



Natural Selections

Legacy Program Update

FY 2009 Pre-Proposals Due to the Legacy Office no later than Friday, September 5, 2008: The Legacy Resource Management Program is currently accepting Pre-proposals through their website, the Legacy Tracker, at www.dodlegacy.org. Visit the website's guidelines page for details.

Legacy Project Highlight of the Month

Legacy Project 00-135 Developing a Blueprint for Managing the Cook Inlet Ecoregion

In 2000, The Nature Conservancy in Alaska and its partners, including DoD, assembled a team, working with over 50 scientists noted for their expertise in the Cook Inlet Basin ecoregion, to assess the ecoregion's biodiversity and identify areas of biological significance. The Cook Inlet Basin ecoregion is the first terrestrial ecoregion assessed by the Conservancy in Alaska. The team carried out the assessment guided by the methodology outlined in *Designing a Geography of Hope: A Practitioner's Handbook to Ecoregional Conservation Planning*, although certain modifications were required to adapt the framework to the unique characteristics of Alaskan ecoregions.

The Cook Inlet Basin ecoregion is located in southcentral Alaska and is home to the greatest concentration of Alaska's human population (see Figure 1). Even so, most of the ecoregion's 2,906,110 ha of land are only lightly developed and many of its landscapes and ecological processes are relatively intact. The region is most notable for its healthy populations of top level and wide-ranging predators, such as black and brown bear, gray wolf, wolverine and lynx, and its important habitats for migratory species including waterfowl and shorebirds, marine mammals and Pacific salmon.

Conservation Targets:

The team identified 299 conservation targets to represent the basin's biodiversity, including both [See Legacy, page 5](#)



In The News

Donnelly Training Area, Alaska Wildlife Program

By John A Haddix II
US Army Donnelly Training Area
Center for the Environmental Management of Military Land, CSU
July 18, 2008

Donnelly Training Area (DTA) is located in Interior Alaska about 100 miles southeast of Fairbanks near the community of Delta Junction. DTA falls completely within the northern Boreal Forest. This 650,000 acre (1015 square miles) training area is a part of Fort Wainwright, Alaska. Much of DTA is remote and only accessible in the summer time by fixed wing or rotary aircraft. In the winter more of the installation is accessible by snow machines. Gerstle River Training Area (GRTA) is located about 30 miles southeast of Delta Junction and consists of 20,000 acres. Both of these Training Areas are managed by USAG (US Army Garrison) Alaska staff at Fort Greely, Alaska. Common animals on these training areas include bison, moose, caribou, wolves, coyotes, red fox, lynx, wolverines, snowshoe hare, ruffed grouse, sharp-tail grouse, spruce

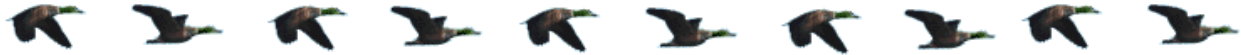
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Naturally Speaking

From the Desk of L. Peter Boice,
DoD Conservation Team Leader and Director, Legacy Program



Crafting new policy – it's the single most important work that I and others at Headquarters do. It's also the most time-consuming and difficult – as it should be, because the implications of new policy can be far reaching and impose additional new demands on already stretched resources. That is why formal policy documents (e.g., Directives, Instructions) from the Office of the Secretary of Defense must be formally approved by senior decision-makers from all affected offices, including the Military Services, General Counsel, Legislative Affairs, and Comptroller. Our office must either accept all substantive recommended changes to our proposed policy, or provide strong justification to retain our original language.

That's why it's so important to engage all interested stakeholders early in the policy development process, long before we request formal review. In that respect, it's much like developing a new integrated natural resources management plan (INRMP), a topic I'll discuss in depth in a future issue.

I recently initiated the development of a new DoD Natural Resources Conservation Program Instruction, to update and replace guidance currently found in DoD Instruction 4715.3, Environmental Conservation Program. We're starting this process now for several reasons. First, DoD's cultural resources program, which has been included in DoDI 4715.3, will soon have its own new separate Instruction. Second, we want to formalize current guidance from various policy memoranda (e.g., Sikes Act, migratory birds) into a stronger and longer-lived policy document. Third, we propose to make substantial modifications and additions to existing natural resources metrics (another topic for a future column).

Over the past two months we have circulated a rough draft of this new Instruction to Military Services' representatives for informal comment. We received dozens and dozens of substantive and pertinent comments, and now are undergoing a second informal review. We hope to receive second round comments by the end of August, and anticipate they will be at least as informative and insightful as the first set. The extent and complexity of these comments will determine if the resulting new document will be ready for formal coordination.

If you've read this far, you may be one of us – a policy aficionado (some would use a more pejorative term!). If so, I urge you to contact your HQ representatives to peruse a copy of our latest draft. Policy issuances such as this are meant to serve those who do the real work – our installation natural resources managers. We welcome your input. I commit to seriously considering, and whenever possible incorporating, all recommendations we receive. With luck the new and improved Natural Resources Instruction will be in place early in 2009.



Training

Workshops, Interagency Training Announcements and More



NEW! USEPA Online EMS Training Course: (Online) This online course provides an overview of how environmental management systems (EMS) can support facility programs. The course takes about one hour to complete and may be found at: <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/ems/ems-101/ems101.htm>.

Maintaining and Implementing Sustainable INRMPs Course: September 16-18, 2008 at the National Conservation Training Center, in Shepherdstown, WV. The three parties to the Sikes Act will participate in an offering of Maintaining and Implementing Sustainable INRMPs Course. This course will be held Tuesday, September 16, 2008 through Thursday, September 18, 2008 in Shepherdstown, WV at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Conservation Training Center. The course is designed for tri-party participation to highlight the importance of cooperation throughout the INRMP process. Please register by 29 July 2008. Contact Patty McKenna at 703-412-7482 or mckenna_patricia@bah.com for more information!

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Annual Meeting: September 7-12, 2008 at the Saratoga Hilton, in Saratoga Springs, NY. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies—the organization that represents all of North America's fish and wildlife agencies—promotes sound management and conservation, and speaks with a unified voice on important fish and wildlife issues. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies is the collective voice of North America's fish and wildlife agencies at every level of government. The Association provides its member agencies and their senior staff with coordination services that range from migratory birds, fish habitat, and invasive species, to conservation education, leadership development, and international relations. The Association represents its state agency members on Capitol Hill and before the Administration on key conservation and management policies, and works to ensure that all fish and wildlife entities work collaboratively on the most important issues. For more details and to register visit <http://www.fishwildlife.org/annualmeet.html>.

DoD Partners in Flight Representatives Annual Meeting: August 4-8, 2008 in Flagstaff, AZ. The annual planning workshop of the DoD Partners in Flight Representatives will take place the first week of August. This year's agenda will focus on the upcoming revision to the DoD PIF Strategic Plan, the redesigned dodpif.org web site, including enhanced DoD Bird Conservation and Species of Concern databases. The revamped web site should be online this fall, and the Strategic Plan will be completed and distributed at the August 2009 Sustaining Military Readiness Conference. The DoD PIF Program Manager is Chris Eberly, ceberly@dodpif.org.



Announcements and Events of Interest

A Short List of Future Events of Interest to the Conservation Community



NEW! The Wildlife Society 15th Annual Conference: November 8-12, 2008 in Miami, FL. The conference is an excellent opportunity to learn and debate cutting-edge research, management practices, and policy issues. A variety of workshops will provide hands-on training in new management techniques. It's also a great place to network among 1,500 wildlife biologists from across the U.S., Canada, the Caribbean, and worldwide. You're sure to come away with ideas and inspiration for tackling the challenges in your daily work environment. To register or for more details visit <http://joomla.wildlife.org/miami08/>.

NEW! 8th Annual NAPPC International Conference: October 22-24, 2008, in Washington, DC. The work of the NAPPC partnership has brought significant attention to the plight of the continent's pollinators. From the NAS NRCS Study on the Status of Pollinators to the US Postal Service Pollination Stamps to the IABIN Western Hemisphere Pollinator Data Portal to National Pollinator Week, this collaboration needs your help to keep our momentum moving forward for pollinators. Wednesday, October 22, 2008 will include an optional pollinator field trip to Plummers Island and the National Museum of Natural History Coevolution Hall, followed by an opening evening reception at the Organization of American States where invitations will be extended to the Ministers of the Environment, the Ministers of Agriculture, and numerous Ambassadors from across the Western Hemisphere. For details visit www.napcc.org or to register go to www.regonline.com/NAPPC2008.

35th Annual Conference on Ecosystems Restoration and Creation: November 6 - 8, 2008 at the John R. Trinkle Building located on the Plant City Campus of the Hillsborough Community College (Plant City, Florida). Kiran C. Patel Center for Global Solutions at University of South Florida is joining the Institute of Florida Studies in co-hosting this year's Conference. The Conference provides a broad forum for exchange of results of the latest research and experience with restoration, creation, and management of ecosystems. The theme of this year's conference is "Assessment of Wetland Mitigation and Mitigation Banks". Visit <http://www.hccfl.edu/ifs/conference/index.html> for details.

CALL FOR POSTERS! Partners in Environmental Technology Symposium 2008 Symposium: December 2 – 4, 2008, in Washington D.C. The Partners in Environmental Technology Technical Symposium & Workshop will take place December 2 – 4, 2008 in Washington, D.C. This event is sponsored by the Strategic Environmental Research & Development Program (SERDP <http://www.serdp.org/>), DoD's environmental science and technology program, and the Environmental Security Technology Certification Program (ESTCP <http://www.estcp.org/>), DoD's environmental technology demonstration and validation program. This year's Symposium & Workshop has been expanded to a full three-day format that will offer a more comprehensive technical program featuring 13 technical sessions and five short courses. Technical sessions will highlight research and innovative technologies that assist the Department of Defense (DoD) in addressing increasingly complex environmental and mission sustainability challenges. Over the course of the three days, short courses on select technologies in the environmental restoration and munitions management areas will offer unique training opportunities on recent advancements in science and technology. For the most up-to-date information about the Symposium, visit <http://www.serdp-estcp.org/Symposium>.



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coarse filter targets (ecological systems) and fine filter targets (species and species aggregations). Fine filter targets were selected based on their imperilment, vulnerability, endemism, declining status, and the inability of coarse scale targets alone to represent them.

Aquatic, terrestrial and coastal ecological systems were used to represent a broader level of biological diversity across the ecoregion. The team assumed that a combination of fine filter and coarse filter target selection would be a robust way to capture the broadest array of biodiversity; however, significant gaps in information on species populations and occurrences as well as the location and extent of fine scale habitats necessitated crosswalking of many fine filter targets to associated systems. The assessment therefore represents largely a coarse scale analysis.

Portfolio Design:

The portfolio assembly process consisted of several steps. Once conservation targets were selected and conservation goals were set for these targets, portfolio assembly began. A computer algorithm and software program called SITES was used to compare various portfolio “solutions” based on several criteria.

As part of the process, a cost suitability index was applied to determine viability of targets, and a conservation lands assessment was completed to maximize the efficiency of the portfolio by building upon those areas already in protected status. The preferred result from SITES was used as a “strawman” portfolio that was then revised during expert workshops. Although certain preliminary steps for portfolio design were partially automated, it was the input of experts that essentially drove portfolio selection.

Portfolio of Areas of Biological Significance:

The final portfolio reflects the character of northern landscapes and the migratory or wideranging nature of many of the species. Such species use a number of habitats at different seasons and life stages, including feeding areas, resting and staging areas, and areas for breeding and the care of young. The portfolio includes 10 terrestrial and 4 aquatic areas of biological significance that—if managed with an emphasis on biodiversity—will likely conserve the fish and wildlife of the basin over the long term. The portfolio, including marine environments, comprises 2,020,950 ha (approximately 5 million acres) or nearly 53% of the ecoregion (see Figure 2).

Public lands make up the majority (87%) of the portfolio, and of the public managers, the state of Alaska is the lead with nearly 48% of the land in state ownership. Nearly 43% of the portfolio is already managed at a high or medium conservation status (e.g. federal refuge or state critical habitat area), and 2% is managed at a low conservation status. Over 55% of the land is not managed for conservation.

Preliminary Threats Assessment:

The primary objective of the threats assessment was to identify general threats to targets across the ecoregion. The most pervasive threats were identified as non-native species introduction, incompatible recreational use, incompatible residential development and incompatible resource development.

Information Gaps:

Recognizing that our understanding of the biodiversity in the Cook Inlet Basin is characterized by significant uncertainties and gaps in data, a secondary goal of the assessment was to document these information gaps and research needs. While many data gaps exist for this ecoregion, two stand out: 1. the need for a comprehensive, fine-scale vegetation map to delineate natural community types and key habitats for species, and 2. better and more information on the habitat needs of wide-ranging species in the ecoregion.



Figure 1. Location of Cook Inlet Basin ecoregion

Conservation Blueprint:

The primary product of this ecoregional assessment can be considered a conservation blueprint—a vision for conservation success—to guide the basin’s public land managers, land and water conservation organizations, private landowners, and others in conserving natural diversity within this ecoregion.

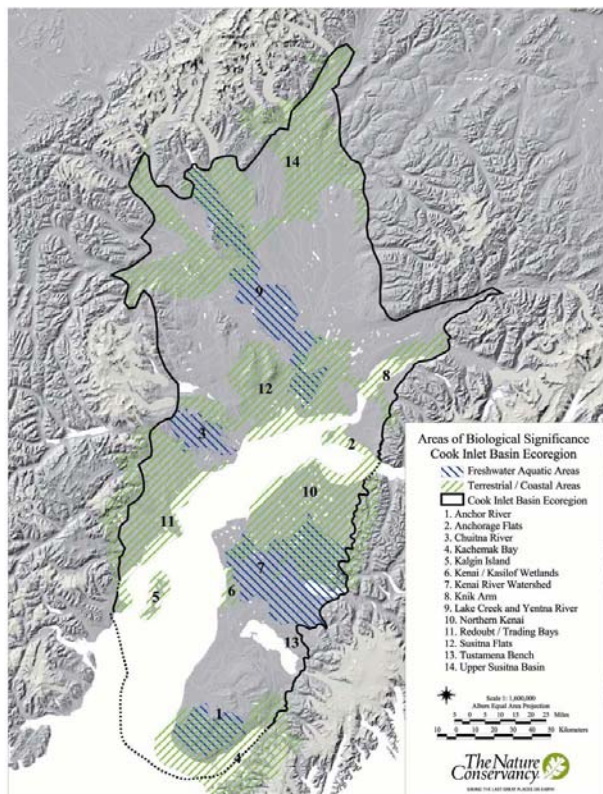


Figure 2. Portfolio of areas of biological significance

The goal is to conserve the entire portfolio of areas of biological significance. Balancing such conservation with the needs of our communities will require a combination of strategies, including on-the-ground and community-based action at specific areas and multiple-area strategies to address threats to targets across ecoregions. It is certain that this initial identification of areas of biological significance will require further qualitative assessment as new information becomes available. This assessment is designed to focus conservation work in the immediate future, allowing conservation practitioners to quickly put emerging opportunities into the appropriate ecological context and to take actions that are scientifically defensible and result in the most biodiversity conserved.

Implementing careful strategies and filling gaps in our knowledge will require partnership and commitment between the many landowners, managers and stakeholders in the region.

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grouse, sandhill cranes, trumpeter swans, and many other species of waterfowl, shorebirds and landbirds. Hunting, trapping, fishing, bird watching and sightseeing are some of the more common recreational activities on DTA. USAG Alaska biologist work with state and federal agencies to monitor wildlife populations, and to improve habitat for some species.



Delta Junction Bison Herd roams free at DTA; adding to the scenery is the Alaska Range in the back.

DTA is the calving grounds for the Delta Junction Bison Herd (DJBH). This herd of plains bison was introduced in the 1928 by the US Fish and Wildlife Service from the existing herd in Yellowstone National Park, and is a free ranging herd that migrates seasonally between state, federal and private lands. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) is the primary agency responsible for management of the DJBH. The Delta Junction Bison Working Group was established to help minimize conflicts between bison and the public, including private agricultural interests, and includes a USAG Alaska representative. This working group makes recommendations to the state on local issues concerning management of the DJBH, and works with the ADF&G to write the Delta Bison Management Plan.

Currently the herd is managed at 360 bison pre-calving with a herd composition of not less than 50 bulls per 100 cows. Drawing permits for hunting are issued by ADF&G when the herd is in excess of 360 animals. Since the herd's calving grounds are located almost entirely on DTA the US Army has an agreement with the state of Alaska to assist in management of the herd.

After calving on DTA the herd starts a fall migration back to state lands and then on to private lands. ADF&G Area Biologists and the USAG Alaska Biologist works together to delay migration onto private lands until local farmers can harvest their crops. The State of Alaska created the Delta Junction Bison Range (DJBR) in 1979 to alter seasonal movements of bison to reduce damage to agriculture. Thousands of acres are managed as food plots each year on the DJBR. During the 2007 season USAG Alaska biologist managed 48 acres of food plots for the bison herd within their calving area, and an additional 25 acres is planned for creation in 2008. Bison hunting is permitted on Army lands, however DTA is primarily the summer grounds for the herd and few bison are harvested on DTA.

Moose are another common animal on DTA. Population densities are currently at 5.6 moose per square mile, which is not considered a sustainable population level by the ADF&G. A liberal cow moose season was implemented during the 2007 season to reduce the herd to a more sustainable level, and more than 700 permits were issued allowing harvest on military lands. USAG Alaska also manages habitat, and worked with the Cold Regions Test Center to create 150 acres of early succession browse for moose during the winter of 2007 – 2008. USAG Alaska staff biologist assisted ADF&G with moose browse surveys to asses the quality of browse on DTA, which contributes to information used to make management decisions.

Sharp-tailed and ruffed grouse are common on DTA, and USAG Alaska biologist conducts annual surveys to assist with monitoring trends in the populations. The Alaska sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus caurus*) is a unique subspecies which only occurs within the drainages of the Yukon River. Preferred habitat of the Alaska sharp-tailed grouse is the slow growing taiga regions of interior Alaska. Alaska sharp-tailed Grouse are a lekking species and a USAG Alaska staff biologist conducts annual lek surveys which contribute to the Alaska small game report published by the ADF&G. Annual ruffed grouse drumming surveys contribute to ADF&G's annual small game report. Many small game hunters harvest sharp-tailed and ruffed grouse on DTA each year.



Moose and calf grazing on DTA



Preferred habitat of the Alaska sharp-tailed grouse is the slow growing taiga regions of interior Alaska. Above a male sharp-tailed grouse is shown at a lek site inside Donnelly Training Area, Alaska.

USFWS determined that Breeding Bird Survey Routes conducted by road were not painting an accurate picture of bird trends in Alaska since most of the state is not accessible by road. A new protocol for monitoring birds in remote areas was needed. The Alaska Landbird Monitoring System (ALMS) protocol was developed by the Alaska Bird Observatory in cooperation with USGS as part of a statewide monitoring plan for birds. This protocol is designed to compliment Breeding Bird Surveys.

Two ALMS point count surveys plots were established by USGS on Donnelly Training Area. These plots were surveyed by the USAG Alaska Biologist in 2006 and 2007, and will continue to be monitored by USAG Alaska biologist every other year as per protocol.

Little is known about fish populations on Donnelly Training Area. During the 2007 season USAG Alaska staff biologist worked with USFWS Fairbanks Fisheries office to conduct fish surveys on military lands. During these surveys no anadromous fish were found, however an unmapped stream was located which supported a breeding population of Arctic grayling and slimy sculpin on GRTA. This data is being used to update the ADF&G Anadromous Fish Catalog. USAG Alaska staff biologist also works with ADF&G fisheries biologists to stock 16 lakes on DTA for recreational fishing.

Outdoor recreation is important to many Alaskans, and Army training lands are relatively undeveloped, but close to population centers. Because of this and the fact that Alaska Army lands generally have a better road and trail network than other public lands, they are popular as recreational areas. By working with state and federal agencies to monitor wildlife populations, and to manage sustainable training lands, there will be continued opportunity to enjoy the outdoors on military lands in this great state.



DTA is a popular outdoor recreation, (bird watching, hiking, and camping) site for many Alaskans.

Biologists hope to reintroduce wood bison in Alaska

By Patrick Reis, Greenwire July 9, 2008

Before their abrupt disappearance 100 years ago, wood bison -- the largest land mammals in North America -- roamed the Alaskan range for more than 400,000 years. Now, the state Fish and Game Department, wildlife advocates, and a prominent media mogul are conspiring to bring them back.

In June, the state shipped in more than 50 bison from Canada in the first step toward reestablishing the wild population -- something not seen in Alaska since hunting, drought and habitat modification wiped the species off the map in the late 1800s. Alaska already has bison, but they are non-native plains bison that were brought to the state in 1928. Wood bison are darker, better adapted to cold weather, and bigger -- a full-grown bull can hit 2,200 pounds or more.

The reintroduction project is expected to cost \$500,000, \$100,000 of which is expected to come from Ted Turner's endangered species fund. But not everyone is completely happy about the reintroduction effort. Doyon Ltd., a Fairbanks-based Native oil and gas corporation, considers the Minto and Yukon flats as potential locations for exploratory drilling. If bison were placed there -- both sites are under consideration -- drilling could be complicated by Endangered Species Act protection. "While we support the general notion of reintroduction of wood bison in both places, we don't support reintroduction currently when there are Endangered Species Act implications," said Doyon spokesmen Jim Mery (see full story by Kyle Hopkins, [Anchorage Daily News](#)).

SMR Conference Survey

Now is Your Chance to Be Heard!



Some of you may have heard the early promotions for the 2009 Sustaining Military Readiness (SMR) Conference, set for Sunday, August 9 to Friday August 14, 2009 in Phoenix, Arizona. The steering committee has been hard at work developing workshops and session subjects that will be of relevance and interest to the wider DoD-environmental community. The Legacy staff would like to have feedback from the *Natural Selections* readership in order to make the conference best meet your needs. Please send your responses, and any elaborations, to Pedro Morales, Pedro.Morales.ctr@osd.mil.

- 1.) Are there any workshops that should be provided for training, continuing education, or skill refinement?
- 2.) What other DoD groups would you like to see targeted to attend NR sessions?
- 3.) What subjects/topics within the field of DoD NR should sessions focus on?
- 4.) If you attended the National Military Fish And Wildlife Agencies Meeting, are there any sessions you would like repeated? Delivered at a more advanced level?
- 5.) Is there any type of training that can help you do your job supporting the military mission more effectively?



Did You Know?

Little Did You Know Conservation Could Be So Much Fun!



The Muskoxen – The muskox (*Ovibos moschatus*) is called omingmak by Inupiaq-speaking Eskimos meaning “the animal with skin like a beard”, a reference to the long guard hair that hangs nearly to the ground. Taxonomists now classify muskoxen with the sheep and goats. The closest living relative of the muskox is the takin, a large goat-like animal which is found in the Himalayas. Muskoxen as a species have changed little since the ice age and are perfectly adapted to live in their harsh arctic environment. The muskox is a stocky, long-haired animal with a slight shoulder hump and a very short tail. Both sexes have horns, but the horns of bulls are larger and heavier than those of cows. The horns of bulls develop large bases which nearly span the entire forehead. The pelage consists of a long, coarse, outer layer and a short, fine underhair.



Muskoxen from the Yukon Delta herd, Alaska.

Mature bulls are about 5 feet high (1.5 m) at the shoulder and weigh 600 to 800 pounds (273-364 kg). Cows are smaller, averaging approximately 4 feet (1.2 m) in height and weighing 400 to 500 pounds (182-227 kg). The name “muskox” is misleading because the animals have no musky odor. The breeding season begins during late summer; mating takes place during the time from August to October. Single calves, weighing 22-31 pounds (10-14 kg), are born in the spring (April to June) to cows older than two years.

Growth is rapid and the animals weigh 150-235 pounds (68-107 kg) as yearlings. Muskoxen are gregarious animals. Winter herds may include up to 75 animals. Smaller harem groups which form during the mating season contain from 5 to 15 females and subadults, with one dominant bull who prevents other adult bulls from entering the group. Bulls excluded from these breeding herds wander widely in search of a harem but generally rejoin mixed sex herds in winter. However, some non-breeding bulls may segregate into bull-only herds during spring.

The group defense formation adopted by muskoxen in response to predators is well known. When danger approaches, muskoxen run together. Every animal tries to face the source of the threat. If only one predator is nearby, the defense formation takes the form of a line. If several predators surround the group, as with a wolf pack, the formation becomes a compact circle with all muskoxen facing outward. Occasionally, one or more animals will charge the predator. The muskox's defense strategy is extremely effective against its principal enemy, the wolf. Unless the herd stampedes, it is nearly invulnerable to wolf attack.

Muskoxen eat a wide variety of plants, including grasses, sedges, forbs, and woody plants. Muskoxen are poorly adapted for digging through heavy snow for food, so winter habitat is generally restricted to areas with shallow snow accumulations or areas blown free of snow.

The return of muskoxen to Alaska is an important success story in wildlife conservation. The original Alaska muskoxen disappeared in the mid- or late 1800s as they had much earlier in Europe and Asia. Overhunting likely contributed to their demise, at least in some areas. Concern over the impending extinction of the species worldwide led to a move to restore a protected population to Alaska. In 1930 US Congress appropriated money for the purchase of thirty-four Greenland muskoxen, which were brought to the University of Alaska. In 1935 the animals were moved to Nunivak Island, and gradually herds were restored on Alaska's mainland. The statewide muskoxen population now exceeds 2500 animals. Muskoxen from Nunivak Island were intended to provide stock for relocating animals to formerly occupied ranges. Nunivak Island muskoxen have been transplanted to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Cape Thompson, the Seward Peninsula, Nelson Island, and to Wrangel Island and the Taimyr Peninsula in Russia. Additional animals have been donated to zoos and other institutions.

Contact Us

Who we are and where to find us!



For further information about the Legacy Resource Management Program please contact:

[L. Peter Boice](#)

Conservation Team Leader

[Jane Mallory](#)

Natural Resource Management Specialist
703-604-1774

[Pedro Morales](#)

Natural Resource Management Specialist
703-604-1933

[Hillori Schenker](#)

Cultural Resource Management Specialist
703-604-1724

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