the things that make life what it really is. To me the risk is not in large scale global problems but in the small scale every day things that make my life great.

Adam Patrick Rothman is a 17 year-old high school senior at West Anchorage High School. He has been an intern in the WWF Alaska field office, studying climate change impacts and producing a short video on the subject.



■ Adam Patrick Rothman



■ WWF Kamchatka/Bering Sea team celebrates office opening in Kamchatka, Russia.

Left to Right: In back: Peter Sharov, David Aplin, Yuri Darman (Director of WWF's Amur Heilong Ecoregion), Viktor Nikiforov, Vladimir Krever, Andrei Yablochkov, Konstantine Zgurovsky, Bubba Cook.

Front row: Alexandra Filatkina, Ekaterina Lipatova, Laura Williams, Natalia Dronova, Elena Kolb, Margaret Williams.

WWF's Bering Sea Seabirds Conservation Efforts

Building momentum with Russian long-line fleet: With WWF support, Russian seabird expert Dr. Yuri Artukhin, working on Russian boats with scientists Andrey Vinnikov and Dmitry Terentev, has demonstrated through experiments on board fishing vessels experimentally that simple, affordable seabird deterring devices (paired streamer lines and weighted fishing lines) reduce the number of seabirds attaching bait by 82%, reducing bycatch mortality by 90%. As word is spreading that such devices can also save a company hundreds of thousands of dollars per year in wasted bait, heads of the fishing industry are proving eager to outfit their fleets with these seabird (and money) savers. Currently four Russian long line vessels deploy the paired streamers. WWF's goal is to expand the use of these devices to the entire Russian long line fleet.

The Pribilof Islands Collaborative (PIC) assembled at the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Islands and Ocean Visitor Center in Homer to learn about the threats facing the birds of the Pribilof Islands, one of the preeminent sites for seabirds anywhere on Earth, and to develop strategies to help promote their conservation. Pribilof Islands community members; government representatives; commercial fishing industry representatives; and conservation groups (including WWF) participated, sharing the latest information about the status of and management issues affecting the Pribilof's avifauna. As a result of the credible, science-based evidence presented by world-class seabird researchers and agency biologists, member organizations in the PIC agreed to pursue a number of collaborative actions to help reduce bycatch and other negative seabird/ fisheries interactions; prevent the accidental spread of predatory rats to important seabird breeding grounds like the Pribilof Islands and Russia's Commander Islands; and stepped up efforts to reduce and clean up netting and other marine debris.

WWF Calls for Right Whale and Polar Bear Protections

In March 2006, WWF's Kamchatka/Bering Sea Ecoregion office Director, Margaret Williams, provided formal oral and written comments to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the designation of critical habitat for the highly endangered North Pacific right whale, the most endangered whale species in the world. Numbering fewer than 200, the species is under immediate threat from both outer continental shelf oil and gas development plans for Bristol Bay and heavy vessel traffic along the Great Circle Route near the Aleutians. In July, NMFS designated 36,750 square miles of open ocean in Bristol Bay and the Gulf of Alaska as critical habitat for North Pacific right whales.

WWF submitted formal comments to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), using science-based arguments in favor of a petition by the Center for Biological Diversity to list the polar bear as Threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA). Scientists agree widely that the polar bears' sea ice habitat is disappearing at an accelerating rate that could well mean no summer sea ice at all by the end of the century. Polar bears will not persist without sea ice. The USFWS decision will be issued December 27, 2006.



Stop Rats Before they Stop You!

Many people are unaware of the harm that rats – hiding out on a boat – can cause to wildlife, people and ships. Rats are accidentally spread by vessels to rat-free islands when offloaded in cargo, released via shipwreck, or by jumping overboard and swimming to land. Worldwide and in the Bering Sea, rats have decimated populations of ground nesting seabirds, eating eggs, chicks, and even adults. They also contaminate seafood and other cargo; carry and transmit diseases to people who work on boats; and cause boat fires and hydraulic leaks by chewing wires. WWF has partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (AMNWR) on production of a new brochure and traveling display targeting people working on boats and in harbors. To share this message on the shores of the western Bering Sea, WWF and the USFWS translated Alaska public educational materials into Russian and delivered them by delegation to Russia (see story, page 7). To learn more about the "Stop Rats" joint venture, go to www.stoprats.org. Free rat prevention kits are available: contact AMNWR at (907) 235-6546 or alaskamaritime@fws.gov.



Want to learn more about WWF's work in the Bering Sea? Visit WWF's refreshed Bering Sea Ecoregion website to read about WWF's 20 Priority Sites for Conservation in the Bering Sea, download brochures and reports, browse through past newsletters, and sample the sounds and images of the Bering Sea on an interactive map. Go to www.worldwildlife.org/wildplaces/bs/beringseamap.cfm. Other links to relevant WWF work include our WWF Russia site (www.wwf.ru/eng) and our WWF Arctic Program site (www.panda.org/arctic).

Spotlight on WWF's Bering Sea Partners

Art Sowls



Photo by Eric Rock

Known for his self effacing humor, diverse interests, and 30 year association with the Bering Sea, Art Sowls may be the ideal companion for anyone heading to the Commander Islands, St. Paul Island or any point in between. From Shumagin to Attu, this veteran biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has scrambled over some of the most rugged islands, headlands, and pinnacles on earth to survey and protect the millions of seabirds that nest on the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. In doing so, Art has made an indelible impression on the people he's encountered along the way.

Art is acknowledged as a tenacious scientist - capable of remarkable feats of biological stamina. Art's colleague and friend, Vernon Byrd, reports that Art has probably surveyed more seabird colonies than anyone else. For many who've worked with him, Art seems most at home in a skiff off a seabird colony or in a remote field camp. A cursory review of Art's resume shows a man interested in more than the acquisition of data. He has employed his good humor and well oiled communication skills to help conserve the Refuge he obviously loves.

Earlier in his career Art and his USFWS colleagues worked with federal, state, and local partners to systematically remove foxes and other invasive species from the islands of the vast Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. In 1993, Art

initiated the refuge's rat prevention program on the Pribilof Islands and has been the project leader ever since. Today Art stands at the forefront of the growing group of partners, from fishermen to school children, working to keep un-infested islands rat free.

Often tapped for assignments that require good judgment, political acumen, and superior communication skills, Art has built sturdy relationships with native Alaskans, conservation organization including WWF and other agencies such as the National Marine Fisheries Service, Alaska Fish and Game, and the U.S. Coast Guard. He has also been the USFWS "first responder" for a number of oil and "rat" spills impacting the Refuge. Art has carried his acquired expertise to far away places, including the Commander Islands in the western Bering Sea.

Since 2000 Art has collaborated with WWF on important conservation issues including rat prevention, the establishment of the COASST beached bird monitoring program on St. Paul and St. George, and the creation of Pribilof Island Collaborative (PIC). His ability, integrity, and affable nature make him the ideal partner - whether telling stories around the fire at a remote field camp, or talking conservation policy and practice at a PIC meeting.



Photo by Robert Angell, USFWS

Special Thanks

We at WWF depend on many partners, friends, and colleagues to achieve our goals in conserving the Kamchatka Peninsula and Bering Sea biodiversity. For their contributions to our conservation efforts in the Bering Sea during the last year, we would like to recognize the following people:

- **Samantha Smith**, for her leadership on Arctic conservation issues, from climate change to shipping, illegal fishing, and more. Samantha has been a champion for the Bering Sea and marine conservation during her decade-long tenure at WWF's Arctic Program in Oslo, Norway. As she departs WWF in December of this year, we wish her well in her next endeavors.
- **Greg Siekaniec**, Refuge Manager of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, for providing leadership and support on the Pribilof Islands Collaborative; sustainable eco-tourism; prevention of alien species; and embracing opportunities for international collaboration with the Commander Islands. Finally, we thank Greg and his outstanding refuge staff for making the Islands and Oceans visitors center a welcome meeting place on numerous occasions.
- **Poppy Benson, Sue Schulmeister, and Marianne Aplin** of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, **Terry Johnson** of the Alaska Maine Advisory Program, and naturalist **Carmen Field** for their assistance on a customized version of the award winning film *Journey of the Tiglax* created for ecotourists visiting the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (AMNWR).
- **Marilyn Sigman, Beth Trowbridge, and Bree Murphy** of the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies for their able assistance in organizing and supporting the WWF Climate Camp Alaska 2006.
- Coastal Communities for Science partners and invited scientists, who participated in Climate Camp Alaska 2006 and made it an engaging, lively, and solutions-oriented event.
- **Barbara Wyckoff Baird** for providing facilitation and master planning expertise that has helped the Kamchatka/Bering Sea ecoregion team build a cohesive and strategic conservation plan.
- **Vladiilen Kavriy, Sergey Kavriy, Andrei Boltunov, Stanislav Belikov, Anatoly Kochnev, and Nikita Ovsyannikov** for their important contributions to polar bear and walrus conservation in the Russian Arctic. Also, **Aleksandr Goryachix, Fedor Tymnetagin, and Anatoly Tevlyany**, local hunters from the native village of Vankarem (Chukotka), for their active participation in polar bear protection through the polar bear patrol.
- **Charlie Johnson** for sharing his deep experience in human dimensions of polar bear conservation with WWF and our Russian conservation.
- **Mikhail Ivanovich Kumanstov**, the Vice-Governor of Koryakia for his support in reviving reindeer herding, salmon conservation, and promoting environmental awareness in the Koryakia Autonomous District. His ideas and policy in Koryakia on managing fisheries and enforcement has set an example for all of Kamchatka.
- **Marina Krasnova**, a school teacher in Paratunka, Kamchatka for her initiative in developing environmental education programs for students, organizing summer camps to introduce children to Kamchatka's parks, and teach them scientific principles of environmental conservation.
- **Julya Potemkina and Nadejda Krupskaya** teachers from Chukotka, for their leadership in children's clubs that are part of WWF's initiative in ecological education.
- **Alena Vakkarik**, head of the news department of broadcasting station "Radio Purga (snowstorm)," for the informational support of conservation projects in Chukotka
- The staff at **Alaska Marine Conservation Center** for their leadership in efforts to protect Bristol Bay from offshore oil and gas development.
- **Brock Bernstein** of the National Fisheries Conservation Center, **Aquilina Lestenkof** of St. Paul Tribal Ecosystem Conservation Organization, **Chris Merculief** of St. George Tribal Government, **Sally Merculief** of St. George Tribal Government, **Leesa Cobb** of Port Orford Ocean Resources Team, **Elizabeth Sheehan** of Triple Bottom Line Collaborative, **Caroline Gibson** of Pacific Marine Conservation Council, **Douglas DeMaster**, of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration NOAA - Alaska Fisheries Science Center, **Astrid Scholz** of Ecotrust, **Sarah Kruse** of Ecotrust, **Jim Overland** of NOAA - Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory, **John Lindsay** of NOAA's Pribilof Islands Project Office, **Heather McCarty** of Central Bering Sea Fisherman's Association (CBSFA), **Steve Manley** of CBSFA, **Linda Snow** of City of St. Paul, **Alvin Merculief** Mayor City of St. George, and **Karin Holser** of Pribilof Islands Stewardship Program for their presentations during the Pribilof Islands Collaborative meeting on St. George Island in November, 2006. We would also like to thank Denise Woods and members of the Steering Committee, as well as all PIC participants for making the November meeting a highly productive one.

Supporters of the Bering Sea Program in 2006:

We gratefully acknowledge support for our Kamchatka/Bering Sea Ecoregion Program from the Alaska Conservation Foundation; the Lennox Foundation; the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); the National Science Foundation; the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund; the Oak Foundation; the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation; the Trust for Mutual Understanding; the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service; and WWF Germany, and WWF Arctic Program.



Kamchatka/Bering Sea Ecoregion News

WWF Alaska Field Office
406 G Street, Suite 303
Anchorage, AK 99501

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World Wildlife Fund, known worldwide by its panda logo, leads international efforts to protect endangered species and the diversity of life on Earth. Now in its fourth decade, WWF works in more than 100 countries around the globe and is supported by one million members in the United States.

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For more information on WWF Kamchatka/Bering Sea work, visit our website at <http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildplaces/bs/pubs.cfm> or contact one of our program staff:

In our WWF Alaska Field Office:

406 G Street, Suite 303
Anchorage, AK 99501
Ph: (907) 279-5504
Fax: (907) 279-5509

Margaret Williams

Director, Kamchatka/Bering Sea Ecoregion Program
Liaison, Russia Programs
E-mail: Margaret.williams@wwfus.org

Bubba Cook

Senior Fisheries Officer
E-mail: bubba.cook@wwfus.org

Evelyn Yobera

Office Administrator
E-mail: evelyn.yobera@wwfus.org

In our WWF Homer Field Office:

3734 Ben Walters Lane
Homer, Alaska 99603
(907) 235-1995 office
(907) 299-3814

David Aplin

Senior Program Coordinator
E-mail: david.aplin@wwfus.org

In our WWF Washington, D.C. headquarters:

1250 Twenty-Fourth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037-1132

Bill Eichbaum

Vice President, Marine Portfolio
Ph: (202) 778-9645
E-mail: bill.eichbaum@wwfus.org

In our WWF Kamchatka Peninsula Field Office:

Sopochnaya St., 13, Suite 4
Elizovo, Kamchatka obl.
684000
Tel: +7 41531 7 17 67
Tel/fax: +7 4152 411 945

Laura Williams

Director, WWF Kamchatka Office in Russia Ecoregional
Office
E-mail: lwilliams@wwf.ru

Ekaterina Lipatova

Office Administrator
E-mail: elipatova@wwf.ru

Alexandra Filatkina

Communications Officer
E-mail: afilatkina@wwf.ru

Nikolay Pozdnyakov

Office Assistant
E-mail: npozdnyakov@wwf.ru

In our WWF Russia Office:

Viktor Nikiforov
Director of Regional Programmes

For DHL and FedEx:

WWF Russia Program Office
19 Nikoloyamskaya Street, Building 3
Moscow 109240, Russia

For Regular Mail:

WWF Russia Program Office
Account No. WWF 232
208 East 51st Street, Suite 295
New York, NY 10022

In our WWF Russian Far East Office:

Konstantine Zgurovsky
Verkhneportovaya Str. 18a
Vladivostok, Russia 690003
Ph/Fax: +7 (4232) 414863
E-mail: kzgurovsky@wwfirfe.ru

In our WWF Germany Office:

Helene Kolb
WWF-Germany
Rebstoeckerstrasse 55
Postfach 190 440
60326 Frankfurt/Main, GERMANY
Ph: + 49 69-79144-147
Email: kolb@wwf.de



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