ALASKA HABITAT MANAGEMENT GUIDE

ARCTIC REGION

MAP ATLAS

PRODUCED BY STATE OF ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME DIVISION OF HABITAT



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Donald Volk, Fisheries Biologist, ADF&G: caribou and moose (with S. Albert); Dall sheep (with J. Westlund); ducks and geese (with L. Shea and F. Nelson).

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The following persons either reviewed or in some other way contributed to the reference map series from which the maps in this atlas were prepared. With the exception of selected marine fish and shellfish, the reference maps are at 1:250,000 scale. For information on specific reviewers of each reference map, see the four reference map volumes of the Alaska Habitat Management Guide for the Arctic Region. The photoreduced maps that were used to create the color maps presented in this atlas were reviewed by project staff, with assistance from selected reviewers as necessary.

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OVERVIEW OF THE ALASKA HABITAT MANAGEMENT GUIDES PROJECT

One of the responsibilities of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) is to assist land managers by recommending to them the best ways and means for protecting local fish, wildlife, and habitats against adverse effects and impacts that may occur from land and water development activities. Because many proposals and plans for development and land uses require a rapid response from the department, there may not be enough time for staff to actually study the specific area in which the proposed development is to occur. However, the department still needs to accumulate and assess a wide variety of information in order to prepare meaningful recommendations for managing habitat. Therefore, the department initiated the Alaska Habitat Management Guides (AHMG) project to prepare reports of the kinds of information upon which its recommendations must be founded in order to responsibly and rapidly address land and water use proposals made by land managers. These guides include written volumes, reference maps, and color map atlases of index maps.

The guides present the best available information on selected fish and wildlife species: describing their life functions and habitat requirements; mapping and discussing their geographical distribution; mapping and discussing the human uses made of them; and estimating their value to residents of the state. The completed guides coverage encompasses the Fish and Game Resource Management Regions established by the Joint Board of Fisheries and Game (plate 1).

Essential to assessing what might happen to fish and wildlife if their habitats are altered is information about what effects or impacts are typically associated with particular kinds of developmental activities. The habitat management guides therefore also provide summaries of these known effects. This information, in conjunction with the compiled life history and distribution information, will allow concerned individuals to estimate how sensitive a given species might be to a specific proposed activity — whether or not, and to what degree, the fish and wildlife are liable to be impacted.

The guides have been designed to provide users with interrelated subject areas that can be applied to particular questions regarding habitat management. For example, information on species' seasonal and geographic habitat use can be correlated with the written and mapped information on actual distribution and abundance. The narratives and maps regarding human uses of fish and wildlife can be compared with abundance and distribution information to obtain an indication of the overall regional patterns of distribution, abundance, and human use for the species of interest. The specific information on habitat requirements also will relate directly to the information on impacts associated with land and water use.

Introduction

ARCTIC REGION GUIDE

Organization and Use of the Guide

This map atlas portrays information at the 1:1,000,000 scale that has been compiled from the more detailed 1:250,000 reference maps available in Alaska Department of Fish and Game offices of the Arctic Region (plate 2). This map atlas includes information on the distribution of fish and wildlife. All maps in this volume are numbered on the left-hand corner and listed in the Contents.

The maps supplement the two written volumes (*Volume I: Life Histories and Habitat Requirements of Fish and Wildlife; Volume II: Distribution, Abundance, and Human Use of Fish and Wildlife*). The narrative volumes are closely related and interdependent. The first highlights important aspects of selected species life histories, emphasizing the interrelationships of the species with their habitats. The second volume provides the most current estimates of their distribution and relative abundance. It also delineates the regional and subregional patterns, locations, and types of human uses of fish and wildlife resources, including commercial, recreational, and subsistence uses. This portion of the guide provides an understanding of the importance of fish and wildlife to the people within and outside the Arctic Region.

Species Selection Criteria

Each species covered in the guides was selected because it met the following criteria: 1) its habitat is representative of some portion of the spectrum of the Arctic Region habitats (this criterion ensures that regional habitats are well represented); 2) it constitutes an important resource to human users in the region; 3) the species or its habitat is liable to be adversely affected by present or proposed land or water uses; and 4) adequate information on its life history, abundance, and distribution was available.

Map Production and Content

The set of maps contained in this atlas is a synthesis of current information on the distribution of selected species of fish and wildlife in the Arctic Region. The information on species distribution was collected from state and federal agency biologists most expert on each species. All data were verified by these specialists during a technical review period, which ended in December 1985. Corrections and final cartographic work continued until drafting was completed in January 1986. Lists of all mappers and reviewers are found in the Acknowledgements. Sources, including personal communications, are listed in the References. The original reference maps from which these color maps were prepared are filed in ADF&G offices of the region. Most of the reference maps are at a scale of 1:250,000. The original maps compiled by the project biologists have been archived in the Division of Habitat in Anchorage to facilitate subsequent updates of mapped information. The maps in this atlas show the regional and subregional patterns of fish and wildlife distribution, whereas the reference maps illustrate specific distribution categories in relation to more detailed features of the landscape. The color maps provide broad overviews of distribution data and thus function as index maps that can be used in conjunction with reference maps. Although the color maps emphasize seasonal concentration areas (e.g., brown bear concentrations along fish streams) and areas utilized for specific reproductive functions (e.g., calving areas, rookeries), for many species the general distribution is also mapped. "General distribution" in this context applies to areas that provide suitable habitat for the species and are within the known range of the species. Additionally, representative of the anadromous fish species, a separate map category, "unsurveyed areas," has been added in order to denote areas that have not been surveyed to determine whether or not fish are present.

Limitations of Mapped Information

All mapped information is necessarily limited to available information. That is, where no information appears on a map it does not automatically mean that the map category does not exist there; rather, it means that there was no available information to map. Because of the limitations of available information and the dynamic nature of mammal, bird, and fish populations, subsequent updates of any maps will very likely change them to some degree.

To maximize the consistency of mapped source data from different specialists, a set of specific definitions was adopted prior to the actual mapping and was used by all mappers and contributors. These definitions can be found following this section. It is therefore important to note that where these maps appear to differ from other contemporary maps of the same species, it will be necessary to compare the actual definitions of categories, which will reveal the differences in what was actually mapped in each case. The potential for apparent discrepancies with other maps is particularly great where the definition requires that the category be valid for more than one year's data, which therefore may result in a more conservative mapping of an area than if only one year's data were used.

The coverage of this set of maps is defined by the boundaries of the Arctic Region, and mapped information is not depicted beyond these borders. Please see the appropriate regional reference maps for information on areas outside the Arctic Region. Although it seems logical that mapped information should "edge-match," or show a consistent pattern across a regional boundary, that will not always be the case. The reason is that the distribution and harvest data can change during the time required to produce new maps of an adjacent region.

OVERVIEW OF THE ARCTIC REGION

The Arctic Region (plate 2) includes the Davidson, Philip Smith, Endicott, DeLong, Baird, and Bendeleben mountains. A few of the larger river basins in the region include the drainages of Canning, Sagavanirktok, Colville, Ikpikupk, Kuk, Utukok, Noatak, and Kobuk rivers. Marine waters associated with the region are comprised of the Norton and Kotzebue sounds and the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort seas.

The biophysical, biotic, and human resources of the region are briefly summarized below. Readers desiring a more detailed and extensive discussion of these characteristics of the region should consult the Alaska Regional Profiles.¹

Biophysical Features

Portions of the Arctic Region are in the arctic, transitional, or the continental climatic zones. The weather in the region is the result of the interaction between global air movements, land topography, and major weather systems that move north-south and east-west across the Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean.

Sea ice formation in the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort seas begins in October, and the ice pack persists through late June, although the ice begins to melt and break up in April.

The topography of the region is primarily characterized by lowlands on the arctic coastal plain, Seward Peninsula and along the Noatak, Kobuk, and Selawik rivers, the rolling plateaus and hills of the arctic foothills and Seward Peninsula, and the more rugged Brooks Range and associated mountains. Permafrost is continuous or discontinuous throughout the region. The entire marine area of the region lies within the continental shelf.

Biota

Wet, moist, and relatively dry alpine tundra is the dominant vegetation of the Arctic Region. These highly variable tundra plant communities are comprised of herbaceous sedges, grasses, and low-growing forbs, lichens, and dwarf shrubs, with the percentage of shrubs generally increasing as the soil conditions become drier. Low and tall shrub communities comprised primarily of willow, alder, and shrub birch occur primarily along floodplains and fairly well-drained low-elevation foothill slopes. Various associations of white spruce, black spruce, paper birch, quaking aspen, and balsam poplar trees are found on well-drained soils in valley bottoms and on southerly slopes, generally below 1,000 ft.

The variety of habitats in the Arctic Region support harvestable populations of caribou, moose, brown and polar bears, Dall sheep, furbearers, ducks, geese, small game such as ptarmigan and arctic hares, Pacific walruses, and several species of seals and whales. All five species of Pacific salmon indigenous to North America, arctic grayling, arctic char/Dolly Varden, lake trout, broad whitefish, least cisco, sheefish, and many other fish species are found in the freshwater habitats. The marine environment supports populations of arctic cod, capelin, Pacific herring, saffron cod, starry flounder, king crab, and Tanner crab, as well as several other marine species.

Human Activities in the Region

Many human activities in the Arctic Region revolve around the subsistence, recreational, and commercial uses of fish and wildlife. Commercial fishing, trapping, reindeer herding, seafood processing, fur tanning and sewing, and guiding hunters and fishermen are important segments of the local economies.

Oil and gas development and production on the arctic coastal plain has provided the primary source of wage and employment and government funds over the last 12 years. The proposed development of the Red Dog zinc deposit may alter the economy of the Kotzebue Sound area in the near future. Mining for gold continues at a relatively low level compared to the mining activity around the turn of the century.

Infrastructure development is minimal by national standards, except within the developed oil fields.

¹Arctic Environmental Information and Data Center. N.d. Alaska regional profiles: Northwest Region, Arctic Region. Prepared for the Office of the Governor and Joint Federal/State Land Use Planning Commission.

Concentration areas — areas where the density of animals exceeds the density of the species in the surrounding area. "Concentration" is relative to the general densities within the area.

Suitable habitat — the environmental conditions that provide the species with one or more of the following: food, water, cover, or reproductive opportunities. The components of the habitat used by the species are presented in the narrative portion of this guide, *Volume I: Life Histories and Habitat Requirements of Fish and Wildlife*.

MAMMALS

BELUKHA WHALE

Known major concentration areas — estuarine and nearshore waters where large concentrations of belukha whales are known to occur during ice-free periods, primarily between 1 June and 31 July. Belukhas may utilize these areas intermittently (during a portion of a tidal cycle) or continuously (up to several days). Essential life functions, including calving, are known to occur in these waters.

Known migration patterns — known recurrent patterns of movement of belukha whales between seasonal or life function use areas. Migrational movements may occur within well-defined corridors or over a relatively broad front. The months during which the majority of the movement occurs are indicated.

Known movements associated with feeding – nearshore movements of belukha whales associated with seasonally distributed food sources.

Known summer use areas — areas where belukha whales have been observed during more than one summer, including but not limited to known life function areas.

BOWHEAD WHALE

Known feeding concentration areas — areas where concentrations of feeding bowhead whales have been observed during more than one year. **Known migration patterns** — known recurrent patterns of movement of bowhead whales between seasonal or life function use areas. Migrational movements may occur within well-defined corridors or over a relatively broad front. The months during which the majority of the movements occur are indicated.

BROWN BEAR

General distribution — suitable habitat within the known range of brown bear, including but not limited to seasonal and life function use areas. **Known concentrations along fish streams** — areas where concentrations of brown bears have been observed fishing during more than one year. **Known concentrations associated with mammalian food sources** areas where concentrations of brown bears have been observed feeding on concentrated mammalian food sources. These food sources occur consistently in geographically limited areas during spring and/or summer and include marine mammal carrion or caribou calving aggregations.

Definitions

Known concentrations in berry areas – areas where concentrations of brown bears have been observed feeding on berries during years of abundant berry production.

Known spring concentration areas – areas where concentrations of brown bears have been observed during more than one spring.

CARIBOU

General distribution — suitable habitat within the known range of caribou, including but not limited to seasonal and life function use areas. **Known calving areas** — one or more areas where most calving by a specific caribou herd has been observed. Small groups or individuals of the herd may calve elsewhere.

Known insect relief areas – areas where caribou have been observed to consistently seek relief from insect harassment. These areas are designated only where their availability is limited or their consistent pattern of use warrant such designation. Other areas may also be consistently used for insect relief but have not yet been identified.

Known migration patterns – known recurrent patterns of movement by a majority of a specific caribou herd. Migrational movements may occur within well defined corridors or over a relatively broad expanse between seasonal use areas.

Known winter use areas – areas where a majority of a specific caribou herd has been observed during more than one winter.

DALL SHEEP

General distribution — suitable habitat within the known range of Dall sheep, including but not limited to seasonal and life function use areas. **Known mineral licks** — areas where concentrations of Dall sheep have been observed at nutritionally important mineral deposits.

Known winter use areas – areas where Dall sheep have been observed during more than one winter.

MOOSE

General distribution — suitable habitat within the known range of moose, including but not limited to seasonal and life function use areas.

Known winter concentration areas – areas where concentrations of moose have been observed during more than one winter.

PACIFIC WALRUS

Known haulout concentration areas — areas where concentrations of Pacific walruses have been observed hauled out during more than one year. Known migration patterns — known recurrent patterns of movement of Pacific walruses between seasonal or life function use areas. Migrational movements may occur within well-defined corridors or over a relatively broad front.

POLAR BEAR

General distribution — suitable habitat within the known range of polar bear, including but not limited to seasonal and life function use areas.

Confirmed coastal denning areas — areas within which polar bear dens or denning activity have been observed in more than one winter. Dens and/ or denning activity have been observed in other areas, but adequate data do not currently exist to confirm recurrent use. It was not possible to map sea ice denning areas due to variable ice conditions and lack of information.

Potential coastal denning areas — areas containing habitat exhibiting characteristics similar to confirmed coastal denning areas of polar bears. Dens or denning activity may have been observed in portions of these areas, but data indicating recurrent use are not available.

RINGED SEAL

Breeding and pupping along shore-fast ice – areas of shore-fast ice where ringed seals are known to pup and breed. Pupping and breeding also occur on stable pack ice, but the importance of this habitat is unknown at this time.

Known migration patterns – known recurrent patterns of movement of ringed seals between seasonal or life function use areas. Migrational movements may occur within well-defined corridors or over a relatively broad area.

BIRDS

DABBLING AND DIVING DUCKS

General distribution — suitable habitat within the known range of dabbling or diving ducks, including but not limited to known seasonal and life function use areas.

Known fall concentration areas — areas where concentrations of one or more species of ducks have been observed during fall migration for more than one year.

Known migration patterns – known recurrent patterns of movement of a majority of a subpopulation of ducks. Migrational movements may occur within well defined corridors or over a relatively broad expanse between seasonal use areas.

Known molting concentration areas – areas where concentrations of one or more species of molting ducks have been observed during more than one year.

Known nesting concentration areas — areas where concentrations of one or more species of nesting ducks have been observed during more than one year.

Known spring concentration areas — areas where concentrations of one or more species of ducks have been observed during spring migration for more than one year.

Known winter concentration areas – areas where concentrations of one or more species of ducks have been observed during winter for more than one year.

GEESE

General distribution — suitable habitat within the known range of geese, including but not limited to known seasonal and life function use areas.

Known fall concentration areas — areas where concentrations of one or more species of geese have been observed during fall migration for more than one year.

Known migration patterns — known recurrent patterns of movement of a majority of a subpopulation of geese. Migrational movements may occur within well defined corridors or over a relatively broad expanse between seasonal use areas.

Known molting concentration areas — areas where concentrations of one or more species of molting geese have been observed for more than one year.

Known nesting concentration areas — areas where concentrations of one or more species of nesting geese have been observed during more than one year.

Known spring concentration areas – areas where concentrations of one or more species of geese have been observed during spring migration for more than one year.

FISH

ANADROMOUS FISH

Anadromous watershed areas — drainages or migration corridors with documented presence of anadromous fish (i.e., salmon or arctic char/Dolly Varden). For other species (e.g., sheefish, whitefish, and cisco), see selected freshwater fish.

Documented presence in stream or lake – areas where the presence of anadromous fish species in a stream or lake during any time of year or life cycle has been observed.

Not present in watershed — areas that have been surveyed in which anadromous fish were documented not to be present.

Unsurveyed watershed areas – areas where documentation of the presence or absence of anadromous fish species is not available.

CAPELIN

General distribution — suitable habitat within the known range of capelin, including but not limited to seasonal and life function use areas. **Known spawning concentration areas** — areas where the presence of spawning capelin has been observed.

KING CRAB

General distribution — suitable habitat within the known range of red or blue king crab, including but not limited to seasonal and life function use areas.

Known concentration areas of blue king crab — areas where concentrations of both male and female blue king crabs have been observed.

Known summer concentration areas of female red king crab — areas where concentrations of both juvenile and adult female red king crabs have been observed during summer (June through August) months.

Known winter concentration areas of female red king crab – areas where concentrations of both juvenile and adult female red king crabs have been observed during winter (November through May) months.

PACIFIC HERRING

General distribution — suitable habitat within the known range of Pacific herring, including but not limited to seasonal and life function use areas.

Known overwintering areas — areas where concentrations of Pacific herring have been observed during winter (i.e., December through March) months.

Known spawning concentration areas – areas where the presence of spawning herring or herring roe-on-substrate has been observed.

SELECTED FRESHWATER FISH¹

Documented presence in stream or lake – areas where the presence of a species in a specific stream segment or lake has been observed.

General distribution — suitable habitat within the known range of the fish species, including but not limited to seasonal and life function use areas. Polygons include areas containing the common occurrence of these species, whether in their anadromous or freshwater form.

¹This set of maps includes distribution information for several fish species (e.g., sheefish, whitefish, cisco, grayling, and char) that may enter estuarine or nearshore waters.

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PLATES













