

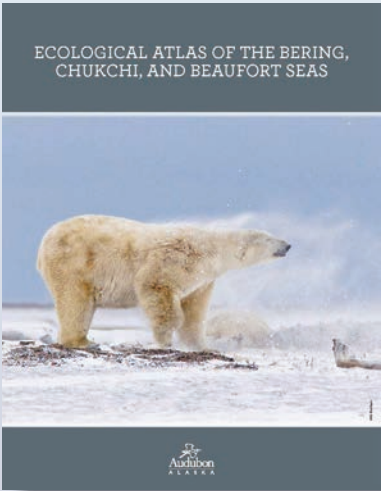


# Audubon ALASKA News

Published twice a year by the Alaska State Office of the National Audubon Society

## Using Science to Conserve the Arctic

Imagine these Arctic scenes: A mass of sea ice drifts by with 20 resting walrus hauled out on top. A bright white Ivory Gull circles a research vessel. A small boat of indigenous hunters quietly approaches a seal. Puffins full of small fish and too heavy to fly dart down into the water under an approaching ship. The long, sleek backs of a dozen bowhead whales take turns breaking the surface as they feed. Twenty-foot waves crash ashore a small rocky island creating spray that can be seen from miles away. A Snowy Owl circles 50 miles offshore over open water, landing on a ship's mast in lieu of absent pack ice. A fishing boat motors toward port with an icy hold full of red salmon. A polar bear and two cubs gnaw on whale bones on the sea ice.



Audubon Alaska developed the *Ecological Atlas of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas* as a way to deepen the understanding of these and other Arctic marine scenes. The maps, summaries, and photographs within take the reader on a scientific journey through natural history and ecological relationships in the Arctic marine environment.

To produce the maps in the *Ecological Atlas*, Audubon Alaska synthesized data from multiple studies, species, decades, and seas. Data were combined and edited into composite layers in order to present a broad-scale perspective on ecological patterns. Species maps, such as the Parakeet Auklet map on page 3, visually describe use patterns, activity, and/or movement through the three seas.

*continued on page 3*

**Ribbon seal.**  
Photograph by Josh London / NOAA



### ALASKA WATCHLIST SPECIES

#### Violet-green Swallow *Tachycineta thalassina*

The Violet-green Swallow is on the Alaska WatchList's Red List of declining species. It closely resembles other swallows, but it can be distinguished by the white patches extending up the sides of its rump and its white cheeks extending above the eye. The Violet-green Swallow nests from Alaska all the way to central Mexico. It is part of a suite of aerial insectivores in Alaska that are in decline.

Photograph on masthead: Christine Haines / Audubon Photography Awards

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For 40 years, Audubon Alaska has worked to conserve Alaska's birds, wildlife, and the habitat crucial to them. Audubon Alaska is financially independent, raising all our own funding—this means your support is critical to protecting the birds and wildlife you care about.

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## DIRECTOR'S VIEWPOINT

# How Are Alaska's Birds Doing?

*By Nils Warnock*

As Audubon Alaska's director, I am often asked about the state of our birds. The last time we summarized data identifying Alaska birds that are declining or vulnerable was in 2010. Back then I noted, "The [Alaska WatchList]... represents what I think of as one of the key roles that Audubon Alaska plays in the conservation community in Alaska – as synthesizers of scientific information, building critical links between scientific data and the implementation of sound conservation policy." I am delighted to say that we now have a new 2017 Alaska WatchList.



My first impression in comparing new results with our 2010 results is that life is getting more difficult for many of our birds. Of the over 230 species we scored, we identified 30 Red List species (species that appear to be declining) in 2010 versus 35 species in 2017; we identified 18 Yellow List species (vulnerable species) in 2010 versus 35 species in 2017. Overall, 31 percent of the birds that we scored ended up on the 2017 WatchList.

Perhaps the two species that I worry the most about are the Aleutian Tern and the Bar-tailed Godwit. The Aleutian Tern has declined a staggering 92 percent in the last three decades at known breeding colonies in Alaska. Reasons for the declines are unclear and a redistribution of colonies to Russian breeding grounds has not been ruled out, but habitat degradation (especially through overfishing) on their Asian wintering grounds is likely a factor. For Bar-tailed Godwits, loss of intertidal habitat at spring staging sites in the Yellow Sea in China has led to annual declines of more than three percent in recent years. Over 50 percent of our regularly occurring shorebird species are on the 2017 WatchList. Seabirds are also suffering. Red-legged and Black-legged kittiwakes and Tufted and Horned puffins made this year's Red List for the first time, based on declines in large parts of their ranges. A prominent factor appears to lie with warming ocean waters affecting the prey these seabirds rely on. Another group of concern is the boreal forest breeders, especially the ones that eat insects. Swallow populations are declining, and Violet-green and Bank swallows made our Red List. Neither species was on our 2010 WatchList. Likewise, while many of our state's waterfowl populations are doing well, those that breed in the boreal forest like the Black Scoter and Greater Scaup appear to be struggling. Drying wetlands and increased fires in the boreal forest might be part of the story.

But there are bright spots. The Short-tailed Albatross, a species that remains on our Red List because of its depressed population status, shows encouraging signs of increases due to intensive management action. In 2010, we touted the population increases of Trumpeter Swans, and in 2017 we are still seeing them doing well. This year, our WatchList success story was about the Emperor Goose, a Red List species in 2010. Based on significant declines in the population in the early 1980s, hunting of it ceased in 1986. Since then, the Emperor Goose population has rebounded so much that a limited hunt resumed in Alaska this year, allowing us to cautiously remove the Emperor Goose from our Red List. It stays as a vulnerable species, but it stands as a testament to the power of intelligent, science-based local, state, and federal management of vulnerable species. With over 500 million (!) birds coming to Alaska (the majority to breed here) from all over the world, we have a responsibility to closely monitor and manage our bird populations. Audubon Alaska remains committed to ensuring that when birds come to our state, they find the healthy habitats they need. ■



**Parakeet Auklet.** Photograph by Milo Burcham

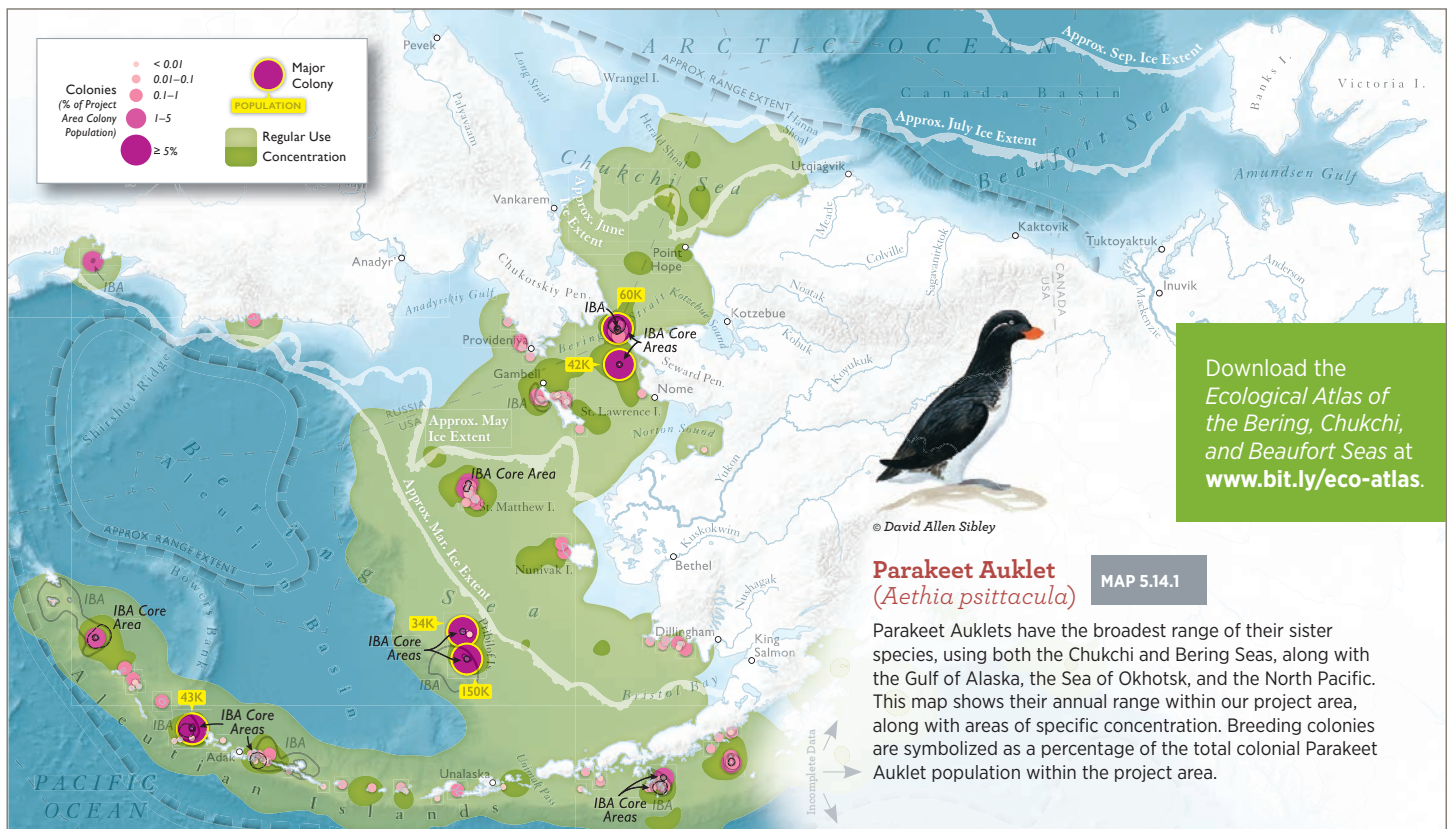
The *Ecological Atlas of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas* will serve as a tool for scientists and policymakers to set conservation priorities and design balanced management plans in this sensitive Arctic region, especially as it becomes increasingly significant in global discourse. The significance of the Arctic lies not only in its immense biological productivity but also in the impact the region has on the rest of the world. We are learning more and more that the Arctic affects global weather systems, temperatures, ocean circulation patterns, and is increasingly influencing global trade, energy extraction, and tourism.

The need for a comprehensive ecological analysis of US Arctic waters is especially pressing in light of the fact that the Trump administration is moving forward with plans to potentially expand

offshore drilling in the region. The US Department of the Interior recently started a two-year planning process to replace the 2017-2022 Five Year Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program (also known as the Five Year Plan), which outlines where offshore oil and gas leasing may occur. The current Five Year Plan does not schedule any leasing in the Arctic Ocean, but the administration has explicitly stated the intent to reconsider Arctic Ocean leases in the new plan.

We made this atlas to be useful to policymakers and scientists, intending that management decisions be informed by its content, though the current political climate necessitates access at a grassroots level for this information, as well. To that end, we have written and mapped with all levels of scientific knowledge in mind. We have also made the Atlas available online for free, so that anyone can have access to this comprehensive Arctic science compendium (see link below).

The *Ecological Atlas of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas* was a cooperative effort. Hundreds of researchers and many agencies and organizations contributed to our understanding of the Arctic marine ecosystem. This publication was extensively peer-reviewed by more than 80 scientists and traditional knowledge experts. We produced the Atlas in collaboration with Oceana and cartographer, Daniel P. Huffman, and we received assistance from the Alaska Ocean Observing System, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Kaverak, Inc., National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, TerraGraphica, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and US Geological Survey. The Atlas was funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. ■



# Chapter Happenings

## Anchorage Audubon Society [www.anchorageaudubon.org](http://www.anchorageaudubon.org)

Anchorage Audubon recently kicked off the fall/winter season with the Potluck & Photo-Sharing Party! Members brought their favorite photos from their summer adventures and also learned about what we'll be up to this winter. Our membership meetings will take place on the third Thursday of the month at 7pm at the BP Energy Center through April. We set the date for the Christmas Bird Count for Saturday, December 16th. The count will be followed by the Potluck Chili Feed. Learn more about our upcoming meetings and events on our website.

Anchorage Audubon is also helping to raise funds so The Conservation Fund (on behalf of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game) can purchase a 2.2-acre undeveloped parcel adjacent to Potter Marsh, located within the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge. The funds need to be raised by December 31st. If you are interested in supporting this effort, please visit our website. ■

## Arctic Audubon Society [www.arcticaudubon.org](http://www.arcticaudubon.org)

Fairbanks had a beautiful summer, and Arctic Audubon members spent a lot of time out enjoying Alaska. Our spring field trips, which focused on new arrivals, had many participants. The Sandhill Crane Festival was well attended and most migrants have now headed south.

We recently had our first board meeting after our summer break. Our program chairs have lined up interesting people for our monthly presentations at the FNSB Noel Wien Library. We set the date for our Christmas Bird Count for Saturday, December 30th. We are still working on access and signage for our Nature Reserve outside of town. ■



**Sandhill Crane.** Photograph by Sheldon Goldstein / Audubon Photography Awards

## Juneau Audubon Society [www.juneau-audubon-society.org](http://www.juneau-audubon-society.org)

Juneau Audubon Society hosted four Saturday Wild Walks this summer. In June, Pat Harris led us into the mysteries of low tide organisms at Bridget Creek beach. In July, the Mt. Roberts tram generously allowed us to travel up the mountain for the discount nonprofit fee. We enjoyed the best weather in several weeks as the sun came all the way out for several hours! It is always fun to search for ptarmigan and grouse on the mountaintop and to enjoy the wonderful blooms of the alpine above the tree line. In August, we led some happy berry pickers into a better knowledge of our edible berries at Eaglecrest ski area/trails. In September, we were able to have our mushroom experts lead our most popular walk along the Mendenhall River trail. Our public lectures start in October, and we will have lectures every month until next April. Thanks to all the volunteers who help make these outings so much fun! ■



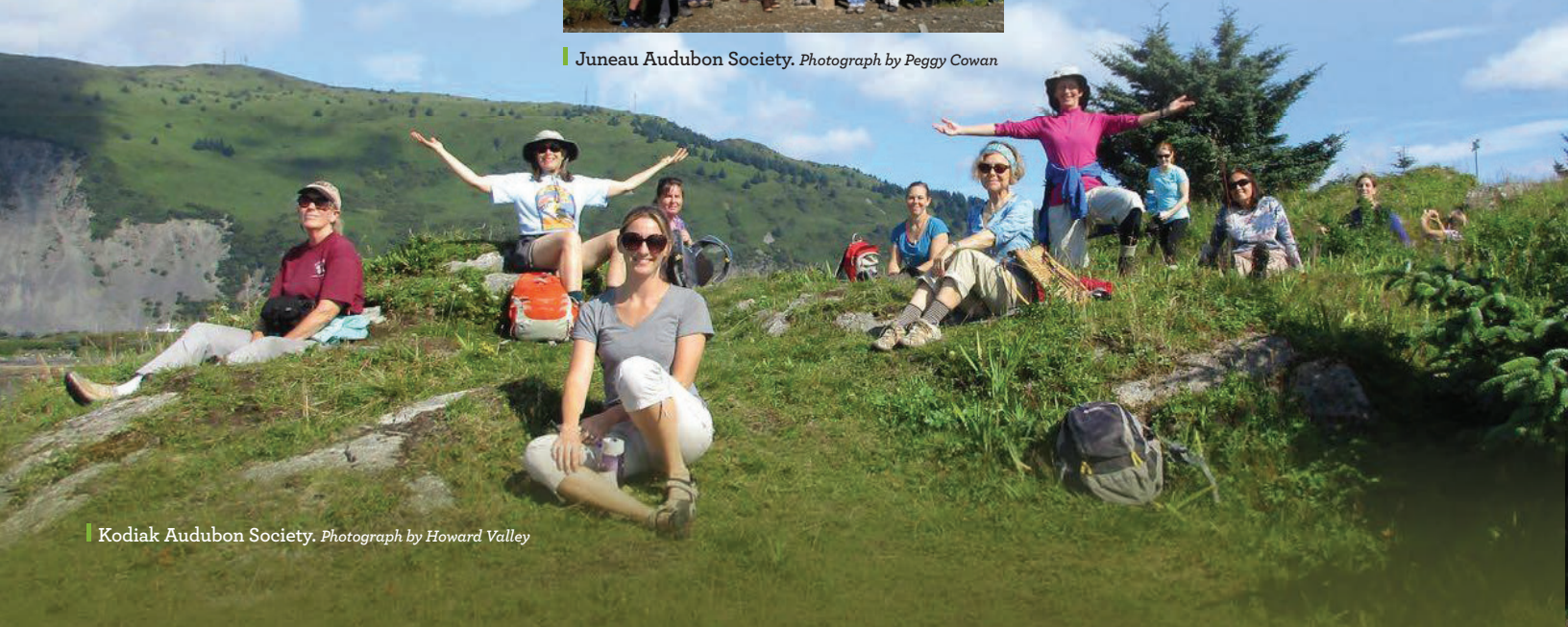
**Juneau Audubon Society.** Photograph by Peggy Cowan

## Kodiak Audubon Society

*Visit Kodiak Audubon on Facebook*

Every summer from June through August, the Kodiak Audubon Society offers weekend hikes, which range from easy strolls to steep mountain climbs. It's a great opportunity for Kodiak residents and visitors to explore the local hiking trails and learn about the fauna and flora of our island. This year, over 335 participants have had the opportunity to hear winnowing snipes, or to be chased by screaming yellowlegs. Some hardy souls have even caught a glimpse of ptarmigan and pipits while climbing in the alpine. In addition to birds, our mountain hikes this summer have also provided several bear sightings, which is always a thrill.

Hikes are led by Kodiak Audubon board members and other volunteers from the community. Each hike leader shares expertise such as birding, yoga, or a deep appreciation of the great outdoors. We also offer two whale-watching hikes in the spring when the gray whales are migrating along the coast of Kodiak. In May, there will be a birding trip along the road system, where local birding gurus will guide interested people from habitat to habitat, searching for spring migrants. All hikes are free and open to the public. ■



**Kodiak Audubon Society.** Photograph by Howard Valley

# The Lay of the Land in Arctic Conservation Politics

By Susan Culliney

Every year, migratory birds trickle away from the Arctic, heading south for winter, leaving behind the ravens, chickadees, and grosbeaks of winter. This year, however, our cherished migratory birds also leave behind many questions about the fate of their Arctic breeding grounds. The Arctic Coastal Plain is an ecosystem delineated by the Brooks Range to the south and the

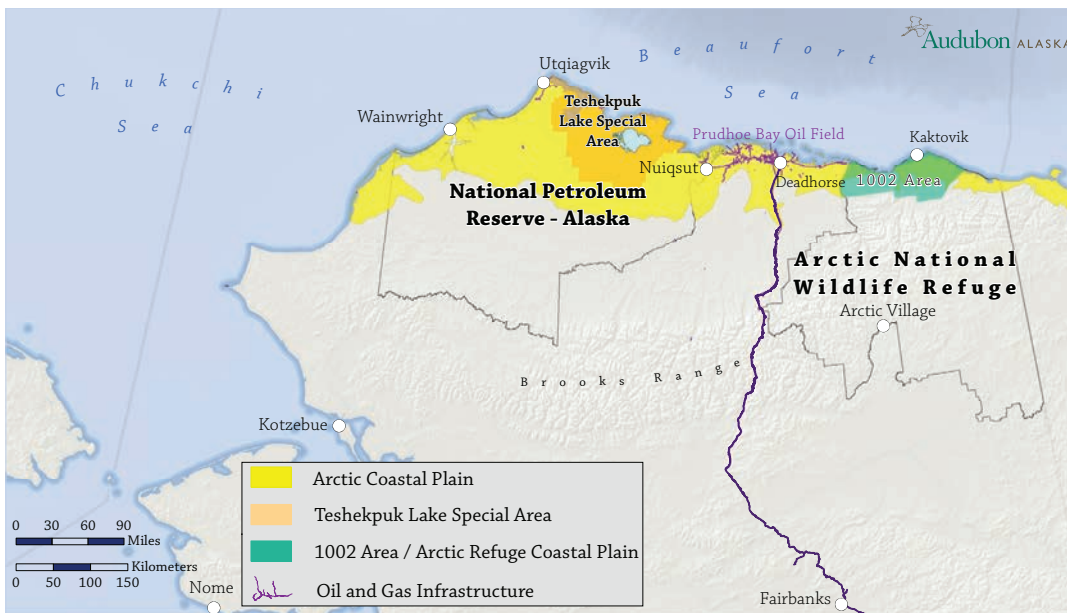
Arctic Ocean to the north and characterized by wetlands, braided rivers, tussocks, and tundra. The Coastal Plain boasts regional, national, and global migratory connections that bring a vibrant burst of life each summer. In the western section of Alaska's Arctic Coastal Plain is the Teshekpuk Lake wetlands complex, one of the premier bird sites in the entire circumpolar Arctic. To

the east lies the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the beating biological heart of the only holistically protected Arctic ecosystem in the nation. Smack dab in the middle of these two Arctic icons is Prudhoe Bay, the largest oil field in North America.

Both the Arctic Refuge and Teshekpuk are under grave risk of development.

Take action to protect the Arctic Refuge and Teshekpuk by going to [www.AudubonAlaska.org/Take-Action](http://www.AudubonAlaska.org/Take-Action).

Congressional budgetary processes are being used to try to open the Arctic Refuge to drilling. There are also new rumors of old tactics that the Trump administration will try to allow seismic petroleum exploration in the Refuge or try to carve off a wedge of land for transfer to the State of Alaska at the Refuge's border along the Canning River. In the Western Arctic, the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area faces the growing possibility that the Trump administration will kick off a new planning process with the likely intent to open sensitive wildlife areas to oil development. The scientific rationale strongly supports protecting both the Arctic Refuge and Teshekpuk. However, we expect intense battles over these issues in the coming weeks, months, and years. ■



Key areas in Alaska's Arctic. Map by Benjamin Sullender



## Help Us Defend Alaska

For 40 years, Audubon Alaska has worked to conserve Alaska's natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, wildlife, and the habitats they rely on. This past year, public lands in Alaska and across the country have faced unprecedented political challenges. We were able to quickly mobilize into a defensive position, relying on our decades of experience, our active and passionate supporters, and Audubon's vast nationwide network. We will continue to stand strong in the defense of birds and their habitats, but we need your support. Make a donation today at [www.AudubonAlaska.org](http://www.AudubonAlaska.org). ■

Caribou in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Photograph by David Shaw

# People of Audubon

## BOARD



Audubon Alaska welcomes **Julianne Lamsek** to the board. Julianne has more than 15 years of experience managing and supporting information technology environments in both corporate and nonprofit settings. She currently serves as IT Director for Cascade Public Media – the PBS affiliate for the Puget Sound region. Julianne recently stepped off the board of PCC Community Markets where she held several leadership positions including board chair. She has a long history of volunteer service with the YWCA. Julianne has an MBA from the University of Washington and bachelor's degrees in Communications and Business Administration from Washington State University. When she is not working, Julianne loves to be outside climbing or cycling. ■

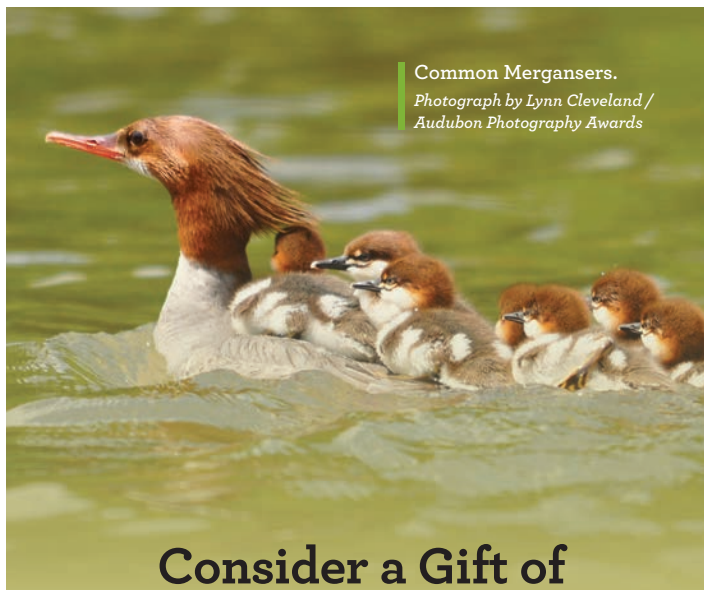


Audubon Alaska welcomes **Richard Monkman** to the board. Dick has been active in Alaska conservation matters since arriving in Anchorage via the Alcan Highway in 1979. He has served on the boards of the Denali Institute and the Alaska Natural History Association (now Alaska Geographic), and on various committees of the Alaska Conservation Foundation. Dick is a graduate of Dartmouth College and a practicing attorney with a focus on Native Alaskan issues, in particular, health care and environmental matters affecting native communities. Dick and spouse, Tina Kobayashi, live in Juneau, where they raised two sons and enjoy hiking, kayaking, skiing, sailing, birding, and traveling to far away, remote parts of the world. ■



**Black-capped Chickadee.**

*Photograph by Richard Rigtterink / Audubon Photography Awards*



**Common Mergansers.**

*Photograph by Lynn Cleveland / Audubon Photography Awards*

## Consider a Gift of Appreciated Stock

Did your stock portfolio increase in value this year? Donating appreciated securities enables you to support Audubon Alaska while conserving cash for other uses, and it helps you avoid capital gains tax on the appreciation. Donated shares must be appreciated in value and owned for longer than one year.

Because of holiday schedules, we recommend completing the instructions to your broker by December 1st. The legal date and value of your gift depend on when Audubon receives the gift. If you would like to make a gift of stock, have your broker contact Marc Scollo at [mscollow@audubon.org](mailto:mscollo@audubon.org). Don't forget to designate your gift to Audubon Alaska. Please call us at 907- 276-7034 to let us know your gift is on the way! You can also use appreciated stocks to fund a larger gift that will pay you income for life. Please call Shari Kolding, Director of Gift Planning, at 512-236-9076 for more details. ■

## Answer to WatchList Quiz

### Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

*Calidris acuminata*



The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is on the Alaska WatchList's Red List. This species breeds in the Russian Arctic, but in the fall, a majority of the juvenile birds cross the Bering Sea to stage in western Alaska where they put on prodigious amounts of fat before flying back across the Pacific to wintering grounds in Australasia. Adult birds are rarely seen in Alaska.

*Photograph by Ed Dunens / CC 2.0*

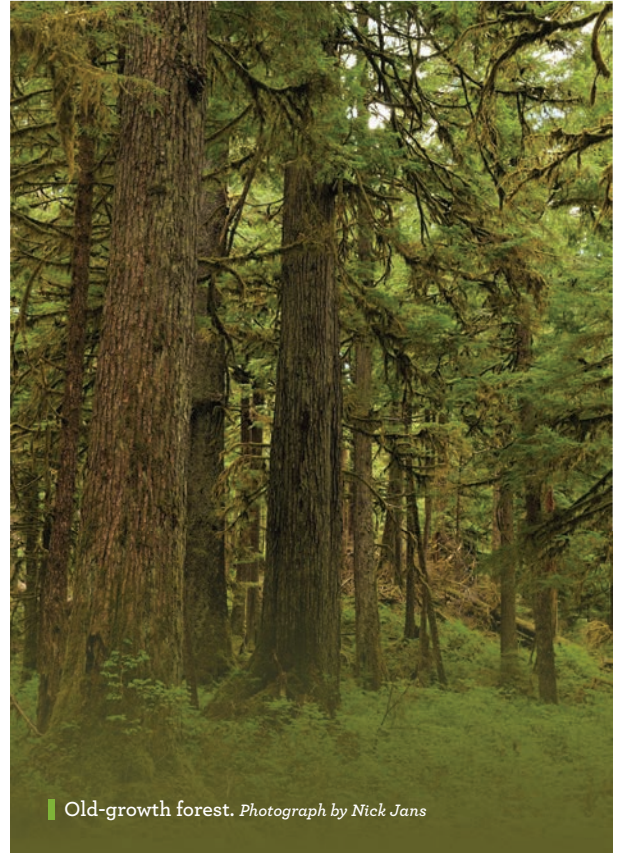
# Is Alaska's Timber Industry on Its Way Out?

By Susan Culliney

The amended Tongass Land Management Plan (TLMP) protects some of the highest priority watersheds in the Tongass National Forest while still scheduling a large volume of old-growth clearcutting over the next 15 years. But even with the TLMP's liberal old-growth allowance and a hefty subsidy, the timber industry in Southeast Alaska may be circling the drain.

The Kuui timber sale received no bids last fall. Meanwhile, the massive Big Thorne timber sale has proved less lucrative and more costly than the industry predicted, with US Forest Service internal documents showing the agency in the highly questionable position of considering whether to reimburse the logging company for its losses. However, even as evidence grows that the industry may be on its last legs, the administration continues to propose ambitiously scaled timber offerings in its planning documents.

Old-growth clearcutting contributes very little economically while taking an immense toll on forest resources. The Tongass provides a wealth of non-extractive forest "products" including fishing, recreation, birding, endemic species, and climate change resiliency. It may be more difficult to calculate these nontraditional values in traditional economic statistics, but they deserve a spot on the balance sheets, where they would far outperform the dwindling timber industry. It makes sense to start thinking creatively about how these non-extractive forest products offer very real opportunities for community jobs and prosperity. ■



Old-growth forest. Photograph by Nick Jans

## Southeast Alaska Birding Trail

Southeast Alaska is characterized by thousands of islands, countless streams, majestic glacial fjords, and the towering trees of the Tongass National Forest. The Tongass covers most of Southeast Alaska and is recognized widely as the "crown jewel" of the National Forest system. It is within the world's largest remaining intact temperate rainforest and is home to the bulk of America's remaining old-growth trees.

Southeast Alaska supports an abundance of birds (more than 350 species recorded!) and multiple Important Bird Areas. The region is a hotspot for Bald Eagles, Marbled Murrelets, Queen Charlotte Goshawks, and more. It is also home to all five species of Pacific salmon, brown bears, Sitka black-tailed deer, Alexander Archipelago wolves, and Prince of Wales flying squirrels.

Audubon Alaska has selected this biologically rich region to be the site of our first birding trail. Similar to birding trails in other states, the Southeast Alaska Birding Trail will be a virtual trail connecting the best birding locations in the region. In addition to providing an incredible experience for adventurous birders, the trail will provide an opportunity for Southeast Alaska communities to further develop ecotourism in the wake of a declining timber industry.

In collaboration with Juneau Audubon Society and the US Forest Service, we are currently putting together a group of birding experts for the first phase of the multi-step process to bring our vision for the Southeast Alaska Birding Trail to fruition. If you would like to contribute ideas, contact our Director of Conservation Science, Melanie Smith, at [masmith@audubon.org](mailto:masmith@audubon.org). ■

Marbled Murrelets.

Photograph by Milo Burcham



# Audubon ALASKA

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Audubon Alaska's Deputy Director, Michelle LeBeau, and Policy Director, Susan Culliney, along with Audubon supporter, Barbara Mayer, at a rally hosted by United Tribes of Bristol Bay and Save Bristol Bay.

## Save Bristol Bay for the Birds

Bristol Bay is one of the most important places on earth for birds and salmon, and it is a vital area for commercial fishing and local communities. Tens of millions of seabirds forage in Bristol Bay. More than one million seabirds, such as Tufted Puffins, nest in the region. Up to 75,000 threatened Steller's Eiders use this area. Shorebirds, ducks, geese, and countless other birds flock to forage, rest, and breed in this astounding marine ecosystem.

But Scott Pruitt, head of the EPA for the Trump administration, wants to undo Bristol Bay protections and consider whether to allow Pebble Mine to operate in the area. This mine would pose an untenable risk to the watersheds that flow like arteries into Bristol Bay. Over time, dams inevitably fail, and the resulting tailings spill would destroy the very foundation of Bristol Bay's food web. The ripple effect on birds, salmon, and human communities would be an ecological disaster of immense proportions.

Stay posted by signing up for our Action Alerts at  
[www.AudubonAlaska.org/Take-Action](http://www.AudubonAlaska.org/Take-Action). ■

## WatchList Quiz Bird

Can you identify this species from the WatchList?

Answer on page 6.

