

Studies of Migratory Birds

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game has been awarded contracts totaling \$495,733 to make baseline ecological studies of migratory birds, assess fish and shellfish resources, and study the life histories and habitats of seals and sea otters in Alaskan coastal waters.

The awards were made by the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The contracts are part of a major marine environmental study conducted by NOAA's Environmental Research Laboratories for the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management and its environmental studies program.

This study seeks to determine the probable ecological impacts of oil exploration and development activities on Alaska's Outer Continental Shelf.

The Alaska researchers plan to summarize the distribution, abundance, behavior, and food dependencies of birds associated with shoreline and estuarine

habitats in the Gulf of Alaska, and the Bering and Beaufort Seas.

They will also determine the critical habitats, migratory routes, and breeding locales for principal bird species.

Primary emphasis for field surveys will be placed on the Beaufort Sea and habitats in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska which are known to be important to key or critical bird species which are vulnerable to contamination.

Helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft will be used to assess bird populations in the remote areas.

Results of the field surveys and previous research will be compiled for a general description of bird use by region and major habitat along Alaska's coastline. The scientists will identify all major bird habitats on maps and provide information on bird migration by species for one field season.

Very little information exists

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Study Birds . . .

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regarding seasonal occurrence, abundance, distribution and life history of various marine life in some Alaskan waters.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game researchers will make special surveys of the herring resources in the southern Bering Sea, and the fish and shellfish in Yakutat Bay in the eastern Gulf of Alaska.

They will assess the razor clam populations near Kodiak Island and the Alaskan Peninsula, and the plants and animals which inhabit the intertidal and subtidal zones of the Kenai Peninsula.

Herring are an important food source of Alaskan coastal residents and represents a potential commercial resource. The fish and their eggs also constitute one of the fundamental sources of food for many other species of fish, mammals and birds.

Because herring spawn on open, exposed beaches in the tidal and subtidal zones, the developing eggs and larvae could be highly susceptible to pollution on the water surface. Information from the study is needed to evaluate, predict and mitigate impacts of potential oil and gas exploration and development on the coastal herring resource.

Results of the study will also indicate the degree of dependence by local residents upon the herring resource. Similar information will be gathered and published for the fish and shellfish resources, razor clams and other marine inhabitants of tidal areas.

Basic information on the ecology, life history, population and nutrition of the land-breeding harbor seal, bearded seal, ringed seal, spotted seal, and sea otters will also be compiled to learn of their ecological roles in Alaska's marine environment.