

Population up for threatened Aleutian geese

The Aleutian Canada goose, a small goose facing extinction only 20 years ago and the subject of an extensive recovery program by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and cooperating agencies, has returned in numbers large enough to be recommended for removal from endangered status.

The regional director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska, Walter O. Stieglitz, has signed a recommendation that the Aleutian Canada goose be reclassified under the Endangered Species Act, from its current designation as "endangered" to the less critical category, "threatened."

"The return of this tough little goose could be the best wildlife news for Alaska this year," Stieglitz said. "This has been one of our most rewarding programs."

The Aleutian Canada goose, *Branta canadensis leucopareia*, is a white-cheeked goose that can be distinguished from most other subspecies by its small size, abrupt forehead and a ring of white feathers at the base of the neck.

In 1967, when the geese were placed on the Endangered Species list, the population numbered fewer than 800 individual birds who were limited to their last known breeding area, Buldir Island, near the western end of the Aleutian Chain. Their wintering grounds were unknown.

Service surveys now show that the species population has increased more than 600 percent since 1975 and now numbers more than 5,800, following an extensive rehabilitation program. It now nests on six islands within the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, including islands south of the Alaska Peninsula and in the Aleutian Island chain.