

extend or reopen the comment period for this rulemaking for at least certain issues.

The EPA is today reopening the comment period—during the comment period for the supplemental notice of proposed rulemaking for the Proposed NO_x SIP call, as described below—for additional air quality modeling runs relevant to the issues raised in the proposed NO_x SIP call, as well as comments concerning the implications that any such additional runs may have for the State NO_x budgets under consideration in that rulemaking.

The EPA is not reopening or extending the comment period of the proposed NO_x SIP call for other issues not identified above. In particular, EPA reiterates its statements in its "Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPR) for NO_x SIP Call—Clarification of Comment Process" (63 FR 4206, January 28, 1998), in which EPA stated that in light of the need to assure that air quality modeling analyses would be completed in time for the final NO_x SIP call rulemaking, it would be necessary to assure that comments on one of the critical inputs into the air quality modeling analyses—the emissions inventories—were, in a timely manner. Accordingly, EPA stated in that notice, "any comments concerning emission inventory data that are to be considered in the modeling analyses must be received by EPA within the official 120-day comment period (i.e., by March 9, 1998)." *Id.*

The EPA intends to publish by mid-April 1998 a supplemental notice of proposed rulemaking for the proposed NO_x SIP call (supplemental proposed NO_x SIP call or supplemental proposal). The EPA intends to provide a 45-day comment period for all issues in the supplemental proposal, which would expire at approximately the end of May 1998. The reopened comment period for the issues identified above will coincide with the comment period for the supplemental proposal.

Dated: April 3, 1998.

Richard D. Wilson,

Acting Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

50 CFR Part 17

Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Request for Information on the Aleutian Canada Goose

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of status review.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), Alaska Region, is reviewing the status of the Aleutian Canada goose (*Branta canadensis leucopareia*) in Alaska and in the western coastal States of Washington, Oregon and California. The population of Aleutian Canada goose declined precipitously in the early to mid 1900s primarily as the result of the introduction of Arctic (*Alopex lagopus*) and red (*Vulpes vulpes*) foxes to its nesting islands. The Aleutian Canada goose was listed as endangered in 1967. A formal recovery program began in 1974, and by 1990 the Aleutian Canada goose had recovered sufficiently to be reclassified as threatened. Censuses on the breeding and wintering grounds indicate further, substantial increases in population, and suggest that the Aleutian Canada goose population may have recovered. The Service requests data and information on the status of this subspecies.

DATES: To ensure their consideration, comments from all interested parties should be received by May 11, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Comments and information concerning this notice should be sent to Anthony DeGange, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1011 E. Tudor Rd., Anchorage, AK 99503. Comments and information received will be available for public inspection by appointment during normal business hours at the above address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Anthony DeGange at the above address or Teresa Woods at the above address.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The Aleutian Canada goose is a small island-nesting subspecies of Canada goose. Morphologically it resembles other small Canada goose subspecies, but nearly all Aleutians surviving past their first winter have a distinct white neck ring at the base of their black necks. The Aleutian Canada goose is the only subspecies of Canada goose whose range once included both the North American and Asian continents. It formerly nested in the northern Kuril

and Commander Islands, in the Aleutian Archipelago and on islands south of the Alaska Peninsula east to near Kodiak Island. The species formerly wintered in Japan, and from British Columbia south to Mexico. The decline of the Aleutian Canada goose has been attributed to the introduction of Arctic foxes, and to a lesser extent red foxes, to its breeding islands for the purpose of developing a fur industry. Hunting and loss of habitat on its wintering range also contributed to the subspecies' decline. At the time of its listing as endangered, its known breeding range was limited to Buldir Island, a small, isolated island in the western Aleutian Islands where foxes were never introduced. Small breeding populations of small Canada geese were subsequently found on Chagulak Island in the central Aleutians and on Kiliktagik Island in the Semidi Islands south of the Alaska Peninsula. These island nesting geese are morphologically similar to Aleutian Canada geese and genetic studies indicate they are more closely related to Aleutian Canada geese than other Canada goose subspecies (Shields and Wilson 1987; B. Pierson, pers. comm.). The Service considers the Chagulak and Semidi Islands geese remnant populations of the previously more continuously distributed Aleutian Canada goose. The Aleutian Canada goose is believed to have numbered fewer than 800 birds in 1975.

Most Aleutian Canada geese winter in California. They arrive on the wintering grounds in early to mid-October. Some geese stop in the Crescent City area in northwest California but most continue on to the vicinities of Colusa in the Sacramento Valley and Modesto in the northern San Joaquin Valley. By mid-December the majority of the population is near Modesto. Small numbers of Aleutian Canada geese also frequently winter near El Sobrante in north San Francisco Bay and near Crescent City. Most of the population stages near Crescent City on the northward migration although several thousand birds are now using pasture land in south coastal Oregon for several weeks in the spring. The small population of geese that breeds in the Semidi Islands winters exclusively in coastal Oregon near Pacific City.

In response to reduced population levels, the Service classified the Aleutian Canada goose as endangered in 1967. The Service provided additional protection to the goose with passage of the Endangered Species Act of 1973. A recovery plan for the Aleutian Canada goose was approved in 1979 and revised in 1982 and 1991 (Byrd et al. 1991). Recovery activities were begun in 1974. Important features of the recovery

program in Alaska and the western U.S. included—banding of birds on the breeding grounds to identify important wintering and migration areas; closure of wintering and migration areas to hunting of Canada geese; acquisition, protection and management of important wintering and migration habitat; removal of foxes from potential nesting islands; propagation and release of captive Aleutian Canada geese on fox free-nesting islands in the Aleutians; and translocation of molting family groups from Buldir Island to other fox-free islands in the Aleutians. Survival of released captive-reared birds on fox-free islands was never high, thus once the population on Buldir Island was large enough to support the translocation of wild birds, release of captive birds was phased out. This approach and other recovery actions have been successful.

Recovery actions resulted in an increase in the population of Aleutian Canada geese. Rates of increase between 1975 and 1989 ranged from 6 to 35 percent annually, and by winter 1989/1990 the peak winter count reached 6,200 geese. The Service reclassified the Aleutian Canada goose from endangered to threatened in 1990 (55 FR 51106, December 12, 1990).

Summary of Status

Since the subspecies was downlisted to threatened in 1990, the overall population of Aleutian Canada geese has sustained a strong recovery. Estimates of the population of geese wintering near Modesto, California, based on ratios of marked to unmarked birds, were approximately 24,000 for the 1995/1996 and 1996/1997 winters (Drut and Trost 1997). The peak 1998 count of Semidi Island birds on their wintering grounds near Pacific City, Oregon was 115–120 (D. Pitkin, pers. comm.). Despite protection on both the breeding and wintering grounds, the Semidi Island population has sustained little or no growth since 1991. The reasons for this lack of growth are unclear.

As of summer 1995, the last year for which census data were available from the breeding grounds, approximately 4,000 pairs of Aleutian Canada geese were estimated to breed in the Aleutian Islands, including at least 350 pairs at Agattu Island, 124 pairs at Alaid/Nizki Islands, 3,500 pairs at Buldir Island, 5 pairs in the Rat Islands, and 20 pairs at Chagulak Island (Byrd 1995). Recent breeding has been documented at Amchitka, Amukta, and Little Kiska Islands. Although the current status of Aleutian Canada geese on these islands is unknown, reestablishment of breeding populations via translocations

to Amchitka and Little Kiska Islands and natural recolonization of Amukta Island is believed to have a low probability of success. The presence of bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), a predator of geese, on islands east of Buldir Island is believed to be a factor that has limited the success of translocations to Amchitka, Little Kiska and Kiska Islands.

The small breeding population on Chagulak Island is believed to be stable, but the terrain is steep and nesting habitat is limited. Foxes have been removed from most of the islands near Chagulak, and to bolster the population of geese in this portion of the Aleutians, translocations of geese from Buldir Island to Yunaska Island occurred in 1994 and 1995. Translocations also occurred in 1994 and 1995 to Skagul Island in the Rat Island group. At this time it is unclear if the translocations have resulted in establishment of breeding populations on these islands.

The status of Aleutian Canada geese in the Semidi Islands is tenuous. Investigators studying these geese found only 14 nests on Kiliktagik Island and 3 nests on Anowik Island in 1995, which is 11 nests fewer than were found on the same islands in 1992 (Beyersdorf and Pfaff 1995). Hatching and overall nesting success of geese in the Semidi Islands in 1995 was lower than their counterparts in the western Aleutian Islands. In addition, relatively few hatching year birds have been appearing on the wintering grounds each fall in coastal Oregon (D. Pitkin and R. Lowe pers. comm.). The reason for lower productivity of Aleutian Canada geese in the Semidi Islands is unknown.

The availability of nesting habitat in the Aleutian Islands is not likely to limit population growth in the foreseeable future. The Service believes there is considerable unoccupied nesting habitat available for geese on some of the existing nesting islands, and there are at least eight other islands with suitable nesting habitat that have been cleared of foxes that are available for natural recolonization. The Service is also continuing its fox eradication program in the Aleutian Islands to benefit geese and other ground nesting birds. All of the extant nesting islands of Aleutian Canada geese in Alaska, as well as most of the islands within its historic nesting range in Alaska, are protected as part of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. Despite the availability of nesting habitat, rapid natural expansion to unoccupied islands is not expected to occur because of the presence of bald eagles and the strong tendency for Canada geese to return to natal areas to breed.

On the wintering grounds in California and Oregon, Aleutian Canada geese depend on agricultural lands. They feed extensively in agricultural fields with waste beans and grain, and graze on sprouting grain and in pastures used by livestock (Dahl 1995). Most Aleutian geese use two ranches near Modesto as their primary winter range. The Service has purchased 2,800 acres of one ranch in fee title as part of the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge, and is negotiating a long-term conservation easement on 2,000 acres of the other ranch to protect and manage the winter range of the Aleutian Canada goose. The Service is also attempting to acquire additional cropland, grassland and riparian acreage along the San Joaquin River, some of which could be used by geese in the future. The Service is actively managing its lands as goose foraging, loafing and roosting habitat, and assisting local landowners with enhancing their lands for geese by providing technical assistance. The intent is to provide high quality habitat for geese while holding them on managed lands to reduce crop depredation on neighboring private farms.

The lands used by Aleutian Canada geese near Colusa, California are primarily privately owned farms and Reclamation District land. The 733 acre Butte Sink National Wildlife Refuge is actively managed to attract geese and other waterfowl. The small wintering area at El Sobrante in north San Francisco Bay is owned by a public utility. In northwest California, Aleutian Canada geese roost on Castle Rock, an offshore island that is now part of the National Wildlife Refuge system, and to a lesser extent on Prince Island which is owned by Native Americans. As the Aleutian Canada goose population has increased, geese have shifted their feeding from State lands to managed pastures on private dairy farms used for livestock grazing, and are now in conflict with several of the local landowners. In an attempt to reduce the depredation problem, the State of California, in cooperation with local landowners, has begun to actively manage 400–500 acres of State land near Lake Earl by fertilizing, irrigating and grazing pasture land. Geese are being discouraged from using private land by hazing.

In Oregon, the Semidi Island geese forage primarily on the pastures of two dairy farms near Pacific City. Both dairies are privately owned but were included within the boundaries of the Nestucca Bay National Wildlife Refuge which would facilitate their acquisition should the Service and the landowners

reach a purchase agreement in the future. The refuge has acquired 120 acres of nearby pasture that is being used by Dusky Canada geese and could be used by Aleutian Canada geese in the future. The Semidi Island geese either roost on the ocean or on Haystack Rock which is part of the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge. Several thousand Aleutian Canada geese from breeding sites in the Aleutian Islands are now using coastal southern Oregon as a stopover for several weeks in spring. These birds forage on privately-owned pasture and roost on offshore rocks in the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge.

Establishment of closed areas for hunting Canada geese has contributed to the recovery of the Aleutian Canada goose. Six closed areas currently exist— islands in Alaska west of Unimak Island, beginning in 1973; northwestern California, the Modesto area and the Colusa area, beginning in 1975; and the Pacific City area and central and south coastal Oregon beginning in 1982. Occasionally a few Aleutian Canada geese using habitats outside of the closed hunting areas are killed by hunters.

Because many waterfowl species in the Pacific Flyway are now highly concentrated on the greatly reduced wetland acres of their wintering grounds, they are vulnerable to disease. Avian cholera has been identified as the cause of death for many of the Aleutian Canada geese found dead on the wintering grounds near Modesto. This disease is a chronic low-level problem on the wintering grounds but is being managed successfully. The Aleutian Canada Goose Recovery Team has prepared and revised a disease and contamination hazard contingency plan that provides information and direction to reduce the incidence and severity of both disease and contamination hazards (Byrd et al. 1996). In addition, the Service has an active program of collecting and disposing of dead and diseased waterfowl to reduce exposure of healthy geese.

In 1992, the Service sent 19 captive Aleutian Canada geese to Russia to start a captive flock in Kamchatka. This flock is being used as part of a joint Russian/Japanese project to reestablish Aleutian Canada geese on former nesting islands in the Commander and Kuril islands and on their former wintering grounds in northern Japan. In August 1997, 33 Aleutian Canada geese were released on Ekarma Island in the northern Kuril Islands. In winter 1997/1998 three of the marked birds released on Ekarma Island were observed on the wintering grounds

in Japan (F. Lee, pers. comm.). In addition, up to 13 additional unmarked Aleutian Canada geese have been observed this winter in Japan (F. Lee, pers. comm.).

The Aleutian Canada Goose Recovery Plan (Byrd et al. 1991) identified the following recovery criteria for the Aleutian Canada goose—(1) an overall population greater than 7,500; (2) 50 pairs of geese nesting in each of 3 remnant breeding areas—western Aleutians (excluding Buldir Island), central Aleutians, and Semidi Islands; and, (3) conservation and management of 25,000–35,000 acres of migration and wintering habitat. The recovery plan states that failure to achieve a specific acreage target of migration and wintering habitat would not preclude delisting of the Aleutian Canada goose if otherwise warranted.

Although the breeding populations of Aleutian Canada geese in the central Aleutians and in the Semidi Islands have not met the second recovery criterion, the overall population of this subspecies is three times the minimum population target identified in the revised recovery plan as required for delisting. Sufficient migration and wintering habitat is now being conserved and managed to support additional population growth (V. Byrd, pers. comm.; D. Woolington, pers. comm.). On the strengths of the population recovery, recent translocations to the central and western Aleutians, an ongoing program to restore the Aleutian Canada goose to the Asian portion of its range, and substantial progress on conserving and managing migration and wintering habitat, the Aleutian Canada Goose Recovery Team concluded in 1995 that it was no longer justified to protect the Aleutian Canada goose under the Endangered Species Act (Byrd 1995).

Request for Data and Comments

The Service requests data on the status of Aleutian Canada geese from all interested parties and all affected local, State, and Federal governments. The Service needs the most recent data from the breeding grounds in Alaska and the wintering grounds and migration areas in California, Oregon and Washington. In particular the Service needs the most recent data on population status and trend and any other information that may bear on the recovery of this subspecies. The Service will use the best available scientific information to evaluate the status of this population, and if deemed appropriate, to prepare a proposal to remove this subspecies from the list of threatened and endangered

wildlife. If this proposal is deemed warranted, it will be published in the **Federal Register**, including a review of materials used in its preparation.

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Author

The primary author of this notice is Anthony DeGange (see **ADDRESSES** above).

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 17

Endangered and threatened species, Exports, Imports, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements, Transportation.

Authority

The authority for this action is the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

Dated: March 30, 1998.

David B. Allen,

Regional Director, Region 7, Fish and Wildlife Service.

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