

## INTRODUCTION

Innoko National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) was established December 2, 1980, with the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). The Refuge is located in west central Alaska, about 270 miles southwest of Fairbanks and 221 miles northwest of Anchorage. The Refuge headquarters is in McGrath, a community located on the south bank of the Kuskokwim River approximately 70 miles east of the Refuge boundary. The exterior boundaries encompass approximately 3.8 million acres. After the conveyance of native allotments, village and native regional corporation (Doyon, Inc.) lands, and state lands, the Refuge will consist of approximately 3.5 million acres.

Innoko Refuge is a relatively flat plain with the highest point reaching 1461 feet. Water dominates the landscape with the Yukon River forming the western border of the Refuge, while the Innoko, Iditarod, Dishna and Yetna Rivers flow through the Innoko Wilderness Area. These rivers tend to be slow-moving and silty with innumerable small lakes, streams, and bogs occurring over much of the Refuge. Wetlands are particularly abundant across the southeast quadrant. Many of the bogs support thick, floating mats of vegetation which give the appearance of solid ground. Much of this rich wetland area depends on the yearly flooding and drawdown regime for nutrient input. To a lesser extent, wildfire also plays an important role.

The vegetation of the Refuge reflects a transition zone between the boreal forest of interior Alaska, and the shrub-land and tundra types common in western and northern Alaska. White spruce dominates in large stands along the rivers where the soil is better-drained. Numerous fires have set vast areas back to earlier seral stages of aspen, birch, and willow. Black spruce muskegs or bogs develop on the poorly-drained soils. Dense willow stands are common along the rivers and sloughs. The most conspicuous characteristic of the vegetation is the complex interspersed of types.

A primary focus of the Refuge is the protection of the extensive wetlands which serve as nesting and breeding habitat for as many as 250,000 waterfowl; primarily wigeon, pintail, scaup, white-fronted geese, Canada geese, tundra and trumpeter swans. Innoko Refuge is well known for its large beaver population. Moose are abundant and provide an important source of meat for local residents. The success of the moose population is attributed to flooding that enhances the growth of willow which is the major winter food of moose. In addition to these species, wolf, black bear, grizzly bear, other furbearers, and caribou inhabit the Refuge. Fish including salmon, sheefish, and especially northern pike, abound in Refuge streams and lakes supporting subsistence and sport fisheries.

## PURPOSES OF INNOKO REFUGE

Section 302.3.B of ANILCA sets forth the following major purposes for which the Innoko Refuge was established and shall be managed:

(i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, waterfowl, peregrine falcons, other migratory birds, black bear, moose, furbearers, and other mammals and salmon;

(ii) to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats.

(iii) to provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in subparagraphs (i) and (ii), the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents; and

(iv) to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in paragraph (i), water quality and necessary water quality within the Refuge.

A. HIGHLIGHTS

- Ed Mallek, former refuge volunteer and seasonal employee, was selected for a new biological technician position in February (Section E.1).
- A new Alaska Natural History Association bookstore opened in our visitor contact area in March (Section H.18).
- Local vocational technical students constructed an environmental education camp facility at our field headquarters site in March (Section H.2).
- The entire staff completed Quality Improvement training in April (Section E.8).
- Spring waterfowl hunting was the primary topic at village meetings conducted along the Yukon River in April (Section H.17).
- Flooding occurred across vast areas of the Refuge in May (Section B.1).
- A very successful "Earth Week" was conducted in McGrath in May (Section H.2).
- A new radio communications system was installed in May (Section I.5).
- Our first habitat map developed from satellite imagery data was developed in May (Section F.1).
- The first neotropical and breeding bird surveys conducted on the Innoko and Mud Rivers were completed in June (Section G.7).
- A smoke jumper crew completed presuppression work at field headquarters in June (Section F.9).
- A prey base/plant community study in July revealed strong correlations (Section G.10).
- The annual goose banding effort in July resulted in quotas being exceeded (Section G.16).
- Our resident environmental education camp held in August at the field headquarters was a huge success (Section H.2).
- A preliminary salmon stock assessment project was completed in August (Section G.11).
- Our new deputy manager reported for duty in McGrath in September (Section E.1).
- Record rainfall was recorded in September (Section B.1).