



The Alaskan Wildlifer

Newsletter of the Alaska Chapter of the Wildlife Society

Fall Issue - September 2012



Message from President Jerry Hupp

Alaska Chapter Position Statements

The Alaska Chapter's Executive Board is currently reviewing three position statements that have been under development in recent years. Therefore, this seems like a good time to talk about the role of position statements and how they're created.

According to the TWS website (<http://www.wildlife.org/policy/position-statements>): "A position statement is a carefully prepared and concise exposition on a wildlife issue that defines the issue, contains factual background data, describes the most probable biological, social, and economic results of alternative actions, and may also contain a recommended course(s) of action." When you consider the diversity of wildlife issues addressed by position statements, and their complexity, you begin to appreciate the process by which a problem is summarized and recommendations offered in a document that is often only a few pages long. Position statements provide background information and suggested courses of action to policy makers. They also guide the Society's public statements on an issue. The TWS bylaws allow chapters to adopt position statements that deal with local issues.

At the national level, there are clear guidelines for development of TWS position statements (<http://www.wildlife.org/policy/position-statements-guide>):

- The TWS Council approves development of a position statement in response to proposals from chapters or members, and may appoint a committee to develop the statement.
- Once developed by committee, the draft statement is forwarded to Council, which may revise it before sending it to TWS members for comment.
- Following revision that can incorporate member comments, the Position Statements

Subcommittee recommends to Council to approve or not approve the statement. The statement is adopted in its final form if a majority of Council approves.

So, what about the position statements the Alaska Chapter's Executive Board is currently working on? One statement addresses the 1994 intensive management statute passed by the Alaska State Legislature, and updates our 1995 position on that issue. Another deals with the process by which state wildlife regulations are adopted. The final statement addresses the risk of disease transmission to Alaskan wildlife posed by domestic livestock. All are important issues for the Chapter to consider. If the Board accepts these position statements, they will be individually submitted to Chapter members for a vote of approval. Our bylaws require that for a position statement to be adopted, it must receive 2/3 approval from those members that vote on the statement. That's a high bar – but it should be. Position statements are intended to reflect overwhelming view of Chapter members.

Although our bylaws are specific regarding the level of member support required to adopt a position statement, they are not quite as specific regarding their development. Our bylaws indicate that statements that are developed by a committee "shall be accepted or rejected by the Board and, if involving new policy, prepared for submission to the Chapter membership." The extent to which the Board is responsible for revising a position statement before

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submitting it to members for further comment or approval is open to interpretation. For the position statements currently under review, we are following the same process as at the national level, giving the Board authority to revise statements drafted by committee before submitting them to members. However, I feel this is a point that we need to clarify in our bylaws.

So, stay tuned for more information on progress of the position statements that are under development. In addition I would like to have further discussion with the Board and members regarding revising the bylaws to clarify how we create position statements. This could be a good discussion and possible action item for our next annual business meeting. In the meantime, if you have points regarding position statements, or other Chapter affairs that you wish to raise, please feel free to contact me at jhupp@usgs.gov. Also, consider sharing your opinions on the Chapter's website (http://joomla.wildlife.org/alaska/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=196&Itemid=281).

I hope everyone has had a good summer and is looking forward to fall and winter. Also, I hope to see some of you at the national TWS meeting in Portland.

-Jerry Hupp, President, Alaska Chapter of the Wildlife Society, USGS Wildlife Biologist

Get to know the TWS-AK Chapter Executive Board, and your regional representative. Email them with ideas, concerns, or newsletter items.

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***You can contribute! We need your story ideas!
Help keep AK-TWS members informed and connected.***

Are you working on an interesting project you'd like to share with other AK-TWS members? Do you have news to share with colleagues? Please make note of upcoming events, projects, personnel changes, issues, or anything else of interest to other AK-TWS members, and pass them on to your regional representative for the winter issue, due out in early December. If you know of something that would make an interesting newsletter article and can't write it up yourself, please contact newsletter editor Elizabeth Manning at elizabeth.manning@alaska.gov or 907-267-2168. Help us make this an interesting and informative newsletter!



Announcements

Upcoming Conferences

Alaska Bird Conference

The 15th Alaska Bird Conference will be held at the Hotel Captain Cook in Anchorage, October 22-26. This meeting is held every two years and provides an opportunity for ornithologists and resource managers to report on all aspects of bird biology and conservation in Alaska. For more information, visit the conference web site at: <http://www.alaskabirdconference.com/>.

2012 Alaska Fire Science Workshop

The 4th annual Alaska Fire Science Workshop is coming up October 11-12, 2012, in Fairbanks, and is open to anyone interested in learning more about the latest findings in fire science in Alaska. Some previous topics include Impacts of a Changing Tundra Fire Regime on Caribou and Moose, Refining Prescriptions for Ruffed Grouse Habitat Burns in Interior Alaska, Boreal Fire History in Alaska, and Fire and Climate Interactions. Many other past presentations can be found at www.frames.gov/afsc/workshops.

This workshop is hosted by the Alaska Fire Science Consortium (AFSC), one of fourteen regional consortia that are part of a national effort to improve science knowledge exchange. The AFSC strives to strengthen the link between fire science research and on-the-ground application by promoting two-way communication between scientists and managers, providing an organized science delivery platform and facilitating collaborative scientist-manager research development. Stay tuned for the 2012 workshop agenda! For more information on attending the workshop, joining the AFSC mailing list or participating in other events (webinars, etc.), visit <http://akfireconsortium.uaf.edu> or contact Jennifer Northway (Consortium Coordinator) at jennifer.northway@alaska.edu, 907-474-6964.

New Chapter Members Needed

By Matt Sexson (UGSS)

Texas, known for delicious BBQ and the only state to have once been its own country, outnumbers Alaska in TWS chapter membership by just seven members. Our longhorn colleagues certainly have plenty to boast. However, Alaska is home to some of the most diverse wildlife resources in North America. Yet many of our colleagues who work with Alaska's wildlife are not members of TWS, even though TWS offers opportunities to collaborate at the state level and contributes a scientific voice to wildlife policy.

I recently volunteered to help bolster our chapter membership, and am looking for creative ways to promote TWS and recruit new members. One means is to provide information on TWS at instate conferences. The Alaska chapter will be a sponsor of the Alaska Bird Conference in late October to increase our visibility among the state's ornithological community. If you know of other meetings where we can disseminate information on TWS, please let me know. Also, as current members, you might consider giving a TWS membership as a gift; students new to wildlife sciences or a colleague at the office might be particularly grateful for access to publications and professional networks. Other ideas abound.

Feel free to forward your thoughts or suggestions to me at msexson@usgs.gov.

New memberships and renewals are available online at The Wildlife Society (<http://joomla.wildlife.org>). Click on membership to obtain membership forms.



Regional News

Southcentral

By Cara Staab, Southcentral Representative

Jason Herreman is the new Kenai Assistant Area Biologist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Wildlife Conservation based in Homer. Jason received his BS and MS degrees from the University of Wyoming; his graduate work focused on genetic and diet analyses for harbor seals in Prince William Sound and Glacier Bay National Park in collaboration with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Jason was previously employed by the North Slope Borough where he led research projects on polar bears and ice seals.

Southeast

By Karen Blejwas, Southeast Representative

Stephanie Sell started a new position with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game as the Assistant Area Biologist in the Douglas office, where she will serve as the primary management biologist position for GMU 1D in the Haines and Skagway area. Stephanie was previously employed by ADF&G as the Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary manager. She has also worked as a biological technician on Round Island and in other Southcentral Alaska refuges and during the refuge off-season she assisted with CWD surveillance in Southcentral Alaska. Stephanie began working with Arctic seals as an undergraduate while attending the University of Alaska Southeast. She received a Master's degree in Conservation Biology from Central Michigan University, where she studied population genetics of ringed seals.

The Alaska Environmental Literacy Plan Working Group has been selected to receive the Department of the Interior 'Partners in Conservation' Award. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar will be presenting the awards in Washington DC on October 18, 2012 to 17 projects

that have achieved exemplary conservation results with community engagement and local partnerships. The project managers of the plan are **Kristen Romanoff** with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Wildlife Education Program and **Bjørn Wolter**, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development.

Northern

By Kaiti Ott, Northern Representative

The North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management recently added **Ryan Klimstra** to its staff. Ryan attended the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina where he earned a B.S. in Biology. He worked as a naturalist/kayak guide throughout his undergraduate years, and after graduating, worked two summers with the Kodiak Regional Aquaculture Association in Kodiak, Alaska as a Fish Technician. He then attended North Carolina State University to earn an M.S. in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology. He studied "Wildlife Use of Native-warm Season and Exotic-cool Season Forage Fields" in the western Piedmont of North Carolina. In June, he accepted a biologist position with the North Slope Borough and moved to Barrow, Alaska. His research interests lie in the population dynamics of terrestrial vertebrates on the North Slope.

Julie Hagelin is joining the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Wildlife Diversity Program in the Fairbanks Office as a Regional Wildlife Biologist III for Interior, Western, and Northern Alaska. Julie previously worked as a Senior Research Scientist at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and prior to that, as a professor at Swarthmore College (PA). She brings to the position a diverse research and academic background, having worked on a variety of bird, mammal, plant, and focused conservation projects from across North America and the



world. Julie earned her PhD in Biology at the University of New Mexico working on sexual selection, breeding behavior, and conservation of upland game birds.

Chris Barger is joining the ADF&G Wildlife Diversity Program in the Fairbanks Office as a Wildlife Biologist I for Interior, Western, and Northern Alaska. Chris brings to the position extensive remote field research experience, having worked on hundreds of species of birds across Alaska and South America. He has broad experience with a wide variety of survey and research methods in both field and lab settings. Chris will be completing his Masters in Biology degree at the University of Alaska Fairbanks this fall.

The National Park Service, Arctic Inventory and Monitoring program added two term wildlife biologists this past summer. **Stacia Backensto** has joined the Park Service in a position that involves wildlife biology but also includes a special emphasis on science communication. **Jeremy Mizel** will be helping the Park Service develop monitoring protocols for land birds. Both positions will focus their efforts on the five northernmost parks in the NPS system (Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, Cape Krusenstern National Monument, Kobuk Valley National Park, Noatak National Preserve, and Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve).



TWS-Alaska Chapter Regions
(Northern, Southcentral, Southeast)



Wanted: Gray-headed chickadee sightings and information

By Travis Booms
(ADF&G)



The Gray-headed Chickadee (*Poecile cinctus*) is an enigmatic species of Northern Alaska. It has not received formal study in North America and current knowledge of the species is essentially non-existent. Hence, Travis Booms, Regional Wildlife Biologist for ADF&G in Fairbanks, is initiating an information gathering project trying to ascertain the current distribution of Gray-headed Chickadees in Alaska. The project will hopefully lead into a more detailed study of their biology and status. If you or someone you know has information about recent or historical Gray-headed Chickadee observations, please email Travis at travis.booms@alaska.gov. Your help is greatly appreciated!

Save the Date: Next Annual TWS AK-Chapter Meeting April 3-5, 2013, UAF Campus

The next annual meeting of the Alaska Chapter of TWS will be held from April 3-5, 2013, at the Wood Center on the UAF campus in Fairbanks. If you have ideas for special sessions or workshops, or wish to volunteer to help organize the meeting, please contact Grant Hilderbrand (Grant_Hilderbrand@nps.gov) or Jerry Hupp (jhupp@usgs.gov). The Chapter's annual meeting will be jointly held with the Northwest Section of TWS.

Arctic Sea Ice Decline Sets Record Low

By Jim MacCracken
(U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Marine Mammals
Management, Anchorage, AK)

The extent of sea ice in the Arctic Ocean set a record low in late July 2012 (see: <http://nsidc.org/arcticseaicenews/>), but ironically there are still several large floes and lots of marginal ice in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas, particularly in Russian waters. Sea ice is preferred habitat for both Pacific walruses and polar bears. When ice completely melts over the shallower continental shelf, walruses abandon the ice and eventually come to shore to rest with a week or two. In 2010 and 2011, 20,000-50,000 walruses - mostly females, calves, and subadults - hauled out on the beach of the barrier island about 6 km north of the Native Village of Point Lay. Two issues are associated with the use of coastal haulouts by walruses: 1) disturbances can lead to stampedes which often kill many calves and younger animals, and 2) foraging from shore limits the area that can be exploited and may result in prey depletion. Collaborative programs involving the Native Village of Point Lay, the Eskimo Walrus Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game have been successful at reducing disturbances and most walruses appear to be in good physical condition.

As of late August 2102, tagged walruses were still well distributed offshore over Hanna Shoal (see: <http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/walrus/2012animation.html>), a major feeding area, and marginal ice was still abundant. If this situation persists, walruses will remain offshore, but the ice is melting rapidly and annual minimums in ice extent typically occur in early- to mid-September.

Some polar bears stay with the ice even when it retreats beyond the continental shelf. However,

others will come to shore and the choice may be based on where they are when the ice completely melts (see: http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/polar_bears/tracking.html). Polar bears that come to shore also face problems in acquiring food which can lead them into close proximity of coastal villages and oil facilities near Prudhoe Bay resulting in bear-human conflicts. Approved bear deterrence measures adopted by the villages and oil companies have been successful at reducing those conflicts. As with walruses, the persistence of marginal and remnant ice through the melt season alleviates many of these problems.

Data available on Alaska's "Research Natural Areas"

Over the last couple years Tom Paragi with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has inquired with land management agencies in Alaska to identify research natural areas set aside for scientific study and assembled the associated GIS layers. Many of these areas were set aside because of relatively unique natural features (e.g., dune complexes of Pleistocene origin in presently forested terrain of the Tanana Valley). RNAs exist even on lands used primarily for resource production and may be useful sites for monitoring climate change effects on adjacent managed lands. If you are interested in the spatial data and report citations that describe the Alaska RNAs (1 MB total), contact Tom at tom.paragi@alaska.gov.



Open-Topped Vertical Pipes: A Slow-Motion Wildlife Mortality Event Unfolds in the West

By David Tessler (ADF&G)
and Gwen Baluss (USFS)

Recently, reports from a number of Western states describe large numbers of birds and other small animals entrapped and killed in uncapped vertical pipes. Un-covered pipes attract the curiosity of birds, especially cavity nesters, and function as pitfalls for small mammals. These open-topped vertical tubes are typically metal, PVC, or other polymer, with a diameter of one to ten inches. Examples of standing pipes are everywhere on the landscape: fence posts, sign posts, irrigation vent pipes, metal supports for swinging road gates, permafrost heat exchangers, outhouse vent pipes, and open-ended PVC pipes used as mining claim boundary markers in many Western states .

In 2009, California Audubon staff reported finding a seven-foot thick layer of bird, reptile and small mammal remains in an eight-inch irrigation vent pipe that had rusted and fallen over. The bird carcasses in that layer numbered in the thousands. In 2011, a small survey of PVC mining claim markers on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) property in eastern Oregon found 20 of 25 PVC marker tubes were uncapped, and all of those contained avian remains. The Nevada Department of Wildlife (NVDOW) has recovered 43 species of birds from mining claim markers, with flycatchers, bluebirds, woodpeckers, sparrows, shrikes, kestrels, and owls among the most common. Nevada has long recognized the wildlife hazards of tubular mining claim markers, and in 1993 prohibited the installation of uncapped pipes for marking the boundaries of mining claims, but the law did not require old pipes to be removed. However, in 2009, Nevada revisited that decision and invalidated any mining claim still marked with open-ended pipe and included a provision that

allows anyone to pull up open pipe markers and lay them on the ground nearby. The American Bird Conservancy estimates that mining survey markers alone have killed millions of birds, and their 2011 letter to the Director of the BLM and the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service stated that, "...their continued use...must be rectified to avoid continued violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act."

The issue of wildlife mortality in standing cylinders is relatively new, poorly understood, and difficult to address because the range of threats is not well defined. This is particularly true in Alaska where there has been no active surveillance for this type of wildlife mortality. While mining claims in Alaska are generally marked with wooden stakes or rebar (not PVC pipe), there are many other types of vertical pipes in use around the state. One type of standing open tube commonly found across Alaska is the ventilation pipe found in vault toilets (outhouses). Vault toilets have been installed around the state by Alaska State Parks, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Defense (DoD), National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and US Forest Service (USFS). Most of the units (except for those at remote cabins) are prefabricated and supplied by two companies: Romtec or CXT. In 2010, a pumping company found one dead and four live Common Goldeneyes in the holding tank of a vault toilet at Donnelly Training Area (administered by DoD). Since then, wildlife managers have been working to install screening on these vents to deter entry. However, merely covering the openings with screening may allow debris or snow to accumulate, or otherwise interfere with the air flow that these toilets require to function properly. The Alaska and Rocky Mountain regions of the USFS have been working together

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recently to find a suitable engineering fix.

Given that many of these potentially deadly pipes are erected on public lands, management agencies should take a leading role in identifying solutions to this conservation challenge. Sensible first steps for addressing the potential impacts of open pipes to wildlife in Alaska would be: 1) to determine the prevalence of different types uncapped pipes in various jurisdictions around the state; 2) begin surveillance of the morbidity

and mortality associated with each type of pipe; and 3) discuss interagency standards for vault toilet vent stacks and develop guidelines to insure all future standing pipes are appropriately covered, capped, or crimped.

If you have information on wildlife mortalities associated with pipes in Alaska, or if you would like to be involved in future discussions on this issue, please contact David Tessler, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, david.tessler@alaska.gov, 907-267-2332.

Obituaries-Denali Biologist Tom Meier

Well-known wolf biologist Thomas J. Meier, 61, died unexpectedly on August 12, 2012 at his home on Karma Ridge near Denali National Park, Alaska. An avid outdoorsman, Tom lived his passion, working for over 35 years as a wildlife biologist. After graduating from Pine City High School in Minnesota, in 1968, Tom earned a B.S. in Biology and M.S. in Zoology from the University of Minnesota which set him on the track to becoming one of the foremost experts on wolves in North America.

He began studying wolves in 1976 and worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Minnesota and Wisconsin for 10 years. He joined research trips to Palmer Station, Antarctica in 1980 and 1981 and lent his expertise to Israel in 1998. Tom first moved to Alaska in 1986 to conduct fieldwork for the Denali wolf project for the U.S. National Park Service and returned to Minnesota to pursue a doctorate in 1993. He moved to Kalispell, Montana where he joined a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service project to restore the wolf population in the Northwestern United States, but his love of Alaska took him back to Denali in 2004 to lead the biological program and conduct predator/prey research. He coauthored what is considered one of the most comprehensive and accessible studies of wolves, *The Wolves of Denali*, and gave presentations about wolves around the world.

Tom had great wit, a wry sense of humor, deep intelligence, a gentle spirit and a generous heart. A talented photographer, his work appeared in many publications including National Geographic. He was godfather to six nieces and younger cousins

and valued his family and world-wide network of friends. He is survived by his brother Michael Meier and wife Jill of Pine City; sister Karlen (Meier) Cochran of Weston, WI; nieces and nephews: Darcy (Meier) and husband Jarrod Pinotti of Rush City, Amy (Cochran) Peters of Wausau, WI, Tracy (Meier) and husband Todd Welsch of Rush City, Beth Cochran of Weston, Mindy (Cochran) and husband Bob Verhasselt of Weston, Jake Meier and Rayna Meier of Maplewood; grand nieces and nephews: Taylor, Kaylana, Kristi, Kyle, Ryan, Nicholas, Hayley Mae, Ariana, Kralen and Kinzley; goddaughter Samantha Peterson of Encinitas, CA; godson Maxwell Peterson of Oceanside, CA; and many more close relatives and friends. He was preceded in death by his parents, Carl and Helen (Krech) Meier and his brother-in-law John Cochran.



Recent Publications by TWS-AK Chapter Members

We would like to highlight the contributions of Chapter members to wildlife science. If you or your colleagues have published articles in peer-reviewed journals during 2012, please send the citation to Elizabeth Manning (elizabeth.manning@alaska.gov). The following are some papers that were recently published by Chapter members.

Bentzen, R. L. and A. N. Powell. 2012. Population dynamics of king eiders breeding in northern Alaska. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 76:1011-1020.

Booms, T. L., L. S. Parrett, and M. A. Keech. 2012. Use of a net gun to safely capture short-eared owls in mid-flight from a helicopter. *Journal of Raptor Research* 46:208-211.

Crawford, J., K. Frost, L. Quakenbush, and A. Whiting. 2012. Different habitat use strategies by subadult and adult ringed seals (*Phoca hispida*) in the Bering and Chukchi seas. *Polar Biology* 35:241-255.

Dickson, R. D., D. Esler, J. W. Hupp, E. M. Anderson, J. R. Evenson, and J. Barrett. 2012. Phenology and duration of remigial moult in surf scoters (*Melanitta perspicillata*) and white-winged scoters (*Melanitta fusca*) on the Pacific coast of North America. *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 90:932-944.

Miller, W., S. C. Schuster, A. J. Welch, A. Ratan, O. C. Bedoya-Reina, F. Zhao, H. L. Kim, R. C. Burhans, D. I. Drautz, N. E. Wittekindt, L. P. Tomsho, E. Ibarra-Laclette, L. Herrera-Estrella, E. Peacock, S. Farley, G. K. Sage, K. Rode, M. Obbard, R. Montiel, L. Bachmann, Ó. Ingólfsson, J. Aars, T. Mailund, Ø. Wiig, S. L. Talbot, and C. Lindqvist. 2012. Polar and brown bear genomes reveal ancient admixture and demographic footprints of past climate change. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109:E2382–E2390.

Pauli, J. N., W. P. Smith, and M. Ben-David. 2012. Quantifying dispersal rates and distances in North American martens: a test of enriched isotope labeling. *Journal of Mammalogy* 93:390-398.

Ruthrauff, D. R., L. T. Tibbitts, R. E. Gill Jr., M. N. Dementyev, and C. M. Handel. 2012. Small population size of the Pribilof rock sandpiper confirmed through distance-sampling surveys in Alaska. *Condor* 114:544-551.

Shafer, A. B. A., J. M. Northrup, K. S. White, M. S. Boyce, S. D. Côté, and D. W. Coltman. 2012. Habitat selection predicts genetic relatedness in an alpine ungulate. *Ecology* 93:1317-1329.

Sonsthagen, S., E. McClaren, F. Doyle, K. Titus, G. Sage, R. Wilson, J. Gust, and S. Talbot. 2012. Identification of metapopulation dynamics among northern goshawks of the Alexander Archipelago, Alaska, and Coastal British Columbia. *Conservation Genetics* 13:1045-1057.

Van Hemert, C., C. M. Handel, and D. M. O'Brien. 2012. Stable isotopes identify dietary changes associated with beak deformities in black-capped chickadees (*Poecile atricapillus*). *Auk* 129:1-7.

Van Hemert, C., C. M. Handel, and T. O'Hara. 2012. Evidence of accelerated beak growth associated with avian keratin disorder in black-capped chickadees (*Poecile atricapillus*). *Journal of Wildlife Diseases* 48:686-694.



Alaska Chapter Leadership

Your 2010-2012 Executive Board

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