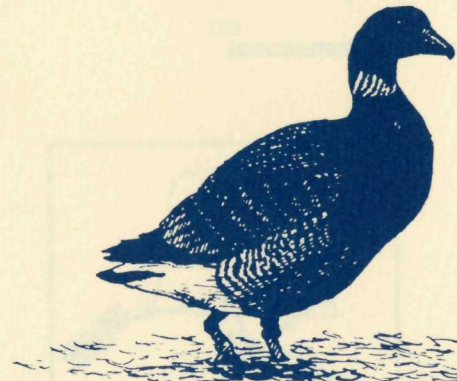
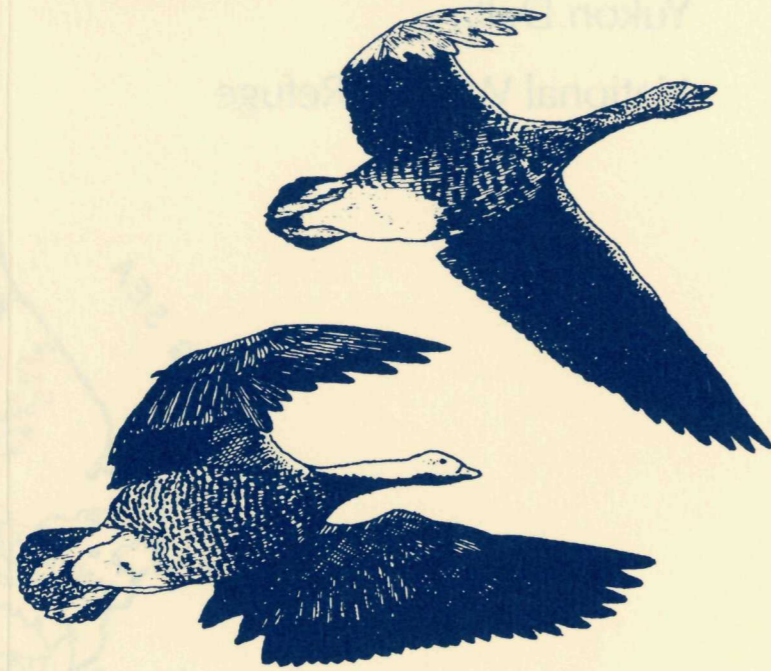
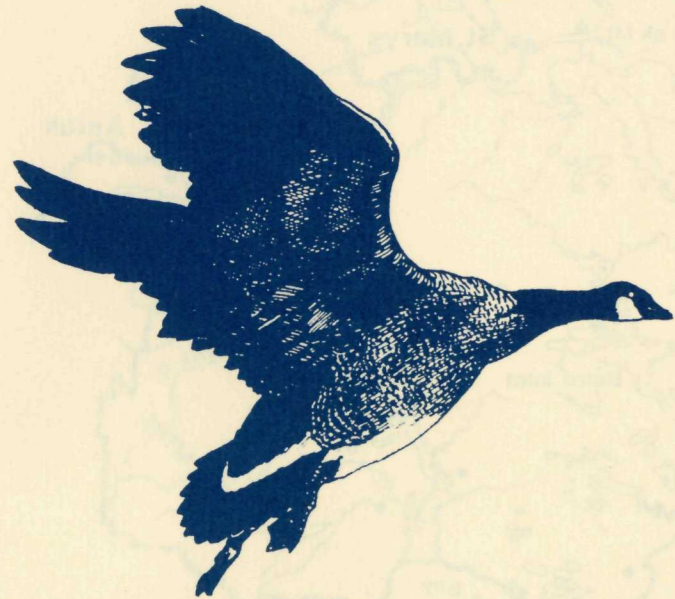


# Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge



## Introduction

Rivers, sloughs, lakes, and ponds are the predominate landscape of the Nation's largest wildlife refuge. Its lands are premier waterfowl habitat with nearly one-third of its 20 million acres covered with water. The refuge was created in 1980 by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act for the purpose of conserving fish and wildlife in their natural diversity, preserving habitat and water resources, and providing the opportunity for subsistence uses by local residents.

## Carved by Water

The most powerful influence of the Yukon Delta terrain is the scouring and building action of water. The Yukon River carves its way over 2,300 miles to the Bering Sea through mountains, foothills, forestland, and tundra. Two hundred miles to the south, the Kuskokwim River also reaches the sea. A centuries-long process, the waters of these two longest rivers in Alaska form a giant delta between their mouths.

The Nulato Hills rise abruptly from the north bank of the Yukon River. The 1.3 million acre Andreafsky Wilderness is located within these hills. The wilderness includes both forks of the scenic Andreafsky River—a designated Wild River.

Nunivak Island is a unique part of the refuge. Located 20 miles offshore in the stormy Bering Sea, the main island and 50 associated islands total nearly 1,700 square miles. Its tundra interior is interspersed with hills, craters, and lava flows. The island's coastline includes sea cliffs, sand dunes, beaches, saltwater lagoons, and rocky shores with coves and bays.

## A Diversity of Species

Spring comes to the Delta with whistling wings, calling, squawking, and honking of millions of birds as they arrive at their traditional breeding grounds. The birds arrive from nearly every state and province in North America and from all continents bordering the Pacific Ocean. The most notable of these migrants are the brant, geese, and swans. More than half of the continent's population of black brant are hatched on the Delta's sensitive coastal habitat. All of North America's cackling Canada geese (a species that is declining) are produced in these coastal lowlands. Large populations of emperor geese, pacific white-fronted geese, and tundra swans nest near the coast and on the inland tundra. No area of similar size is as critical to their survival as the Delta.

Ducks are three times as numerous as geese. Greater scaup, oldsquaw, and pintail are the most abundant species while common scoter, green winged teal, mallard, and wigeon are common. Less numerous are the spectacled and common eiders whose habitat is confined to a narrow coastal zone and the open sea.

An estimated 100 million shore and waterbirds representing over 50 species use the Delta for nesting, resting, and foraging during migration. These include gulls, jaegers, cranes, loons, grebes, plovers, snipe, godwits, sandpipers and the rare bristle-thighed curlew. Dense concentrations of kittiwakes and murrelets, lesser numbers of puffins, auklets, guillemots, and cormorants are found in seabird rookeries along the rocky shores of Cape Romanzoff, Nunivak, and Nelson Islands.

Large mammals such as black and grizzly bear, caribou, and moose are found primarily along the highlands and in the woodlands along rivers. They range on about 20 percent of the refuge with moderate to low densities. Small mammals include the aquatic furbearers—beaver, muskrat, mink, and otter. Arctic and red fox are common; wolf and wolverine infrequently venture from the uplands.

The coastal waters of the Bering Sea support harbor, ribbon, ringed and bearded seals, and walrus. Many species of whales pass along the coast during their migration. Resident fish include trout, char, and grayling in the mountain streams and pike, sheefish, whitefish, and burbot in lowland waters. Each summer great numbers of king, silver, red, pink, and chum salmon migrate through the Delta Rivers to clear upland spawning areas.

Muskox were introduced on Nunivak Island from Greenland in 1935. Through careful management their population is maintained at about 500 animals. This nucleus herd was the source of the expanding populations on the nearby mainland and several other transplants in Alaska.

## Plant Life

During the short summer the area bursts into life. There are hundreds of species of plants on the refuge, many blooming in splashes of color. Most of the land is carpeted by a moist spongy layer of tundra. Permafrost, a layer of permanently frozen soil, lies just beneath the tundra.

Woodland vegetation is found in the inland portions of the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers. Less than 10% of the delta is thinly wooded. Trees grow slowly because of the harsh subarctic conditions. The trails of a single season may last over a decade.



When visiting be careful that your actions do not alter the character of the landscape or disturb biological processes. The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta is a vast but delicate habitat. Its protection is essential to wildlife populations of local, national, and international interest. Make demands on yourself not on the land.

ALASKA 1984  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of National Resources."

The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Refuge Manager  
Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge  
P.O. Box 346  
Bethel, Alaska (99559)  
(907) 543-3151

### A Living Heritage

Yupik Eskimos have depended on land and its resources since crossing the Bering land bridge thousands of years ago. Hundreds of historic sites bear testimony to their way of life. These aboriginal inhabitants traveled widely in search of fish and wildlife resources. Winter villages were small and widely scattered. Their homes were subterranean sod structures supported by whalebone and driftwood. During the brief summer families moved to isolated fishing camps.

Many families still move to summer camps where salmon is caught and dried. Wild game continues to be an important food source. Many traditional ways of preparing meat and furs are still being used. The Yupiks have adopted much of the modern world, but their lives remain linked to the harsh environment.

### Visiting the Delta

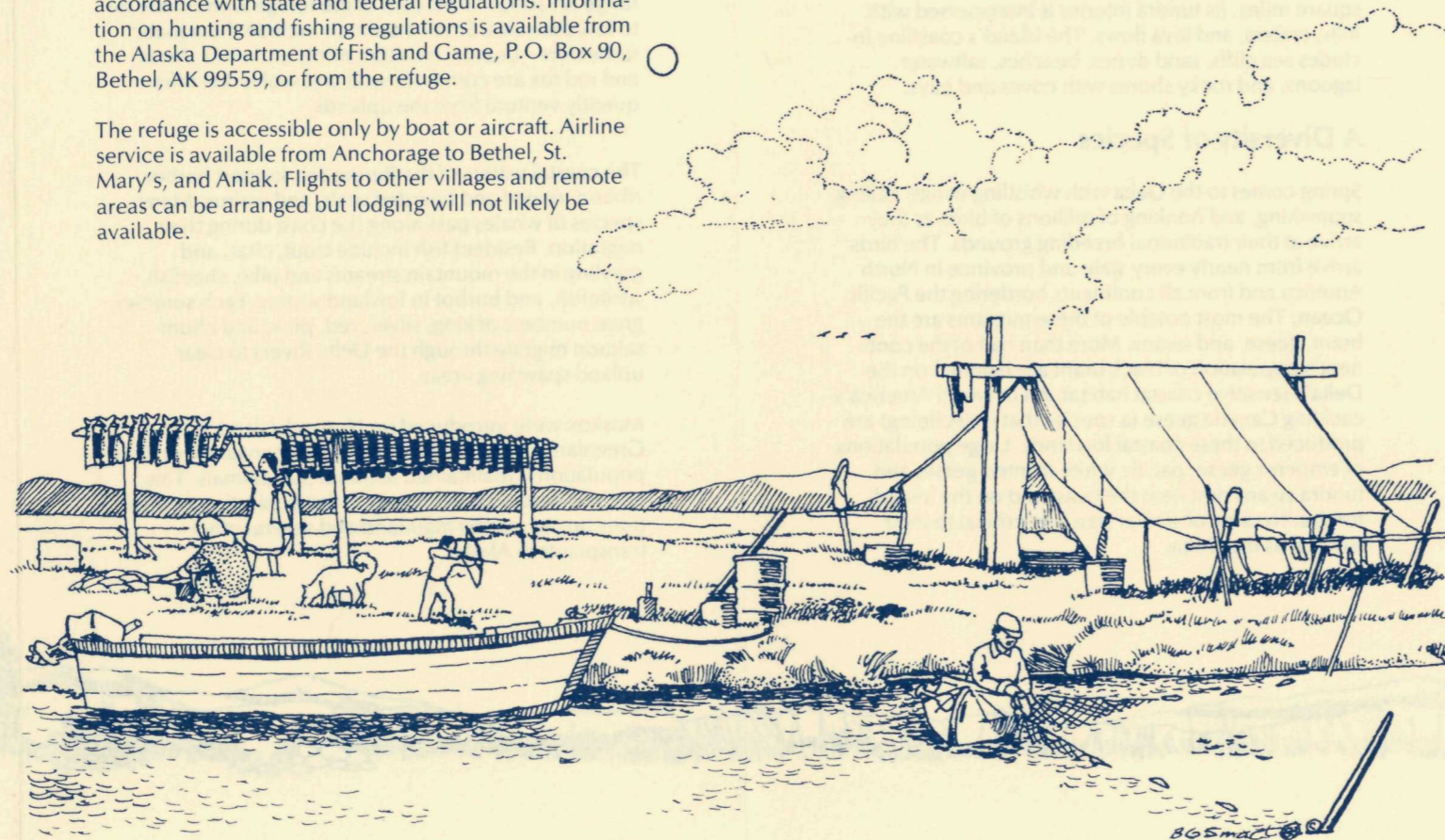
Recreational uses may include wildlife observation, hiking, and boating. Hunting and fishing are allowed in accordance with state and federal regulations. Information on hunting and fishing regulations is available from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, P.O. Box 90, Bethel, AK 99559, or from the refuge.

The refuge is accessible only by boat or aircraft. Airline service is available from Anchorage to Bethel, St. Mary's, and Aniak. Flights to other villages and remote areas can be arranged but lodging will not likely be available.

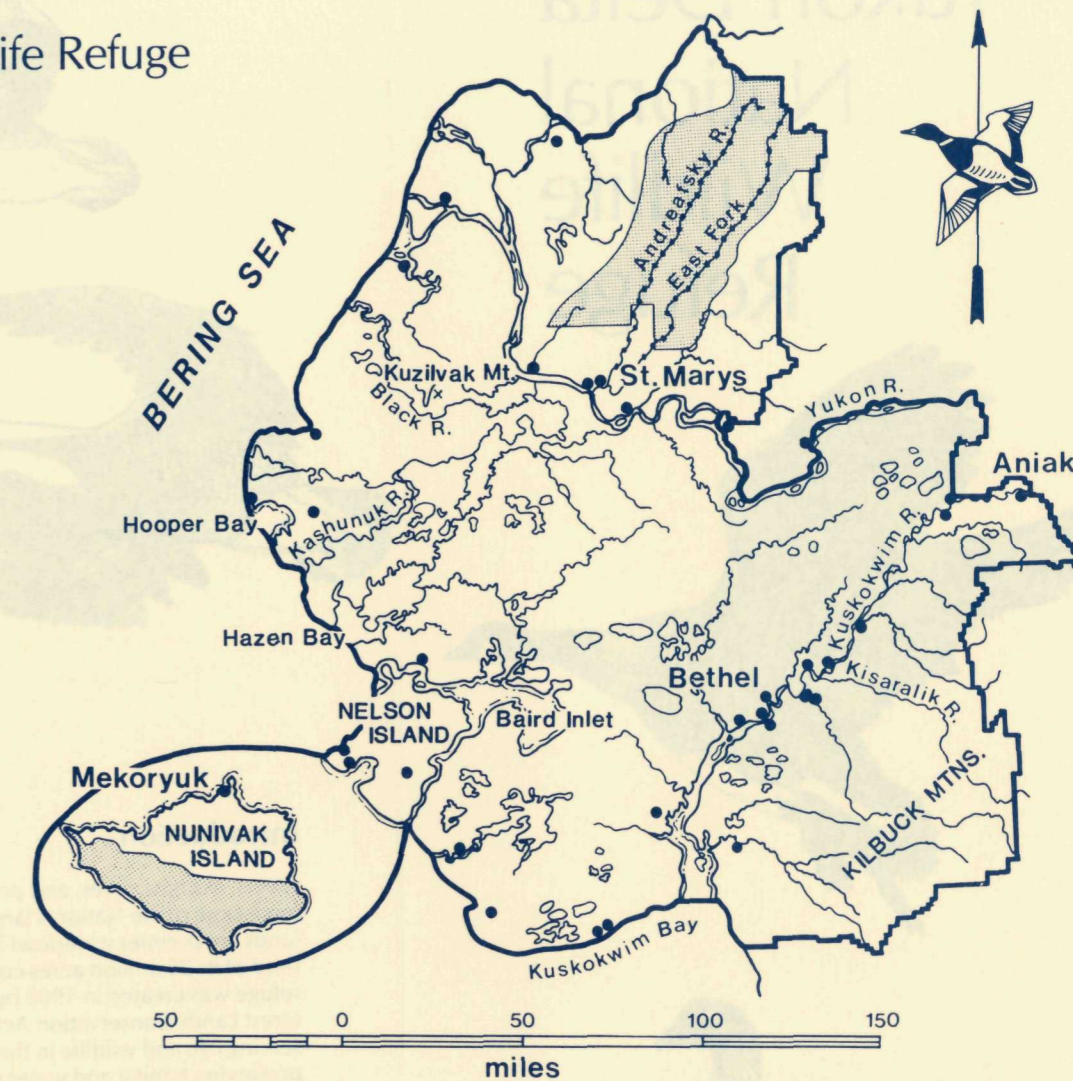
Ownership of large acreages within the refuge boundaries has been conveyed to Native corporations and individuals. These lands, as well as scattered fishing and hunting camps should be respected as private property. Those planning a journey in the region should consult with the Association of Village Council Presidents in Bethel regarding the location of private land and procedures for visiting villages. Address: P.O. Box 219, Bethel, Alaska 99559.

### Weather and Insects

Winter begins on the Delta early in October. January temperatures average near 0°F although the high winds often cause a wind chill factor that exceeds -60°F. Annual snowfall may exceed 50 inches but winter thaws prevent much accumulation. Ice breakup does not occur until May or early June. Because of the Yukon Delta's remoteness and unpredictable weather, a safe trip requires careful planning. Top quality equipment and insect repellent are essential.



## Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge



- refuge boundaries ———
- villages •
- wild rivers ·····
- wilderness [shaded box]

