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Bering Sea Ecoregion

Close-out Report

October 1999 – September 2004

for

World Wildlife Fund

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USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



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Bering Sea Ecoregion

Strategic Goals and Objectives

The objective of the Bering Sea program is to conserve the globally significant biodiversity of the Bering Sea by protecting key sites and wildlife populations, as well as shaping development policies for improved stewardship in collaboration with local communities, the private sector, and U.S. and Russian governments.

Collaborators/Partners

In the Bering Sea ecoregion, we have many partners. They include the following:

- Administration of Chukotka government
- Alaska Marine Conservation Council
- Alaska Oceans Network
- Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Association
- Association of Marine Mammal Hunters
- Audubon Society of Alaska
- Beringia Ethnic-Nature Park
- Children's Library of Anadyr
- Kaira Club
- Kamchatka Fisheries Management Agency
- Kamchatka Region Parks Administration
- League of Independent Experts
- Native Alaska communities throughout the ecoregion
- North Pacific Longliners' Association
- North Slope Burrough
- Pacific Environment
- Pribilof Islands Stewardship Council
- Russian Academy of Science
- Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North
- Russia Program Office of WWF
- The Nature Conservancy of Alaska
- TRAFFIC - Europe
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- US National Park Service
- Washington SeaGrant Program (Univ of Washington)
- Wild Salmon Center
- Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation
- Yupik Association

Summary: Period 10/01/03—09/30/04

In this year WWF achieved a number of successes to support our conservation work:

- **Improved transportation, communication, and outreach in Wrangel Island (Chukotka) and the Commander Islands Zapovedniks and the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (AMNWR).** Our Bering Sea team worked with staff in these Russian and US protected areas to identify priority needs and to obtain equipment (in the cases of the two Russian areas) and provide educational materials. We were able to improve transportation and communication services in the Russian protected areas, helping dedicated protected areas staff to work in such remote and difficult locations. In the AMNWR -- through a cost share program with the US Fish and Wildlife Service -- we published educational brochures and produced sign posts for the Pribilof Islands unit of the refuge.
- **Achieved UNESCO World Heritage Status for Wrangel Island Nature Reserve.** After preparing documentation and patient persistence for several years, WWF is pleased to announce that UNESCO recognized the importance of this high conservation priority as a world natural heritage treasure. The decision was announced in July, 2004.
- **Introduced seabird avoidance devices to reduce seabird bycatch in the Russian long line fishery.** Through a pilot project WWF commissioned research on the problem of seabird bycatch in the western Bering Sea longline fishery. After documenting the problem in Russian waters, we enlisted the help of Alaskan counterparts – NOAA, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Washington SeaGrant program. We conducted preliminary analyses to demonstrate the economic losses of bait loss, caused by seabird predation on the long line hooks. We organized seminars for fishermen, captains, scientists and industry representatives in Russia, inviting an Alaskan fisherman and a scientist to explain and demonstrate the use of the seabird avoidance devices, “tory lines” or also known as “streamers.” Obtaining free samples of “tory lines” that effectively curtailed seabird bycatch in Alaska by 80-100%, WWF carried these to Russia and convinced several Russian long-liner vessels to experimentally apply these lines. In August of 2004, WWF-supported researchers returned from sea to report that their first experiments on board Russian vessels had been successful. Detailed data are not yet available.
- **WWF conducted a series of seminars and presentations on the concept of Marine Certification in Russia.** Through Russian-language materials and with the input of WWF’s community-based certification expert, we provided information to and received feedback from Russian fishing enterprises. While some were skeptical, businesses and communities alike expressed interest and are currently working with WWF to develop a certification assessment application.
- **New sources of funding leveraged.** The Bering Sea ecoregion’s work and results have attracted new sources of funding to support programs. Among new donors are

the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, which, inspired by the transboundary nature of WWF's Bering Sea work, awarded us with a \$400,000 for the year 2003-2004. In January, 2004 the National Science Foundation approved a three-year grant for \$1.2 million for community-based science and education in Alaska. Other new donors included the Lennox Foundation, to support an ecotourism seminar in Chukotka; the Collins and Alaska International Foundation to support our Bering Sea environmental education exchange; and the Sustainable Fisheries Foundation to support WWF-Russia's work on marine certification. Additionally, through the Pribilof Collaborative led by WWF, more than 20 partner organizations are contributing time, expertise, and some direct funding to the stakeholder process. NOAA, for example, recently donated \$50,000 to ensure that the process moves forward.

- **WWF Russia became a national organization.** After ten years of being a "program office" of WWF-International, in July WWF Russia entered the world as an officially registered national organization with its own Russian board of directors, and a membership (which it had been developing over two transitional years) of 5,000 Russian citizens. Program priorities such as ecoregion conservation will remain the same.

Results by Objective and Activity

Objective I: Protect key sites in the Bering Sea

Activity 1.1: Conserve marine and coastal habitats in Chukotka Peninsula, Pribilof Islands and Commander Islands

In last year's report we proposed to do the following:

- In Chukotka, designation of a national park and reduction of poaching of polar bears.
- In the Pribilofs, a new management plan for the northern fur seal, and a comprehensive plan for managing resource use in the waters around the islands, results in recovered populations of northern fur seals, seabirds, harbor seals, and sea lions.
- In the Commander Islands, the nature reserve will be transformed into an operational protected area, evaluating it against World Conservation Union (IUCN) / World Conservation on Protected Areas (WCPA) marine management standards before and after the program begins.

These outputs were not fully met, but significant progress was made within each area. In Chukotka, although we did not succeed in creating a new national park, we focused our efforts on a community outreach effort, primarily through education and outreach programs, including a special effort to involve native communities in preparing appropriate regulations for the implementation of the U.S.-Russia agreement on the "Conservation and Management of the Alaska-Chukotka Population of Polar Bears." In the Commander Islands, working to strengthen the marine park's protections and move beyond the status of "paper park," WWF purchased necessary equipment for park infrastructure and funded a scientific and enforcement expedition. In the Pribilofs, we have made huge steps toward engaging community members in an unprecedented multi-stakeholder effort to design conservation solutions that address the serious declines in marine mammals and fisheries populations around the islands.

Results in the Chukotka Peninsula region

Made steps forward to protect the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population.

WWF worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Alaska Nanuuk Polar Bear Commission, Russian experts, and the administration of Chukotka to gather important information about threats facing the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population, and to make a case for ratification. Part of this work included the completion of an influential report on the illegal hunting and trade in polar bear parts in Russia. Throughout the early summer of 2003, WWF contacted key officials in the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Department of Interior, and the U.S. State Department to push for ratification of the agreement. Finally, on August 31, 2003, on the last day of the summer session of Congress, the Senate ratified the agreement.

In September 2003, WWF staff met with representatives of the Association of Traditional Marine Mammal Hunters of Chukotka in Anadyr, Chukotka. Eduard Zdor, chairman of the Association and Vladilen Kavriy, head of the Association's Polar Bear Commission, as well as local Duma representative Vladimir Etylin, met to discuss their vision for implementing the newly-ratified agreement. At that time, their vision for the treaty's implementation seemed to contradict certain conservation stipulations in the agreement. During the following winter, WWF brought together expert scientists Nikita Ovsyannikov, Stanislav Belikov, and Andrei Boltunev, to discuss recommendations that will inform legislation and regulations.

Building on these discussions, in May 2004, WWF sponsored Belikov, Boltunev, and Mr. Kavriy (a native Chukchi from the region) in a traveling tour to several hunting communities along the Bering Sea coast of Chukotka. During this tour, the three men held meetings to inform the hunting communities about the current status of the polar bear population and the progress on the agreement, they then shared copies of the draft regulations and solicited community input on the best ways for implementing conservation management policies and involving the community. Based on their three-week tour of Lorino, Lavrentia, and neighboring coastal areas, Belikov, Kavriy, and Boltunev made several significant changes in their draft regulations which will be presented to the federal government for final approval. In addition, WWF is supporting a video project by the Association of Traditional Marine Mammal Hunters that attempts to revive local traditions and beliefs that kept hunting in check. The video will be circulated among the coastal villages involved in polar bear hunts.

Laid groundwork to engage young conservationists. Native communities play a key role in the future survival of the Bering Sea. A needs assessment early on in the ecoregion program, identified youth as a target audience. In response, a central part of WWF's work in the Bering Sea has been youth education. In the Chukotka region, WWF supported educational clubs in local schools, This included instructional guidebooks for teachers leading the clubs, printed materials on nature and wildlife, audiovisual resources for participating youth, and a computer. In the future we hope to provide email access and field equipment like binoculars, field guides, tents, and sleeping bags for outdoor educational outings.

In October, 2003, WWF held a "Bering Sea Summit" for youth participating in our clubs on both sides of the Bering Sea. Almost a year of preparation led up to the event, with students exchanging essays, photo-exhibits, crafts, and artwork with clubs on the other side of the Bering

Sea. For one week in October, WWF gathered 12 young people and their teachers from Alaska and Russia to participate in a learning summit that involved a three-day “ranger academy” of outdoor science skills, a field trip, and an overnight at the educational-research facility Alaska SeaLife Center. USAID’s initial support for this project allowed WWF staff to work in the field of education, the results of which helped us to leverage project funds from two Alaska-based foundations and the National Park Service.

Improved operating capacity of Wrangel Island Zapovednik.

The years 2003 and 2004 were some of the worst for federally protected areas in Russia. Administrative restructuring, inaction and at times, hostile policies generated by the Minister of Environment (a former head of the Transportation Ministry), and continued low-level funds were among the many factors presenting huge obstacles to Russia’s system of protected areas. Among those, Wrangel Island Zapovednik remains a priority for WWF, due to its role in harboring the largest female polar bear denning area in the ecoregion and the largest concentration of Pacific walrus. The reserve received some much needed recognition in July, when UNESCO awarded it a special world heritage designation, which demonstrates the global importance of and recognition of the need to protect it. WWF-Russia played the key role in proposing the nomination four years ago. WWF also purchased with match funding two all-terrain vehicles for the reserve. These vehicles will provide much needed transportation as the staff of the reserve work to maintain, patrol, and protect the many unique wildlife areas on the island.

Promoted ecotourism in local communities.

In 2001 and 2002, as part of this project, WWF Russia staff made initial forays into the ecotourism sector in Chukotka, laying the groundwork primarily through the establishment of educational centers and searching for opportunities for partners in community-based tourism. In September 2003, WWF staff visited several coastal communities in the Chukotka region to investigate the possibility of helping local communities develop alternative livelihoods that will help them generate income while sustainably managing their rich natural resources. At the encouragement of the Chukotka Minister for Culture, Education, Tourism, and Youth, WWF began to develop a program that would lay the foundation for eventual ecotourism to the region. WWF recruited three international experts to conduct a training seminar for residents and tour operators in Chukotka for September 2004.

Results in the Pribilof islands

The Pribilof Islands Collaborative.

WWF has been actively involved in the Pribilof Islands, working closely with the communities of St. Paul and St. George to identify conservation concerns. WWF has engaged various stakeholders in the region and formalized a unique and exciting process uniting diverse interest groups whose livelihoods are tied to the resources of the Pribilof Islands. Our first step was to hire a professional facilitator, Meg King, of the University of Alaska, who designed the process and has guided it to its formal inception. Today, the collaboration is a 22-member formal group that has the mission of assessing the science behind management and designing conservation and research solutions for the following key areas:

- Northern fur seal population decline;
- status and management of halibut and crab stocks;
- protecting seabirds; and
- testing the effectiveness of the current no-trawl zone around the Pribilof Islands.

WWF's Evie Witten, director of the Alaska field office, participated in a variety of forums to present information about the status of the Northern fur seal and how the Pribilof Islands Collaborative was working to stem the population decline. During two meetings of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council, Evie reported jointly with industry representatives on the process of the collaborative. She has worked closely with members of the Alaska marine conservation community, keeping them updated and successfully soliciting their involvement. In the summer of 2003, the council created a special committee to address the fur seal problem and review the next draft of the federal Northern fur seal conservation plan. Evie was appointed to serve on this committee, putting her in place to be a key player on fur seal management within one of the most important marine resource institutions in the Bering Sea.

To better understand the effectiveness of the Pribilof Islands' no-trawl zone, it became clear that an understanding of current management efforts was needed. WWF commissioned an analysis of the Pribilof Islands habitat conservation area (a trawl closure that was put in place in 1992 but never analyzed for its effectiveness), this work has entailed numerous data requests to relevant management agencies; creation of a geospatial database; and extensive analysis of historical records on the no-trawl zone; fisheries survey data; and other sources. The result of this work is a thorough, scientifically-based case study that demonstrates the inadequacy of the zone. Additionally, it provides some understanding of what might be needed to conserve the Pribilofs in a truly ecosystem-based approach. WWF's next task is to use this information in an advocacy context, promoting broad agreement that the no-trawl zone needs to be re-designed and supplemented by measures that will truly address the ecological and biological requirements of the Pribilof Islands ecosystem.

Identified new funds for the Collaborative.

Working within the collaborative and with partners, WWF leveraged new sources of financial support for the project from the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Alaska Conservation Foundation, the Marine Conservation Alliance, the Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association, and the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Community Development Association. Additionally, partner organizations are seeking funds together to contribute to the overall process, submitting joint proposals to Congress, the North Pacific Research Board, and foundations.

Established two community science positions in both St. Paul and St. George. WWF was able to create a new program in St. Paul and St. George titled, *Coastal Communities for Science*. Through this initiative WWF and the communities are identifying research questions that can benefit the community and provide opportunities for community participation. While building scientific capacity to address research and conservation in these communities, the project will also generate new information about biodiversity and ecological processes in the ecoregion.

Completed two educational products to raise awareness about the conservation role of the Pribilofs. In partnership with the two tribal communities (St. George and St. Paul) and the USFWS, WWF produced and posted a series of educational signs on St Paul, informing visitors about the Alaska Maritime Wildlife Refuge unit on the Pribilof Islands, and a brochure that will be distributed to all visitors on both islands. While simple and relatively easy to produce, such a brochure has never been published and will be extremely useful for educational and tourism purposes. Additionally, in the summer of 2003, WWF hired naturalist Conrad Field to conduct a summer biology field camp for youth of St. George.

Results in the Commander islands

The Commander Islands are home to the Kommandorsky Zapovednik, or nature reserve, a strict scientific protected area that is approximately 24,300 square kilometers, most of which is a 30 kilometers marine zone surrounding the islands. Since the reserve was created in 1993 to protect the unique wildlife area of the Commanders, several problems have emerged. New limitations placed on local people's traditional subsistence activities has generated tensions in the community that continue today. Salmon fishermen and other fishing vessels poach in the marine portion of the reserve, and while the reserve enjoys some tourist visitation each summer, the expedition cruise boats stop only briefly on the island, and leave little cash behind. Little funding or infrastructure is available to help the reserve defend its resources and today the reserve is characterized by dilapidated conditions, lack of basic transportation and communication equipment, a budget which covers only the meager salaries of reserve staff, and until recently, a manager with little experience in working with people. In October 2002, a new director was appointed to the reserve, offering an opportunity to rejuvenate the imperiled Zapovednik.

Since becoming active in the Bering Sea, WWF has surveyed the Commander Islands sea otter population (2000), conducted a preliminary socioeconomic assessment (2001), and supported a nature club in the village school (2001). In 2003-2004 we have focused more on management of the nature reserve. WWF is now thrilled by the opportunity of the appointment of a new director of the nature reserve. The new leader is an individual with bilingual language skills, biological training, and an apparent enthusiasm for conservation. The appointment of this long-vacant post is promising for future work and success in conservation.

Sponsored the Commander Islands Conservation Workshop.

In April, 2004, WWF joined the Audubon Society of Alaska, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Russian Bird Conservation Union, and the Pacific Institute of Geography in organizing a Commander Islands conservation workshop. The outcome of the workshop was a prioritized list of research needs, education and outreach proposals, and ideas for transboundary cooperation. WWF is already implementing some of the recommendations, including procuring natural history educational materials for the children's library and museum in the Bering Island village of Nikolskoe and transferring donated equipment and supplies to the nature reserve. WWF found additional funds to invite three residents of the Pribilof Islands to attend the workshop. As we move forward with our conservation program in both the Commanders and Pribilofs, these individuals will be valuable links in the exchange of information about shared species, problems and solutions.

Launched the Commander Islands Expedition of 2004.

In April and June, WWF funded two ten-day expeditions on the *Typhoon*, a small boat based in Kamchatka. We initiated the expeditions in an effort to achieve several goals:

- test the effectiveness of the satellite-based vessel monitoring system technology we have supported over the last two years;
- assist staff from the Commander Islands Nature Reserve as they patrol the 30-mile strictly protected marine zone;
- gather information about the bird and mammal rookeries;

- build and improve local support for the nature reserve;
- foster international cooperation across the Bering Sea, particularly between the Commander Islands Nature Reserve and the Alaska Maritime Wildlife Refuge; and
- document biodiversity and WWF's Bering Sea projects on film for educational purposes.

During the first trip, three Alaskans—Tom Van Pelt of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Karin Holser of the Pribilof Islands Stewardship Program, and Olga Romanenko, biologist, interpreter and WWF consultant, were based in the village of Nikolskoe on Bering Island (population 700), where they reported to the community on the recent Commander Islands conservation workshop, held prior to the expedition's departure. They met with school teachers, held educational activities for the students, and met with all of the islands' entities to exchange information on conservation as well as local needs. Additionally, they gathered information about the presence of introduced species such as rats, mink, and reindeer—which can devastate bird colonies and local flora—to help strategize on how the impacts of these harmful species can be addressed might be removed.

While this work went forward on land, at sea, the Typhoon plied the waters of the Commander Islands marine zone, looking for poachers, while also helping scientists Larisa Zilenskaya (Institute of Biological Problems of the North) and Sergey Zagrebelny (Commander Islands Nature Reserve) gather data on seabird nesting sites and sea otter haul-outs. Fisheries inspector Vitaly Bliznetsov communicated with the land-based Kamchatka Fisheries Management Agency through the satellite-supported database software he had developed with WWF support. Local fisheries inspector Vladimir Fomin boarded the boat in Nikolskoe to assist in the patrol. Naturalist and photographer Greg Homel was also aboard to gather film footage for a video production. WWF will use the video to promote greater awareness of this special marine area and the need to protect it. WWF's Bering Sea fisheries coordinator Konstantine Zgurovsky was aboard the Typhoon as expedition leader, Kamchatka fisheries representative Andrey Yablochkov was also part of the expedition, helping to coordinate the diverse needs of the scientists and law enforcement officers.

Supported community education efforts. As part of the expedition described above, WWF representative Olga Romanenko and her American colleagues met with key educators on Bering Islands to identify priority needs and potential for expanding youth activities on the Commanders. Following this event in June, WWF sent several boxes of printed and audiovisual materials to the island, along with posters and instructional guidebooks to be used by the teachers. Additionally, WWF agreed to support travel of a small group of university students to the island to assist the nature reserve on Bering Island. They assisted the nature reserve with field work, gaining practical experience in science and an understanding of the function of the protected area.

We have also engaged other partners in the US which are providing assistance to the Commander Islands in the social/governance sector. For example, the International Aleut Association (IAA), based in Anchorage, was interested in providing capacity-building support to the Commander Islands Aleut communities. To provide an example of community participation in natural resources management, IAA obtained funding to bring two Aleut people from the Commanders to the United States, to attend the August meeting of the Pribilof Collaborative.

This visit to the Pribilofs gave the Russian visitors a close-up look and direct experience with such community processes that are yet very new to Russia.

Objective II: Shape development policies for improved stewardship in collaboration with local communities, the private sector and the Russian Government

Activity 2.1: Substantially improve fisheries management in target areas across the Bering Sea

Last year in our report to USAID, WWF anticipated achieving the following outputs in the fisheries arena:

- Government support for a satellite-vessel monitoring program (evident in interagency cooperation);
- Production of a training course and relevant materials;
- Evidence of improved enforcement through increased number of fishing vessels inspected and level of fines levied on violators; decreased levels of poaching; and increased cooperation with the United States Coast Guard in joint enforcement and training activities.
- Successful transfer of this technology applied to other parts of the Russian Far East.

In reality, WWF achieved these targets and much more.

Improved cooperative management and enforcement in the Bering Sea.

WWF's international capacity in the Bering Sea is key to our effectiveness, allowing us to transfer lessons learned and conservation solutions across the ecoregion. To improve fisheries management in Russia, we recognize that much of the effort must come from within Russia, but we also believe that certain partnerships can be helpful in facilitating this change.

During this grant period, WWF engaged U.S. governmental agencies to assist in providing training and advice for fisheries counterparts in Russia. In November 2003, WWF Bering Sea fisheries coordinator Konstantine Zgurovsky and Margaret Williams met with the individuals involved in the U.S.-Russia Intergovernmental Coordinating Committee on Fisheries (a bilateral commission). Our objective was to provide information about fisheries management in Russia and WWF's projects in the western Bering Sea that focus on improving fisheries enforcement. Law enforcement officials in these agencies welcomed our information, queried us extensively, and offered to assist our program by hosting a group of Russian enforcement officers, participating in joint seminars, and evaluating technical aspects of our satellite-based vessel monitoring program. Since these meetings, WWF has followed up with communication, providing information and occasional updates.

Supported the satellite-based vessel monitoring inspection team.

In an effort to address the serious problem of illegal fishing in the Russian part of the Bering Sea, WWF continued to invest in a team of inspectors to develop and apply technology that would benefit fisheries enforcement officials in working more efficiently. The problems facing the fisheries arena in Russia are huge—government restructuring, corruption, and dwindling fish

stocks are just a few. Despite these daunting problems, WWF supported a team of four specialists within the North-West Fish Inspection (SVRV) with expertise in satellite monitoring systems. The team:

- created and updated software for tracking fishing vessel movement in the North Pacific;
- identified misreporting and poaching vessels;
- analyzed captains reports, including catches, speed, position of vessel, and other parameters indicating fishing boat activity; and
- created a Russian-language website with different levels of information access for enforcement bodies' representatives and general information on their anti-poaching activity.

Additionally, WWF held four workshops for almost one hundred inspectors from different branches of Rybvods (Petropavlovsk, Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Sakhalin) in which inspectors from the WWF-supported team presented information on satellite monitoring software and hardware effective usage. Participants also received instructional CDs on how to use the program. In order to allow inspectors to have the right equipment to access the enforcement databases through their new software, WWF purchased mobile satellite monitoring equipment for field exploitation by Rybvod inspector. As a result of the WWF pilot project, during 2003 the number of detected violations was equal to 133 (53 vessels failed to provide correct position and 80 vessels provided false information in captains' reports). About USD\$10,000 in penalties were imposed.

Facilitated interagency cooperation and improving technical capacity for marine enforcement.

To address the myriad problems caused by governmental restructuring and the lack of effective coordination among fisheries enforcement bodies in the western Bering Sea, WWF conducted several projects to catalyze interagency enforcement efforts. Most of these were aimed at training programs for multiple-agency participation. At the workshops, the Special Marine Inspection and Federal Border Service (FPS) representatives discussed inter-agency efforts to improve anti-poaching activity. As a result, a protocol for interagency cooperation was signed between Rybvods, Kamchatka Special Marine Inspection, and FPS. The Commander Islands Nature Reserve protected 30-miles area was chosen as a model for inter-agency cooperation. During two joint raids, sponsored by WWF around the Commanders, no violations were detected.

Addressed the threat of driftnet and long-line fisheries.

The Bering Sea supports up to six million migratory birds each year—gulls, cormorants, puffins, fulmars, terns, and many other species come to the region because of its rich productivity and excellent nesting habitats. Unfortunately, more than one third of these nesting areas occur within close proximity to driftnet and longline fisheries. These methods of fishing cause thousands of bird deaths a year, as the birds are attracted to the bait and then become entangled in the fishing gear. To address the problems associated with the driftnet fishery, WWF-Russia worked with experts from the Pacific Institute of Fisheries Science and Oceanography to research the extent of the problem and how the current permitting process in Russia creates the foundation for this wasteful fishing practice to continue. WWF-Russia has also worked closely with a network of NGOs along the Okhotsk and Bering Sea coasts to develop a unified strategy which will promote an end to the practice. WWF is currently finalizing the driftnet report. Once complete, it will be

distributed through our offices in Japan and Russia, with the purpose of forcing the Japanese to stop their big scale driftnet operations in Russia.

We are also working to assess the ecological damage from a much lesser-studied gear type: long lines. In Alaska and around the world, long-line fisheries can have a devastating impact on seabird species. Extremely rare birds, such as the short-tailed albatross are vulnerable to this gear, as they attack the baited lines entering the water, are snagged, and drown. In Alaskan marine waters, however, cooperative efforts of fishermen and scientists have led to an 80-100 percent reduction in the incidental take of seabirds. WWF is working to transfer the lessons from Alaska to the Russian waters of the Bering Sea.

Last year, in an effort to gather baseline information quantifying the extent of the problem, WWF initiated a pilot project in the western Bering Sea to gather information about seabird bycatch that could serve as baseline data for comparison during experimental deployment of streamer lines—devices which frighten birds away from the baited fishing lines. The second stage was to determine the procedure for applying the streamers, define the scientific protocols for conducting the study, and then find willing fishing partners. WWF provided a grant to Dr. Yuri Artyukhin, along with copious materials—articles, books, and other publications—to begin the project. Dr. Artyukhin’s project accomplishments include:

- compiled data from long line fishing records going back to 1991;
- recruited observers to monitor bycatch by fishing boats;
- involved fisheries scientists from the Kamchatka branch of TINRO (Kamchatka Institute for Fisheries Research and Oceanography) in the project;
- organized a seminar for forty fishermen from the company AKROS, the biggest owner of the long-line fleet;
- shared informational materials and a video by NOAA on how streamers work; and
- conducted a preliminary economic assessment of the cost of bait loss due to bycatch.

In May, 2004, WWF made the following steps forward:

- organized a visit to Petropavlovsk (Kamchatka) and Vladivostok by Dr. Ed Melvin, scientist and expert on seabird avoidance devices and (retired) Bering Sea halibut fisherman Mark Lundsten;
- held a series of meetings for scientists, fishermen, fisheries managers, and indigenous community representatives on the topics of reducing seabird bycatch in Alaska and other efforts around the world, sustainable fisheries, marine certification, and consumer interest in purchasing sustainably harvested fish;
- engaged the largest long-line company in Kamchatka, AKROS in discussions on the ecological and economic benefits of streamers and integrated weight lines;
- produced a Russian translation, and dubbed (with USFWS, NOAA) permission the video “Off the Hook” and distributed it among fisheries and science communities;
- made a presentation on the seabird avoidance devices at the July meeting of the Russian Far East Forum in Vladivostok; and
- received approval from AKROS general director to move ahead in using the streamers and weighted lines on an experimental basis. This is a huge step forward and a sign that our international exchange, Russian literature, visual materials, and continued outreach efforts have made an impact on the fishing community.

Introduced market incentives to change fishing practices in the western Bering Sea.

In our work to promote sustainable fisheries management, WWF has succeeded in guiding several fisheries through the approval process by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and we are now working to help market their products under the MSC label. Our goal is to broaden participation in MSC labeling to include Russia and inform its Far East fisheries managers about the rewards of sustainable management and eco-labeling (MSC certification may provide new markets and higher prices).

To develop this very challenging program, WWF-Russia was able to attract support from the Sustainable Fisheries Foundation to initiate an assessment of the key fisheries in the Russian Far East. Our first step was to provide information about the Marine Stewardship Council, little-known in Russia to the broad fishing community and identify several discrete candidates from the Bering Sea coastal communities with whom we could work. We enlisted the help of Meredith Lopuch, director of WWF's community-based certification program. Over the last year, Meredith has worked closely with our Bering Sea fisheries coordinator in Russia, Konstantine Zgurovsky, to accomplish the following:

- provide a Russian-language overview in powerpoint to introduce fisheries managers to the MSC;
- held four seminars in Vladivostok and Petropavlovsk in June 2004 to provide this information in person and answer questions about MSC and its potential benefit for Russian fishermen;
- presented MSC information at the Russian Far East Fisheries Forum, a regional trade show;
- communicated with representatives of the corporation Unilever, prior to and during their site visit to Vladivostok, in process of communicating its desires to purchase MSC-certified Pollock in Russia. Unilever informed participants at the Russian Far East Fisheries Forum that it hopes to see the MSC process initiated in large-scale fisheries, and expressed its interest in the development of certification in the Far East; and
- developed a Russian-language questionnaire for the Russian Far East to identify possible candidates for a pre-assessment for certification.

The highlight of this project is the participation of many fisheries representatives at the above-mentioned seminars. Despite the significant challenges presented to WWF in pushing for the implementation of more sustainable fishing practices, we have identified a couple of parties who are extremely interested in pursuing the certification process. One of these is Lumukan Ltd, part of the Inter-territorial Association of Hunters and Fishermen "Krechet" in the Khabarovsk region of the Russian Far East, and another is the Kamchatka Association of Indigenous people, along the Bering Sea. The next steps for these partners will be to provide a fishery profile for fisheries identified through the pre-analysis process and choose pre-assessment candidate for community based marine environmental certification.

Table of Final Accomplishments

Benchmark Number	Benchmark/Output	Status*
Activity 1.1	Establishment of a Coastal Protected Area in	Cancelled

	Karaginsky District	
Activity 1.2	Establishment of Marine Zone for Nalychevo Nature Park	Complete
Activity 1.3	Beringia Ethnic Cultural Park and coastal protected areas in Chukotka Region	Delayed
Activity 1.4	Development of Kommandorsky Zapovednik Area	On track
Activity 2.1	Creation of a network of the “Living Planet” Clubs in Chukotka	On track
Activity 2.2	Laying the groundwork for certification/economic incentives for fisheries conservation	On track

- Status may include activities that are completed, on-track, delayed, mixed performance, or cancelled.

Project Evolution

The Bering Sea ecoregion program has evolved significantly since its beginning, primarily in terms of growth. The activity plan supported by USAID has been adapted somewhat, but did not significantly change over the course of the project. The primary shifts in activity have been geographical, although we have also made decisions to adopt certain activities or invest less effort in others. For example, although we had included Karaginsky Bay in our early activity plans, elections in 2000 reversed what had been a very favorable political climate to one in which achieving any head way was nearly impossible. We made the decision to delay the work we had started there, and at a future moment, will still benefit from the information gathered as a part of this project.

Some goals which remained consistent from the onset of this USAID project, such as the creation of Beringia National Park, were not met by the end of the project. On the other hand, in several cases, goals that we identified for this program were met successfully and those results catalyzed other successes (a case in point is the work on sustainable fisheries and our seabird bycatch reduction project, described above).

In implementing this program over the last five years, the number of our partners on both coasts of the ecoregion grew tremendously. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of these partnerships is the diversity reflected by them. WWF has creatively engaged partners to achieve a wide range of conservation goals. From tribal leaders in small coastal villages to representatives of the billion-dollar Alaska Pollock fishery, our collaborators were and are a key part of our success. A list of partners and stakeholders can be found above.

In the last five years, we have faced both external (political) as well as internal (capacity-related) challenges. For example, in the course of this project, the fisheries management administrative structure in Russia has been re-organized twice and we are still lacking a comprehensive fisheries law for that country. Enforcement responsibilities have also been jettisoned from one agency to another, making our work to influence key leaders or pressure points exceedingly difficult, indeed, sometimes without any result at all. We have adapted to this situation by putting less emphasis on the federal level and maintaining contacts with officials and staff at the regional level, where personnel seems to remain more consistent. In the Alaskan waters, due to acute hostility among political leaders toward the concept of marine protected areas, we adapted our approach to habitat conservation. We began a unique approach to working with fishermen

and communities, instead of attempting to promote an MPA. Now that effort is recognized throughout the region as a serious forum which offers a new model for addressing fisheries management issues that could complement the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council process and will avoid acrimonious conflict between conservationists and the fishing sector.

Other challenges have been posed in the last year by leadership and reorganization at the level of the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources. New and confusing policies threaten to further derail the already weakened federal support structure for nature reserves. At the same time, at the local level, conducting certain work in marine protection has been easier in Russia than in Alaska. A case in point is WWF's work with the new Commander Islands Zapovednik and the expeditions we launched there in April and July of 2004.

Internally, capacity issues have been challenging. In the beginning of the project, our Russian staff was entirely based in Moscow, nine time zones away from the Bering Sea coast. Similarly, the logistics and distance created challenges in Alaska. It was not until 2000 that WWF was able to open an office in Anchorage. Today WWF has a full-time fisheries coordinator based in our Vladivostok office and a field coordinator in Kamchatka. These two individuals are extremely productive and capable and their presence has greatly increased our ability to produce results. Fortunately our office in Anchorage has also grown and we currently have three staff persons there.

In addition to conservation partners, new donors also joined the Bering Sea program during the life of this USAID-supported project. They have included: The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Oak Foundation, the Trust for Mutual Understanding, the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, the Collins Foundation, the Alaska International Education Foundation, the Sustainable Fisheries Fund, the Lennox Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the US National Park Service, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Results

- Please see pages 6-15 for detailed discussion of results.

Products

Please see the attached "media digest" for media generated in the last year. WWF publications produced during this program include:

Bering Sea Ecoregion calendars (2000, 2001, 2003)

Bering Sea Ecoregion News, 2002 and 2003

Bering Sea Ecoregion: A Call to Action (in Russian) 2000.

Bering Sea Ecoregion: A Call to Action (in English). 1999

Bering Sea Biodiversity Assessment: The Approach (a bilingual poster). 2001

Certifying Sustainable Fisheries: the Marine Stewardship Council (in Russian). 2003.

Ecoregional Climate Change and Biodiversity Decline: Chukotka Ecoregion Passport (English and Russian). 2002

Trawling in the Mist: Industrial Fisheries in the Russian Part of the Bering Sea. (Published by TRAFFIC-Europe). 2002

Wrangel Island Zapovednik: Russian Stronghold for Beringian Biodiversity. (Jointly published by WWF and the Beringia Conservation Program. 1999

Conclusion

The work WWF describes in this report comprises a comprehensive and ambitious approach to Bering Sea conservation. Indeed, taking an ecoregional approach to conservation in any setting is difficult, costly, and requires long-term horizons but at a scale as large as the Bering Sea, and in a region spanning two nations, and encompassing many diverse cultures, these challenges become even greater.

Some of the challenges are simply operational. Our ecoregion coordinators are located in three different time zones. The time difference between Washington, D.C. and Petropavlosk (a major city in the western Bering Sea) is 17 hours. The tremendous distances, lack of roads (and thus need for helicopter, ship, or plane), harsh weather, and high cost of transportation (\$1,000 for a roundtrip ticket between Anchorage and the Pribilof Islands) are characteristic of work in the Bering Sea.

Many people are doubtful about the possibility of achieving conservation results in a region of political and economic instability such as Russia. Indeed, Russia is still a country very much in transition and democracy has yet to take hold. President Vladimir Putin has made, and is still making, some major changes in the structure of natural resources and protected areas management, the consequences of which are yet unclear. In some regions in the western Bering Sea, elections in December 2000 presented us with new political obstacles in the form of two environmentally unfriendly governors (Koryakia and Kamchatka regions). Yet the situation is not so bleak: in another region, Chukotka, the same elections produced a young, dynamic governor who has actively engaged WWF in conservation activities. Throughout the ecoregion we have identified many strong leaders, managers, and others who are committed to conservation, and we are confident that in partnerships with them, we can deliver results.

Political challenges face us in Alaska, too, represented for example, by a powerful Alaska congressional delegation often unfriendly to conservation interests and an influential commercial fish lobby with state, national, and international connections. Such an environment has made the discussion of Marine Protected Areas and other conservation measures highly politicized, and conflictual.

However, WWF has established many positive relationships with the fishing community in Alaska and in other parts of the world. Our partnerships with indigenous people in Russia and coastal communities of Alaska have been fruitful, leading to new educational programs, the conclusion of an international treaty on the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population, and other conservation results. We believe that with the right approach we can build support for a new approach to marine habitat conservation and fisheries management among fishermen and

indigenous partners. The efforts in the Pribilofs reflect this in both practical terms in a key site as well as building a model for dialogue within the NMFC

Russia's economy presents another challenge. Donors sometimes wonder about how the problem of crime may affect their investments. Admittedly, the presence of organized crime in the fisheries sector adds a new level of complexity to the already complicated and highly charged field of sustainable fisheries management we are addressing in Alaska. However, WWF has made inroads already into the fisheries enforcement sector in Kamchatka, releasing small amounts of funding at intervals, and monitoring results closely.

Recommendations for follow-on, evaluation, and further dissemination or outreach.

Despite these challenges there are many opportunities for conservation. WWF has only "scratched the surface" in terms of territorial coverage in this enormous ecoregion. Further partnerships and an increased number of conservation actors in the ecoregion could contribute more results, especially if such efforts were coordinated strategically.

To better guide our own future efforts, and to evaluate our progress so far, WWF began drafting a conservation action plan for the ecoregion. An important component of this plan is the development of measures by which to assess success or failure in the ecoregion in years to come. We are compiling this plan in partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) of Alaska and are attempting to apply TNC's "5-S" planning tool, which was initially developed for site-based planning within TNC. Applying this methodology at a scale as large as an ecoregion has proved challenging but is proving to add biological rigor and will provide scientific justification for our programmatic recommendations in the future.

Support from USAID played a critical, pivotal role for WWF in the Bering Sea. Having been able to establish a presence in the ecoregion, particularly in Russia, WWF was able to generate action and engage people, in turn spawning new ideas, partnerships, and results - leading to new donors and new activities. As we learn from both our successes and failures in the Bering Sea as well as from other ecoregions, our activities are becoming more focused, and strategic. The ecoregional conservation plan we are developing with TNC, and our many conservation partners, will be key ingredients to our long-term involvement in the ecoregion. Our ability to leverage both action and direct financial investment in the ecoregion, and specifically in WWF's priority areas and projects, has been demonstrated. While such results do not come easily, WWF is committed to making a difference in the Bering Sea for years to come.

FY09 Update

GCP provided the first funding for WWF to work in Chukota, Russia. This enabled WWF to start a program there, meeting with partners, doing initial activities and building WWF capacity for work in the area. It came at a very opportune time, just after a biodiversity assessment, and at a time when USAID's assistance to Russia was decreasing. It enabled the WWF Network's Arctic work to expand into this important area.

As a result of the GCP funding, WWF was able to leverage US foundation funding, and the program has continued. A few years ago the WWF Network established the Arctic as one of seven places globally where it is focusing high priority local-to-global conservation approaches

as a WWF Network Initiative. Chukota is included in this initiative and has contributed to its development. This comes at a time when recognition of the strategic importance of the Arctic is rapidly growing, as one of the areas on Earth most affected by climate change, and with strong security and economic implications for the US Government.