

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR****Fish and Wildlife Service****50 CFR Part 92**

[Docket No. FWS-R7-MB-2015-0158;  
FF09M21200-156-FXMB1231099BPP0]

RIN 1018-BB10

**Migratory Bird Subsistence Harvest in Alaska; Harvest Regulations for Migratory Birds in Alaska During the 2016 Season**

**AGENCY:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

**ACTION:** Proposed rule.

**SUMMARY:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service or we) is proposing migratory bird subsistence harvest regulations in Alaska for the 2016 season. These proposed regulations allow for the continuation of customary and traditional subsistence uses of migratory birds in Alaska and prescribe regional information on when and where the harvesting of birds may occur. These proposed regulations were developed under a co-management process involving the Service, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Alaska Native representatives. The rulemaking is necessary because the regulations governing the subsistence harvest of migratory birds in Alaska are subject to annual review. This rulemaking proposes region-specific regulations that would go into effect on April 2, 2016, and expire on August 31, 2016.

**DATES:** We will accept comments received or postmarked on or before February 16, 2016. We must receive requests for public hearings, in writing, at the address shown in **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** by February 1, 2016.

**ADDRESSES:** You may submit comments by one of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments to Docket No. FWS-R7-MB-2015-0158.
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R7-MB-2015-0158; Division of Policy, Performance, and Management Programs; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 5275 Leesburg Place, MS: BPHC; Falls Church, VA 22041-3803.

We will not accept email or faxes. We will post all comments on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means that we will post any personal information you provide us (see the Public Comment Procedures section, below, for more information).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Donna Dewhurst, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1011 E. Tudor Road, Mail Stop 201, Anchorage, AK 99503; (907) 786-3499.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:****Public Comment Procedures**

To ensure that any action resulting from this proposed rule will be as accurate and as effective as possible, we request that you send relevant information for our consideration. The comments that will be most useful and likely to influence our decisions are those that you support by quantitative information or studies and those that include citations to, and analyses of, the applicable laws and regulations. Please make your comments as specific as possible and explain the basis for them. In addition, please include sufficient information with your comments to allow us to authenticate any scientific or commercial data you include.

You must submit your comments and materials concerning this proposed rule by one of the methods listed above in the **ADDRESSES** section. We will not accept comments sent by email or fax or to an address not listed in **ADDRESSES**. If you submit a comment via <http://www.regulations.gov>, your entire comment—including any personal identifying information, such as your address, telephone number, or email address—will be posted on the Web site. When you submit a comment, the system receives it immediately. However, the comment will not be publicly viewable until we post it, which might not occur until several days after submission.

If you mail or hand-carry a hardcopy comment directly to us that includes personal information, you may request at the top of your document that we withhold this information from public review. However, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. To ensure that the electronic docket for this rulemaking is complete and all comments we receive are publicly available, we will post all hardcopy comments on <http://www.regulations.gov>.

In addition, comments and materials we receive, as well as supporting documentation used in preparing this proposed rule, will be available for public inspection in two ways:

- (1) You can view them on <http://www.regulations.gov>. Search for FWS-R7-MB-2015-0158, which is the docket number for this rulemaking.
- (2) You can make an appointment, during normal business hours, to view the comments and materials in person at the Division of Migratory Bird

Management, MS: MB, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803; (703) 358-1714.

**Public Availability of Comments**

As stated above in more detail, before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

**Why is this rulemaking necessary?**

This rulemaking is necessary because, by law, the migratory bird harvest season is closed unless opened by the Secretary of the Interior, and the regulations governing subsistence harvest of migratory birds in Alaska are subject to public review and annual approval. This rulemaking proposes regulations for the taking of migratory birds for subsistence uses in Alaska during the spring and summer of 2016. This proposed rule also sets forth a list of migratory bird season openings and closures in Alaska by region.

**How do I find the history of these regulations?**

Background information, including past events leading to this rulemaking, accomplishments since the Migratory Bird Treaties with Canada and Mexico were amended, and a history, were originally addressed in the **Federal Register** on August 16, 2002 (67 FR 53511) and most recently on February 23, 2015 (80 FR 9392).

Recent **Federal Register** documents and all final rules setting forth the annual harvest regulations are available at <http://www.fws.gov/alaska/ambcc/regulations.htm> or by contacting the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

**What is the process for issuing regulations for the subsistence harvest of migratory birds in Alaska?**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service or we) is proposing migratory bird subsistence harvest regulations in Alaska for the 2016 season. These proposed regulations allow for the continuation of customary and traditional subsistence uses of migratory birds in Alaska and prescribe regional information on when and where the harvesting of birds may occur. These proposed regulations were developed under a co-management process

involving the Service, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Alaska Native representatives.

We opened the process to establish regulations for the 2016 spring and summer subsistence harvest of migratory birds in Alaska in a proposed rule published in the **Federal Register** on April 13, 2015 (80 FR 19852), to amend 50 CFR part 20. While that proposed rule primarily addressed the regulatory process for hunting migratory birds for all purposes throughout the United States, we also discussed the background and history of Alaska subsistence regulations, explained the annual process for their establishment, and requested proposals for the 2016 season. The rulemaking processes for both types of migratory bird harvest are related, and the April 13, 2015, proposed rule explained the connection between the two.

The Alaska Migratory Bird Co-management Council (Co-management Council) held meetings on April 8–9, 2015, to develop recommendations for changes that would take effect during the 2016 harvest season. Changes were recommended for the permanent regulations in subparts A and C of 50 CFR part 92, and the consent agenda package of carry-over regulations was amended to request a limited emperor goose harvest for 2016; these recommended changes were presented first to the Pacific Flyway Council and then to the Service Regulations Committee (SRC) for approval at the committee's meeting on July 31, 2015.

#### **Who is eligible to hunt under these regulations?**

Eligibility to harvest under the regulations established in 2003 was limited to permanent residents, regardless of race, in villages located within the Alaska Peninsula, Kodiak Archipelago, the Aleutian Islands, and in areas north and west of the Alaska Range (50 CFR 92.5). These geographical restrictions opened the initial migratory bird subsistence harvest to about 13 percent of Alaska residents. High-populated, roaded areas such as Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna and Fairbanks North Star boroughs, the Kenai Peninsula roaded area, the Gulf of Alaska roaded area, and Southeast Alaska were excluded from eligible subsistence harvest areas.

Based on petitions requesting inclusion in the harvest in 2004, we added 13 additional communities based on criteria set forth in 50 CFR 92.5(c). These communities were Gulkana, Gakona, Tazlina, Copper Center, Mentasta Lake, Chitina, Chistochina, Tatitlek, Chenega, Port Graham,

Nanwalek, Tyonek, and Hoonah, with a combined population of 2,766. In 2005, we added three additional communities for glaucous-winged gull egg gathering only, based on petitions requesting inclusion. These southeastern communities were Craig, Hyدابurg, and Yakutat, with a combined population of 2,459, based on the latest census information at that time.

In 2007, we enacted the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's request to expand the Fairbanks North Star Borough excluded area to include the Central Interior area. This action excluded the following communities from participation in this harvest: Big Delta/Fort Greely, Healy, McKinley Park/Village, and Ferry, with a combined population of 2,812.

In 2012, we received a request from the Native Village of Eyak to include Cordova, Alaska, for a limited season that would legalize the traditional gathering of gull eggs and the hunting of waterfowl during spring. This request resulted in a new, limited harvest of spring waterfowl and gull eggs starting in 2014.

#### **What is different in the regulations for 2016?**

##### *Subpart A*

Under subpart A, General Provisions, we are proposing to amend § 92.4 by adding a new definition for “Edible meat” and revising the definition for “Nonwasteful taking.” These changes were requested in 2014 by the Bristol Bay Regional Council, which recommended that all edible parts of migratory waterfowl must be salvaged when harvested. The topic was originally brought up by the Association of Village Council Presidents after an incident in their region where tundra swans were only breasted and the remainder of the bird was discarded. The concern was that “indigenous inhabitants” harvesters come from a variety of different cultures, and it was expressed that subsistence should involve retaining the whole bird for food and other uses.

##### *Subpart C*

Under subpart C, General Regulations Governing Subsistence Harvest, we are proposing to amend § 92.22, the list of birds open to subsistence harvest, by updating scientific names for six species and clarifying the nomenclature for Canada goose subspecies. These nomenclature updates come from the Service and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

##### *Subpart D*

The regulations we are proposing for subpart D, Annual Regulations Governing Subsistence Harvest, are the same as the 2015 regulations. While we are not proposing any changes to the 2015 regulations for subpart D in this 2016 proposal, we provide information below on potential changes to the proposed regulations for this subpart in the 2017 migratory bird subsistence harvest regulations in Alaska.

The Co-management Council proposed a new emperor goose (*Chen canagica*) limited subsistence hunt for the 2016 season. Since 2012, the Co-management Council has received regulatory proposals from the Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak, the Kodiak-Aleutians Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, the Yaquillrit Keutisti Council (Bristol Bay), and the Bering Strait/Norton Sound Migratory Bird Council (Kawerak) to open the harvest of emperor geese for the subsistence season. Since the hunting season has been closed since 1987 for emperor geese, the Co-management Council created a subcommittee to address these proposals. The emperor goose harvest is guided by the 2006 Pacific Flyway Management Plan and the 2005–2006 Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Goose Management Plan. Over 95 percent of the emperor goose population breeds on the Yukon-Kuskowim Delta of Alaska, and most emperor geese winter in remote western Alaska with the remainder wintering in Russia. The Pacific Flyway Council recognizes the 3-year average abundance estimate derived from the emperor goose spring population survey on the Alaska Peninsula as the management index to guide harvest management decisions. The Pacific Flyway Council's Emperor Goose Management Plan and the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Goose Management Plan indicate that a harvest can be considered when the 3-year average abundance index is at least 80,000 birds. This threshold has not been reached since 1984, and Alaska Natives have questioned the survey methods used to determine the population index.

In addition, two studies are being conducted concurrently by the Service and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. The first study is designed to provide a comprehensive evaluation of all available emperor goose survey data and assess harvest potential of the population. The second study is designed to develop a Bayesian state space population model to improve estimates of population size by integrating current population assessment methods using all available

data sets. The model provides a framework from which to make inferences about survival rates, age structure, and population size. The results of these studies will assist in amending the management plans.

The Service conducted the spring emperor goose survey April 25–28, 2015, and results indicated that the 2015 spring index (98,155) was 23 percent above the 2014 count (79,883), and 49 percent higher than the long-term (1981–2014) average (65,923). The most recent 3-year average count (2012, 2014, 2015) is 81,875 geese and the highest on record since 1984. Further, it is above the threshold for consideration of an open hunting season on emperor geese as specified in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Goose Management Plan and the Pacific Flyway Council Management Plan for emperor geese.

As a result of this new information, the Co-management Council amended their motion of the consent agenda and proposed to add an allowance for a limited emperor goose harvest in 2016.

The Pacific Flyway Council met in July 2015, and supported the Co-management Council's recommendation to work with the State of Alaska and the Service to develop harvest regulations and monitoring for a limited emperor goose harvest in 2016. On July 31, 2015, the SRC supported the Co-management Council's proposed limited harvest of emperor geese for the 2016 Alaska spring and summer subsistence season. However, the approval was provisional based upon the following:

- (1) A limited harvest of 3,500 emperor geese to ensure that population growth continues toward the Flyway management plan objective;
- (2) A harvest allocation (e.g., an individual, family, or Village quota or permit hunt) that ensures harvest does not exceed 3,500;
- (3) Agreement on a monitoring program to index abundance of the emperor goose population; and
- (4) A revised Pacific Flyway Emperor Goose Management Plan including harvest allocation among all parties (including spring/summer and fall/winter), population objective, population monitoring, and thresholds for season restriction or closure.

The harvest allocation design and harvest monitoring plan are to be completed by November 1, 2015. Additionally, there was an explicit statement that the limited, legalized harvest of 3,500 birds was not in addition to existing subsistence harvest (approximately 3,200 emperor geese). The 3,500 bird allowable harvest is to be allocated to subsistence users during the spring and summer subsistence season.

The SRC suggested that the allowable harvest should be monitored to ensure it does not exceed 3,500 birds.

On August 13–14, and September 21, 2015, the Co-management Council Native Caucus met separately and with all partners to discuss options available to limit and monitor the harvest, as well as options to allocate the 3,500 birds across the six regions where emperor geese occur. Given the limited time provided to address the four conditions placed on this new harvest by the SRC, all partners agreed that the best course of action would be to spend additional time working together to develop a culturally sensitive framework tailored to each participating region that conserves the population and adequately addresses the data needs of all partners. In support of this recommendation, the Co-management Council took action to: Postpone an emperor goose harvest until 2017; work with all partners to develop the harvest framework; and work with their Emperor Goose Subcommittee and the Pacific Flyway Council on updating the Pacific Flyway Emperor Goose Management Plan.

**How will the Service ensure that the subsistence harvest will not raise overall migratory bird harvest or threaten the conservation of endangered and threatened species?**

We have monitored subsistence harvest for the past 25 years through the use of household surveys in the most heavily used subsistence harvest areas, such as the Yukon—Kuskokwim Delta. In recent years, more intensive surveys combined with outreach efforts focused on species identification have been added to improve the accuracy of information gathered from regions still reporting some subsistence harvest of listed or candidate species.

*Spectacled and Steller's Eiders*

Spectacled eiders (*Somateria fischeri*) and the Alaska-breeding population of Steller's eiders (*Polysticta stelleri*) are listed as threatened species. Their migration and breeding distribution overlap with areas where the spring and summer subsistence migratory bird hunt is open in Alaska. Both species are closed to hunting, although harvest surveys and Service documentation indicate both species have been taken in several regions of Alaska.

The Service has dual objectives and responsibilities for authorizing a subsistence harvest while protecting migratory birds and threatened species. Although these objectives continue to be challenging, they are not irreconcilable, provided that regulations continue to

protect threatened species, measures to address documented threats are implemented, and the subsistence community and other conservation partners commit to working together. With these dual objectives in mind, the Service, working with North Slope partners, developed measures in 2009, to further reduce the potential for shooting mortality or injury of closed species. These conservation measures included: (1) Increased waterfowl hunter outreach and community awareness through partnering with the North Slope Migratory Bird Task Force; and (2) continued enforcement of the migratory bird regulations that are protective of listed eiders.

This proposed rule continues to focus on the North Slope from Barrow to Point Hope because Steller's eiders from the listed Alaska breeding population are known to breed and migrate there. These regulations are designed to address several ongoing eider management needs by clarifying for subsistence users that (1) Service law enforcement personnel have authority to verify species of birds possessed by hunters, and (2) it is illegal to possess any species of bird closed to harvest. This rule also describes how the Service's existing authority of emergency closure would be implemented, if necessary, to protect Steller's eiders. We are always willing to discuss regulations with our partners on the North Slope to ensure protection of closed species as well as provide subsistence hunters an opportunity to harvest migratory birds in a way that maintains the culture and traditional harvest of the community. The proposed regulations pertaining to bag checks and possession of illegal birds are deemed necessary to monitor the number of closed eider species taken during the subsistence hunt.

The Service is aware of and appreciates the considerable efforts by North Slope partners to raise awareness and educate hunters on Steller's eider conservation via the bird fair, meetings, radio shows, signs, school visits, and one-on-one contacts. We also recognize that no listed eiders have been documented shot from 2009 through 2012; however, one Steller's eider and one spectacled eider were found shot during the summer of 2013, and one Steller's eider was found shot in 2014. In 2015, one spectacled eider was found dead, and it appeared to have been shot by a hunter. The Service acknowledges progress made with the other eider conservation measures, including partnering with the North Slope Migratory Bird Task Force, for increased waterfowl hunter awareness and

continued enforcement of the regulations. To reduce the threat of shooting mortality of threatened eiders, we continue to work with North Slope partners to conduct education and outreach. Conservation measures are being continued by the Service, with the amount of effort and emphasis being based on regulatory adherence. In addition, the emergency closure authority provides another level of assurance if an unexpected number of Steller's eiders are killed by shooting (50 CFR 92.21 and 50 CFR 92.32).

The longstanding general emergency closure provision at 50 CFR 92.21 specifies that the harvest may be closed or temporarily suspended upon finding that a continuation of the regulation allowing the harvest would pose an imminent threat to the conservation of any migratory bird population. With regard to Steller's eiders, the proposed regulation at 50 CFR 92.32, carried over from the past 5 years, clarifies that we will take action under 50 CFR 92.21 as is necessary to prevent further take of Steller's eiders, and that action could include temporary or long-term closures of the harvest in all or a portion of the geographic area open to harvest. When and if mortality of threatened eiders is documented, we will evaluate each mortality event by criteria such as cause, quantity, sex, age, location, and date. We will consult with the Co-management Council when we are considering an emergency closure. If we determine that an emergency closure is necessary, we will design it to minimize its impact on the subsistence harvest.

#### Endangered Species Act Consideration

Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1536) requires the Secretary of the Interior to "review other programs administered by him and utilize such programs in furtherance of the purposes of the Act" and to "insure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out \* \* \* is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered species or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of [critical] habitat. \* \* \*" Prior to issuance of annual spring and summer subsistence regulations, we would consult under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act; 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), to ensure that the 2016 subsistence harvest is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any species designated as endangered or threatened, or modify or destroy its critical habitats, and that the regulations are consistent with conservation programs for those species. Consultation under section 7 of the Act for the annual

subsistence take regulations may cause us to change these regulations. Our biological opinion resulting from the section 7 consultation is a public document available from the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

#### Statutory Authority

We derive our authority to issue these regulations from the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, at 16 U.S.C. 712(1), which authorizes the Secretary of the Interior, in accordance with the treaties with Canada, Mexico, Japan, and Russia, to "issue such regulations as may be necessary to assure that the taking of migratory birds and the collection of their eggs, by the indigenous inhabitants of the State of Alaska, shall be permitted for their own nutritional and other essential needs, as determined by the Secretary of the Interior, during seasons established so as to provide for the preservation and maintenance of stocks of migratory birds."

#### Required Determinations

##### *Regulatory Planning and Review* (Executive Orders 12866 and 13563)

Executive Order 12866 provides that the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) will review all significant rules. The OIRA has determined that this proposed rule is not significant.

Executive Order 13563 reaffirms the principles of Executive Order 12866 while calling for improvements in the nation's regulatory system to promote predictability, to reduce uncertainty, and to use the best, most innovative, and least burdensome tools for achieving regulatory ends. The executive order directs agencies to consider regulatory approaches that reduce burdens and maintain flexibility and freedom of choice for the public where these approaches are relevant, feasible, and consistent with regulatory objectives. Executive Order 13563 emphasizes further that regulations must be based on the best available science and that the rulemaking process must allow for public participation and an open exchange of ideas. We have developed this rule in a manner consistent with these requirements.

##### *Regulatory Flexibility Act*

The Department of the Interior certifies that, if adopted, this rule will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities as defined under the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. 601 *et seq.*). A regulatory flexibility analysis is not required. Accordingly, a Small Entity Compliance Guide is not required. This

proposed rule would legalize a pre-existing subsistence activity, and the resources harvested will be consumed.

##### *Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act*

This proposed rule is not a major rule under 5 U.S.C. 804(2), the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act. This proposed rule:

(a) Would not have an annual effect on the economy of \$100 million or more. It would legalize and regulate a traditional subsistence activity. It would not result in a substantial increase in subsistence harvest or a significant change in harvesting patterns. The commodities that would be regulated under this proposed rule are migratory birds. This proposed rule deals with legalizing the subsistence harvest of migratory birds and, as such, does not involve commodities traded in the marketplace. A small economic benefit from this proposed rule would derive from the sale of equipment and ammunition to carry out subsistence hunting. Most, if not all, businesses that sell hunting equipment in rural Alaska qualify as small businesses. We have no reason to believe that this proposed rule would lead to a disproportionate distribution of benefits.

(b) Would not cause a major increase in costs or prices for consumers; individual industries; Federal, State, or local government agencies; or geographic regions. This proposed rule does not deal with traded commodities and, therefore, does not have an impact on prices for consumers.

(c) Would not have significant adverse effects on competition, employment, investment, productivity, innovation, or the ability of U.S.-based enterprises to compete with foreign-based enterprises. This proposed rule deals with the harvesting of wildlife for personal consumption. It does not regulate the marketplace in any way to generate substantial effects on the economy or the ability of businesses to compete.

##### *Unfunded Mandates Reform Act*

We have determined and certified under the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (2 U.S.C. 1501 *et seq.*) that this proposed rule would not impose a cost of \$100 million or more in any given year on local, State, or tribal governments or private entities. The proposed rule does not have a significant or unique effect on State, local, or tribal governments or the private sector. A statement containing the information required by the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act is not required. Participation on regional management bodies and the Co-

management Council requires travel expenses for some Alaska Native organizations and local governments. In addition, they assume some expenses related to coordinating involvement of village councils in the regulatory process. Total coordination and travel expenses for all Alaska Native organizations are estimated to be less than \$300,000 per year. In a notice of decision (65 FR 16405; March 28, 2000), we identified 7 to 12 partner organizations (Alaska Native nonprofits and local governments) to administer the regional programs. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game also incurs expenses for travel to Co-management Council and regional management body meetings. In addition, the State of Alaska will be required to provide technical staff support to each of the regional management bodies and to the Co-management Council. Expenses for the State's involvement may exceed \$100,000 per year, but should not exceed \$150,000 per year. When funding permits, we make annual grant agreements available to the partner organizations and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to help offset their expenses.

#### *Takings (Executive Order 12630)*

Under the criteria in Executive Order 12630, this proposed rule would not have significant takings implications. This proposed rule is not specific to particular land ownership, but applies to the harvesting of migratory bird resources throughout Alaska. A takings implication assessment is not required.

#### *Federalism (Executive Order 13132)*

Under the criteria in Executive Order 13132, this proposed rule does not have sufficient federalism implications to warrant the preparation of a federalism summary impact statement. We discuss effects of this proposed rule on the State of Alaska in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act section above. We worked with the State of Alaska to develop these proposed regulations. Therefore, a federalism summary impact statement is not required.

#### *Civil Justice Reform (Executive Order 12988)*

The Department, in promulgating this proposed rule, has determined that it will not unduly burden the judicial system and that it meets the requirements of sections 3(a) and 3(b)(2) of Executive Order 12988.

#### *Government-to-Government Relations With Native American Tribal Governments*

Consistent with Executive Order 13175 (65 FR 67249; November 6, 2000), "Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments," and Department of Interior policy on Consultation with Indian Tribes (December 1, 2011), we will send letters to all 229 Alaska Federally recognized Indian tribes. Consistent with Congressional direction (Public Law 108-199, div. H, Sec. 161, Jan. 23, 2004, 118 Stat. 452; as amended by Public Law 108-447, div. H, title V, Sec. 518, Dec. 8, 2004, 118 Stat. 3267), we will be sending letters to approximately 200 Alaska Native corporations and other tribal entities in Alaska soliciting their input as to whether or not they would like the Service to consult with them on the 2016 migratory bird subsistence harvest regulations.

We implemented the amended treaty with Canada with a focus on local involvement. The treaty calls for the creation of management bodies to ensure an effective and meaningful role for Alaska's indigenous inhabitants in the conservation of migratory birds. According to the Letter of Submittal, management bodies are to include Alaska Native, Federal, and State of Alaska representatives as equals. They develop recommendations for, among other things: seasons and bag limits, methods and means of take, law enforcement policies, population and harvest monitoring, education programs, research and use of traditional knowledge, and habitat protection. The management bodies involve village councils to the maximum extent possible in all aspects of management. To ensure maximum input at the village level, we required each of the 11 participating regions to create regional management bodies consisting of at least one representative from the participating villages. The regional management bodies meet twice annually to review and/or submit proposals to the Statewide body.

#### *Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA)*

This proposed rule does not contain any new collections of information that require Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval under the PRA (44 U.S.C. 3501 *et seq.*). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. OMB has reviewed and approved our collection of information associated with:

- Voluntary annual household surveys that we use to determine levels of subsistence take (OMB Control Number 1018-0124, expires June 30, 2016).

- Permits associated with subsistence hunting (OMB Control Number 1018-0075, expires February 29, 2016).

#### *National Environmental Policy Act Consideration (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*)*

The annual regulations and options are considered in a October 2016 environmental assessment, "Managing Migratory Bird Subsistence Hunting in Alaska: Hunting Regulations for the 2016 Spring/Summer Harvest," dated October 9, 2015. Copies are available from the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** or at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

#### *Energy Supply, Distribution, or Use (Executive Order 13211)*

Executive Order 13211 requires agencies to prepare Statements of Energy Effects when undertaking certain actions. This is not a significant regulatory action under this Executive Order; it would allow only for traditional subsistence harvest and improve conservation of migratory birds by allowing effective regulation of this harvest. Further, this proposed rule is not expected to significantly affect energy supplies, distribution, or use. Therefore, this action is not a significant energy action under Executive Order 13211, and a Statement of Energy Effects is not required.

#### **List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 92**

Hunting, Treaties, Wildlife.

#### **Proposed Regulation Promulgation**

For the reasons set out in the preamble, we propose to amend title 50, chapter I, subchapter G, of the Code of Federal Regulations as follows:

#### **PART 92—MIGRATORY BIRD SUBSISTENCE HARVEST IN ALASKA**

■ 1. The authority citation for part 92 continues to read as follows:

**Authority:** 16 U.S.C. 703-712.

#### **Subpart A—General Provisions**

■ 2. Amend § 92.4 by adding, in alphabetical order, a definition for "Edible meat" and revising the definition for "Nonwasteful taking" to read as follows:

#### **§ 92.4 Definitions.**

\* \* \* \* \*

*Edible meat* means the meat from the breast, back, thighs, legs, wings, gizzard, and heart. The head, neck, feet, other

internal organs, and skin are considered inedible byproducts, and not edible meat, for all provisions of this part.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Nonwasteful taking* means making a reasonable effort to retrieve all birds killed or wounded, and retaining all edible meat until the birds have been transported to the location where they will be consumed, processed, or preserved as human food.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Subpart C—General Regulations Governing Subsistence Harvest

■ 3. Amend § 92.22 by:

■ a. Revising paragraph (a)(3);

■ b. Removing and reserving paragraph (a)(4); and

■ c. Revising paragraphs (a)(5) and (6), (i)(3), (13), and (15), (j)(4) and (15), and (l)(2).

The revisions read as follows:

#### § 92.22 Subsistence migratory bird species.

\* \* \* \* \*

(a)(3) Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*).

\* \* \* \* \*

(a)(5) Canada goose, subspecies Aleutian goose—except in the Semidi Islands.

(a)(6) Canada goose, subspecies cackling goose—except no egg gathering is permitted.

\* \* \* \* \*

(i)(3) Spotted sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*).

\* \* \* \* \*

(i)(13) Wilson's snipe (*Gallinago delicata*).

\* \* \* \* \*

(i)(15) Red phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*).

\* \* \* \* \*

(j)(4) Bonaparte's gull (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*).

\* \* \* \* \*

(j)(15) Aleutian tern (*Onychoprion aleuticus*).

\* \* \* \* \*

(l)(2) Snowy owl (*Bubo scandiacus*).

### Subpart D—Annual Regulations Governing Subsistence Harvest

■ 4. Amend subpart D by adding § 92.31 to read as follows:

#### § 92.31 Region-specific regulations.

The 2016 season dates for the eligible subsistence harvest areas are as follows:

(a) *Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Region*.

(1) Northern Unit (Pribilof Islands):

(i) Season: April 2–June 30.

(ii) Closure: July 1–August 31.

(2) Central Unit (Aleutian Region's eastern boundary on the Alaska

Peninsula westward to and including Unalaska Island):

(i) Season: April 2–June 15 and July 16–August 31.

(ii) Closure: June 16–July 15.

(iii) Special Black Brant Season Closure: August 16–August 31, only in Izembek and Moffet lagoons.

(iv) Special Tundra Swan Closure: All hunting and egg gathering closed in Game Management Units 9(D) and 10.

(3) Western Unit (Umnak Island west to and including Attu Island):

(i) Season: April 2–July 15 and August 16–August 31.

(ii) Closure: July 16–August 15.

(b) *Yukon/Kuskokwim Delta Region*.

(1) Season: April 2–August 31.

(2) Closure: 30-day closure dates to be announced by the Service's Alaska Regional Director or his designee, after consultation with field biologists and the Association of Village Council President's Waterfowl Conservation Committee. This 30-day period will occur between June 1 and August 15 of each year. A press release announcing the actual closure dates will be forwarded to regional newspapers and radio and television stations.

(3) Special Black Brant and Cackling Goose Season Hunting Closure: From the period when egg laying begins until young birds are fledged. Closure dates to be announced by the Service's Alaska Regional Director or his designee, after consultation with field biologists and the Association of Village Council President's Waterfowl Conservation Committee. A press release announcing the actual closure dates will be forwarded to regional newspapers and radio and television stations.

(c) *Bristol Bay Region*. (1) Season: April 2–June 14 and July 16–August 31 (general season); April 2–July 15 for seabird egg gathering only.

(2) Closure: June 15–July 15 (general season); July 16–August 31 (seabird egg gathering).

(d) *Bering Strait/Norton Sound Region*. (1) Stebbins/St. Michael Area (Point Romanof to Canal Point):

(i) Season: April 15–June 14 and July 16–August 31.

(ii) Closure: June 15–July 15.

(2) Remainder of the region:

(i) Season: April 2–June 14 and July 16–August 31 for waterfowl; April 2–July 19 and August 21–August 31 for all other birds.

(ii) Closure: June 15–July 15 for waterfowl; July 20–August 20 for all other birds.

(e) *Kodiak Archipelago Region*, except for the Kodiak Island roaded area, which is closed to the harvesting of migratory birds and their eggs. The closed area consists of all lands and

waters (including exposed tidelands) east of a line extending from Crag Point in the north to the west end of Saltery Cove in the south and all lands and water south of a line extending from Termination Point along the north side of Cascade Lake extending to Anton Larsen Bay. Marine waters adjacent to the closed area are closed to harvest within 500 feet from the water's edge. The offshore islands are open to harvest.

(1) Season: April 2–June 30 and July 31–August 31 for seabirds; April 2–June 20 and July 22–August 31 for all other birds.

(2) Closure: July 1–July 30 for seabirds; June 21–July 21 for all other birds.

(f) *Northwest Arctic Region*. (1) Season: April 2–June 9 and August 15–August 31 (hunting in general); waterfowl egg gathering May 20–June 9 only; seabird egg gathering May 20–July 12 only; hunting molting/non-nesting waterfowl July 1–July 31 only.

(2) Closure: June 10–August 14, except for the taking of seabird eggs and molting/non-nesting waterfowl as provided in paragraph (f)(1) of this section.

(g) *North Slope Region*. (1) Southern Unit (Southwestern North Slope regional boundary east to Peard Bay, everything west of the longitude line 158°30' W. and south of the latitude line 70°45' N. to the west bank of the Ikpikpuk River, and everything south of the latitude line 69°45' N. between the west bank of the Ikpikpuk River to the east bank of Sagavinirktok River):

(i) Season: April 2–June 29 and July 30–August 31 for seabirds; April 2–June 19 and July 20–August 31 for all other birds.

(ii) Closure: June 30–July 29 for seabirds; June 20–July 19 for all other birds.

(iii) Special Black Brant Hunting Opening: From June 20–July 5. The open area consists of the coastline, from mean high water line outward to include open water, from Nokotlek Point east to longitude line 158°30' W. This includes Peard Bay, Kugrua Bay, and Wainwright Inlet, but not the Kuk and Kugrua river drainages.

(2) Northern Unit (At Peard Bay, everything east of the longitude line 158°30' W. and north of the latitude line 70°45' N. to west bank of the Ikpikpuk River, and everything north of the latitude line 69°45' N. between the west bank of the Ikpikpuk River to the east bank of Sagavinirktok River):

(i) Season: April 2–June 6 and July 7–August 31 for king and common eiders; April 2–June 15 and July 16–August 31 for all other birds.

(ii) Closure: June 7–July 6 for king and common eiders; June 16–July 15 for all other birds.

(3) Eastern Unit (East of eastern bank of the Sagavanirktok River):

(i) Season: April 2–June 19 and July 20–August 31.

(ii) Closure: June 20–July 19.

(4) All Units: Yellow-billed loons. Annually, up to 20 yellow-billed loons total for the region inadvertently entangled in subsistence fishing nets in the North Slope Region may be kept for subsistence use.

(5) North Coastal Zone (Cape Thompson north to Point Hope and east along the Arctic Ocean coastline around Point Barrow to Ross Point, including Iko Bay, and 5 miles inland).

(i) No person may at any time, by any means, or in any manner, possess or have in custody any migratory bird or part thereof, taken in violation of subpart C and D of this part.

(ii) Upon request from a Service law enforcement officer, hunters taking, attempting to take, or transporting migratory birds taken during the subsistence harvest season must present them to the officer for species identification.

(h) *Interior Region*. (1) Season: April 2–June 14 and July 16–August 31; egg gathering May 1–June 14 only.

(2) Closure: June 15–July 15.

(i) *Upper Copper River Region* (Harvest Area: Game Management Units 11 and 13) (Eligible communities: Gulkana, Chitina, Tazlina, Copper Center, Gakona, Mentasta Lake, Chistochina and Cantwell). (1) Season: April 15–May 26 and June 27–August 31.

(2) Closure: May 27–June 26.

(3) The Copper River Basin communities listed above also documented traditional use harvesting birds in Game Management Unit 12, making them eligible to hunt in this unit using the seasons specified in paragraph (h) of this section.

(j) *Gulf of Alaska Region*. (1) Prince William Sound Area West (Harvest area: Game Management Unit 6[D]), (Eligible Chugach communities: Chenega Bay, Tatitlek):

(i) Season: April 2–May 31 and July 1–August 31.

(ii) Closure: June 1–30.

(2) Prince William Sound Area East (Harvest area: Game Management Units

6[B]and [C]—Barrier Islands between Strawberry Channel and Softtuk Bar), (Eligible Chugach communities: Cordova):

(i) Season: April 2–April 30 (hunting); May 1–May 31 (gull egg gathering).

(ii) Closure: May 1–August 31 (hunting); April 2–30 and June 1–August 31 (gull egg gathering).

(iii) Species Open for Hunting: Greater white-fronted goose; snow goose; gadwall; Eurasian and American wigeon; blue-winged and green-winged teal; mallard; northern shoveler; northern pintail; canvasback; redhead; ring-necked duck; greater and lesser scaup; king and common eider; harlequin duck; surf, white-winged, and black scoter; long-tailed duck; bufflehead; common and Barrow's goldeneye; hooded, common, and red-breasted merganser; and sandhill crane. Species open for egg gathering: glaucous-winged, herring, and mew gulls.

(iv) Use of Boats/All-Terrain Vehicles: No hunting from motorized vehicles or any form of watercraft.

(v) Special Registration: All hunters or egg gatherers must possess an annual permit, which is available from the Cordova offices of the Native Village of Eyak and the U.S. Forest Service.

(3) Kachemak Bay Area (Harvest area: Game Management Unit 15[C] South of a line connecting the tip of Homer Spit to the mouth of Fox River) (Eligible Chugach Communities: Port Graham, Nanwalek):

(i) Season: April 2–May 31 and July 1–August 31.

(ii) Closure: June 1–30.

(k) *Cook Inlet* (Harvest area: Portions of Game Management Unit 16[B] as specified below) (Eligible communities: Tyonek only):

(1) Season: April 2–May 31—That portion of Game Management Unit 16(B) south of the Skwentna River and west of the Yentna River, and August 1–31—That portion of Game Management Unit 16(B) south of the Beluga River, Beluga Lake, and the Triumvirate Glacier.

(2) Closure: June 1–July 31.

(l) *Southeast Alaska*. (1) Community of Hoonah (Harvest area: National Forest lands in Icy Strait and Cross Sound, including Middle Pass Rock near the Inian Islands, Table Rock in Cross Sound, and other traditional locations

on the coast of Yakobi Island. The land and waters of Glacier Bay National Park remain closed to all subsistence harvesting (50 CFR part 100.3(a)):

(i) Season: Glaucous-winged gull egg gathering only: May 15–June 30.

(ii) Closure: July 1–August 31.

(2) Communities of Craig and Hydaburg (Harvest area: Small islands and adjacent shoreline of western Prince of Wales Island from Point Baker to Cape Chacon, but also including Coronation and Warren islands):

(i) Season: Glaucous-winged gull egg gathering only: May 15–June 30.

(ii) Closure: July 1–August 31.

(3) Community of Yakutat (Harvest area: Icy Bay (Icy Cape to Point Riou), and coastal lands and islands bordering the Gulf of Alaska from Point Manby southeast to and including Dry Bay):

(i) Season: Glaucous-winged gull egg gathering: May 15–June 30.

(ii) Closure: July 1–August 31.

■ 5. Amend subpart D by adding § 92.32 to read as follows:

**§ 92.32 Emergency regulations to protect Steller's eiders.**

Upon finding that continuation of these subsistence regulations would pose an imminent threat to the conservation of threatened Steller's eiders (*Polysticta stelleri*), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Alaska Regional Director, in consultation with the Co-management Council, will immediately under § 92.21 take action as is necessary to prevent further take. Regulation changes implemented could range from a temporary closure of duck hunting in a small geographic area to large-scale regional or Statewide long-term closures of all subsistence migratory bird hunting. These closures or temporary suspensions will remain in effect until the Regional Director, in consultation with the Co-management Council, determines that the potential for additional Steller's eiders to be taken no longer exists.

Dated: December 8, 2015.

**Karen Hyun,**

*Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.*

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