



Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge

Spring 2025 report

For Kodiak Aleutians Regional Advisory Council

Rats Eradication on Four Aleutian Islands – Environmental Impact Statement

The FWS initiated a 45-day public scoping period from September 23 - November 7, 2024 for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for proposed rat eradication on four Aleutian islands – Great Sitkin, Amchitka, Kiska and Attu. A public scoping meeting was held October 7, 2024 in Anchorage to provide the opportunity for stakeholders, Alaska Native Tribes and Tribal organizations, and other interested parties to learn about the project and to express their thoughts. Approximately 50 people attended, including the Aleutian Pribilof Island Association, Native Village of Atka, and the Tyonek Tribal Conservation District. Eleven formal comments were received during this initial public scoping period. Comments will be addressed in the preparation of the draft EIS, which will be available for public comment in spring 2026. Additional information about this project can be found at <https://www.fws.gov/aleutianrateis>.



Rat eradication planning – Great Sitkin Fall 2025

In July 2024, field surveys occurred on Great Sitkin Island and surrounding islands to gather essential baseline environmental data to support the proposed Norway rat eradication project. Building on surveys conducted in 2021, this trip focused on detecting rat presence, documenting anadromous fish in freshwater streams, counting avian predators on Great Sitkin and 6 surrounding islands, and piloting the overwinter deployment of acoustic recording units to measure bird abundance before rat removal. With funding received from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, a team will visit Great Sitkin in fall 2025 to conduct further pre-eradication research, including determining upper distributional range of rats to devise treatment strategies, and trial various methods to reduce impacts to non-target species. Insights gained from this research will increase the effectiveness of eradication tools and methods on islands where future rat eradication scoping and compliance is underway.

Summer Field Season

Due to anticipated budget shortfalls, biologists are planning a somewhat reduced field season for 2025 compared to previous years. We will conduct seabird monitoring at seven of the eight annual monitoring sites, collecting data on breeding success, growth rate, prey items for the chicks, timing of fledging, and much more. In addition, we will conduct surveys for invasive species in the eastern and central Aleutians.



2025 will be the third and final year of the statewide Aleutian tern survey. We will use the *Tiglax* to conduct skiff-based surveys in high priority areas between Adak and Attu Islands. We will conduct aerial surveys in the eastern Aleutians (Unimak to Umnak) and on the Bering/Chukchi Sea coast. The work involves the cooperation

of many agencies, tern experts, local communities, and multiple wildlife refuges.



The 2025 field season will also be the second year of a study tracking where storm-petrels from two Gulf of Alaska breeding colonies spend their winter using geolocators. Geolocators (also called GLS tags) are small devices attached to a leg band that measure light levels, which can be used to calculate a specific location for a bird each day. Fifty fork-tailed and Leach's storm-petrels were captured and fitted with geolocators at St. Lazaria and East Amatuli Islands in 2024. In 2025, those tags will be retrieved providing information about where the birds overwintered and a second round of geolocators will be deployed to explore differences between winters.

Murre Die-off



Figure 4: common murre breeding colony before and after heat wave

Alaska Maritime NWR biologists led a paper published in *Science* in December 2024 documenting the extent of the common murre mortality event during the 2015-2016 Northeast Pacific Marine Heatwave. Although we knew at the time the event was devastating, subsequent counts from breeding colonies have provided an updated mortality estimate which is 4-8 times larger than previously thought. This new study, [*Catastrophic and persistent loss of common murres after a marine heatwave*](#), documents the largest single species wildlife die-off in recorded history. Common murres are one of the most widespread and abundant seabirds in the northern hemisphere and

approximately four million, half of Alaska’s population, starved when their food resources declined during this extreme, large-scale marine heatwave.. These findings received a lot of media coverage, with journalists from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Alaska Beacon* and many more writing articles about this catastrophic event. [here](#). These findings received a lot of media coverage, with journalists from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Alaska Beacon* and many more writing articles about this catastrophic event.

Steve Delehanty’s Retirement

It is both with honor and sadness that we share that our long-time Refuge Manager Steve Delehanty’s last day at Alaska Maritime NWR was January 18, 2025. We have been lucky enough to follow his leadership as Refuge Manager for the last 15 years at Alaska Maritime NWR. His expertise, guidance and commitment to the Refuge, wildlife and our community partners will be sorely missed. Jeff Williams is Acting Refuge Manager until the position is filled. Jeff has been with the refuge for 35 years and is excited to carry on engagement with our tribal partners.



Summer Science and Culture Camps

The Refuge plans to continue support of three science and culture camps in Sand Point, Unalaska and St Paul Island. Participants at these camps have opportunities to engage with Refuge staff and learn about local natural resources. Each lesson is tailored to the community and will include a hands-on component that engages the participants. We look forward to continuing to partner with these communities at these camps.

Figure 6: youth at Camp Qungaayux Summer 2024

Island Invasive Species Surveys

In July 2024, our Research Vessel *Tigla* assisted with a rapid detection survey for invasive species on 38 National Wildlife Refuge islands (Kodiak and Alaska Maritime). Species of concern were priority invasive plants, fox, rabbit, European black slugs, and European green crabs. Early detection means locating invasive species just as they are beginning to invade and responding before they spread and cause harm. Surveys found:

Crab Surveys: No European green crabs (EGC) were detected, but baseline data on coastal crab assemblage was established, providing a foundation for further monitoring.

Slug Surveys: In 2023, European black slugs were first documented on a single island (Midun) in the Sandman Reefs, approximately 20 miles from King Cove. In 2024, slugs were found on five of the eight additional Sandman islands. Additional studies are necessary to inform potential management actions for black slugs on the islands, including their biology, methods of travel, and ecological impacts.



Figure 6 USDA APHIS field crew searching for invasive mammals



Figure 5: members of the island invasive species survey team

Invasive Mammal Surveys: No evidence of fox or rabbits were found on islands where previous eradication had been completed, indicating their success and habitat recovery.

Invasive Plant Surveys: Invasive plant species were largely confined to critical access points, with notable infestations on islands previously or currently impacted by feral cattle. Herbicide treatments were applied to contain small infestations of high-priority invasive plants at two locations (Garden Island and Aiktak Island) in Alaska Maritime and one location in Kodiak (Uganik Island set net site), with recommendations for continued treatment with the goal of eradication.

Management Implications: The surveys validated the efficacy of the rapid detection protocol, highlighting its potential for widespread application across remote islands. Key management priorities emerging from this effort include enhancing biosecurity protocols at sites with regular human activity to minimize new introductions, and integrating invasive species surveillance into broader ecological monitoring programs.

Alaska Maritime and Kodiak NWR have both applied for internal funds to continue invasive species management and surveillance in the region, including invasive plant treatment, rapid detection, and a workshop and Slug Out community outreach event in King Cove for summer 2025.