

Audubon Alaska Impact Report

WINTER 2021



Willow Ptarmigan

2021 Audubon Alaska Highlights

Alaska is home to over 470 species of birds migrating from across all of our national flyways. Birds from Alaska are found in communities across the country and around the globe, connecting all of us to work together to protect their vital habitats in the face of climate change.

Through policy advocacy, powerful partnerships, innovative conservation strategies, and a strong commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (EDIB), Audubon is scaling our work in new ways and in new places—throughout Alaska, the United States, and the hemisphere. Our top 2021 accomplishments in Alaska include:

- Successfully defending the Arctic Refuge from oil and gas development and launching our first Imago Initiative Arctic Refuge gathering with Indigenous partners to explore opportunities for permanent protection of the Arctic Coastal Plain—one of the world’s most important bird nurseries and home to the largest migrating mammal herd, the Porcupine Caribou Herd;
- Establishing organizational vision and values centered on equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging through racial equity dialogues hosted by First Alaskans Institute;
- Releasing our Natural Climate Solutions Report, showing that Alaska is our nation’s largest carbon sink, which will guide our work to protect birds from climate change, benefiting people and communities at the same time; and
- Expanding our hemispheric work through innovative new partnerships and conservation strategies in Latin America and Canada’s Boreal Forest.

Through a focus on meaningful conservation outcomes and a renewed commitment to one another, Audubon helped chart a brighter future for birds in 2021.

In this report, we detail other important accomplishments that have helped us move the needle on our conservation priorities in Alaska. We hope you’ll enjoy reading about what your support has made possible over the past year.



CONSERVATION HIGHLIGHTS

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—the largest national wildlife refuge in the United States—hosts millions of migratory birds from around the world each year and is a critically important ecosystem for wildlife. Audubon Alaska has been on the frontline to protect the Arctic Refuge from oil and gas development after the 2017 tax bill opened it to drilling, despite significant concern over the resulting ecological and climate impacts.

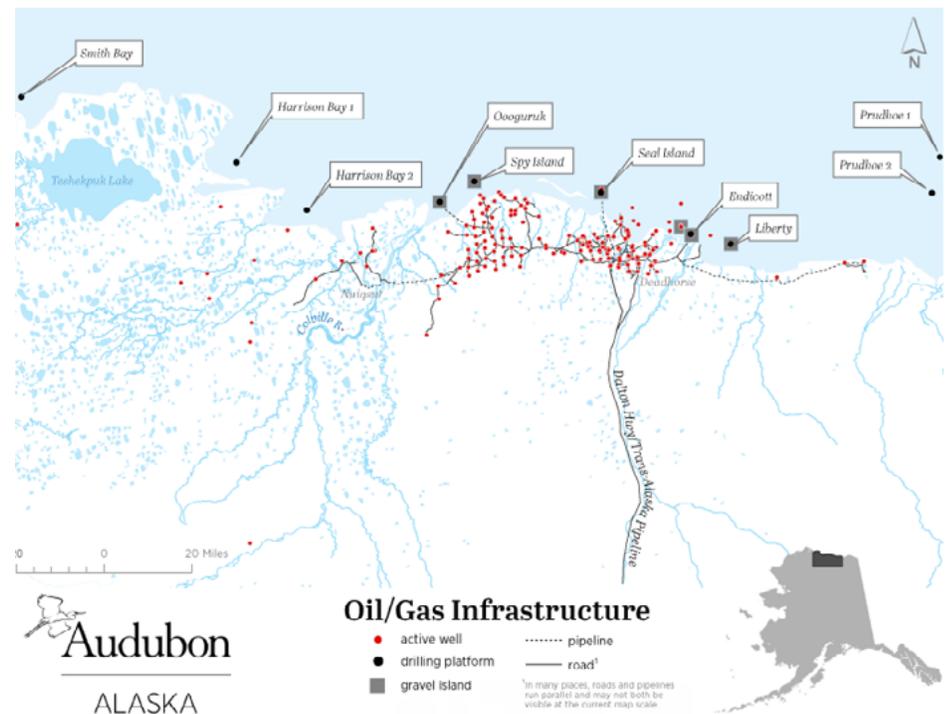
Advocacy efforts by Audubon Alaska, our members, and partner organizations paid off: early this year, the Biden-Harris Administration put a temporary halt on oil and gas development in the Arctic Refuge. While this was welcome news, the fight is not over until permanent protections are in place for this extraordinary ecosystem. Audubon is moving forward with our lawsuit, *National Audubon Society v. Bernhardt*, to hold the Department of the Interior accountable for bypassing important policies that protect Alaska’s wildlife and public lands.

We are also seeking permanent protections for the Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain by supporting the Indigenous-led Imago Initiative. In 2021, we held our first Imago Initiative gathering in the Arctic Refuge to learn from Inupiat and Gwich’in elders and youth about ways to support conservation efforts that emulate Indigenous values on the land.

The map below, developed by our staff, shows current infrastructure development on the North Slope of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Audubon Alaska is closely monitoring these projects and raising awareness about the threats they pose to birds, other wildlife, and local communities.



Audubon Alaska staff at the Imago Initiative gathering



CONSERVATION HIGHLIGHTS

Bristol Bay

Over the past year, we fought tirelessly to defend Bristol Bay—home to the world’s greatest concentration of seabirds and its largest salmon fishery, and an area incredibly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change—from the proposed Pebble Mine, which extends into Alaska’s boreal forest. The proposed mine would destroy 3,500 acres of wetlands, lakes, and ponds, and over 80 miles of salmon streams. Conservation organizations, Alaska Native communities, commercial fishermen, and concerned citizens have all come together to oppose Pebble Mine, but the prior administration pressured federal agencies to remove protections from Bristol Bay regardless.

In November 2020, a permit for the mine was denied, and the project stalled. But, as with many of Alaska’s important bird areas, the threats are ongoing and protections remain temporary. Throughout this fight, Audubon Alaska has utilized our network in defense of Bristol Bay to increase awareness about the proposed mine and its impacts on birds. Over 70,000 actions were taken by Audubon members across the U.S. calling for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to veto Pebble Mine. Audubon also submitted an independent letter to the EPA calling for this action. With several of our partners we have started a multi-year project to highlight inadequacies in the Army Corps’ compensatory mitigation program, which will guide meaningful mining reform across the state.



Tufted Puffin



Bald Eagle

Chilkat Valley

The Chilkat River Valley, known by the Tlingit people as “Valley of the Eagles,” is a scenic river valley that runs for over 50 miles from high in the mountains of British Columbia to Chilkat Inlet near Haines, Alaska. As its nickname suggests, the valley is an important habitat for eagles; in fact, it’s home to the largest concentration of American Bald Eagles in the United States.

In 2020, we participated in and funded a Chilkat Valley Working Group as part of our efforts to promote biodiversity in Alaska’s watersheds. The working group was comprised of conservation partners in the Chilkat Valley, whom we gathered to consider a coordinated campaign against the Constantine Metal Palmer Project in the headwaters of the Klehini River.

We are continuing to highlight the incredible bird diversity of the Chilkat Valley watershed by completing an assessment of bird diversity in the Chilkat estuary with our local partner, the Takshanuk Watershed Council. They have completed surveys that will be used to extend the current Important Bird Area designation for the Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve to include the Chilkat River estuary.

CONSERVATION HIGHLIGHTS

Public Lands

Alaska is home to over one-third of public lands in the U.S., which serve as habitat for hundreds of migratory bird species, provide recreational areas that benefit local communities, and act as a buffer against the impacts of climate change. These public lands are also the traditional hunting and fishing grounds for local Alaska Native communities.

Despite their cultural and ecological importance, Alaska's public lands remain under threat from industrial development. During its tenure, the Trump Administration released 50 million acres of BLM land across Alaska's

boreal forest to foreign and corporate mining interests. We have worked hard to shine light on this issue with partnership from Indigenous peoples, business owners, regional recreation enthusiasts, and many others. In 2020, we filed letters with the Bureau of Land Management requesting a halt of the land giveaway, and later filed a formal petition to the federal government against these actions in early 2021. We learned in April this year that the BLM reversed the release, blocking the land giveaway that would have put these diverse ecosystems at risk.

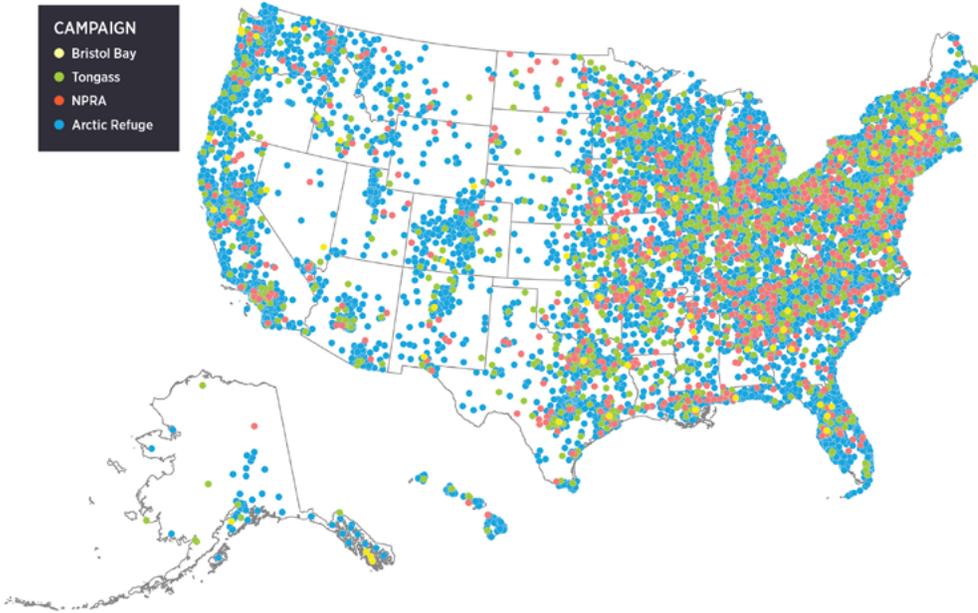
Co-Management and Indigenous-Led Conservation

Audubon Alaska supports our Indigenous partners' leadership in conservation and recognizes how public lands are intertwined with the history and lives of Indigenous peoples. We are committed to advancing progress toward a new era of federal policy that restores tribal management to U.S. public lands.

Last year, we released the first of a two-part report, Bridges to a New Era, that highlights the opportunities for tribal co-management across federal public lands in the United States. Following up on these reports, we will be hosting a series of briefings and hearings with members of Congress and federal agencies.



Advocacy sign at an Imago Initiative gathering



Activating the Audubon Network

Over the past year, we mobilized our network to submit over 130,000 comments from our members on Alaska issues. The map to the left illustrates the actions taken across the country for Alaska public lands and waters by Audubon members.

Scaling our Conservation Impact

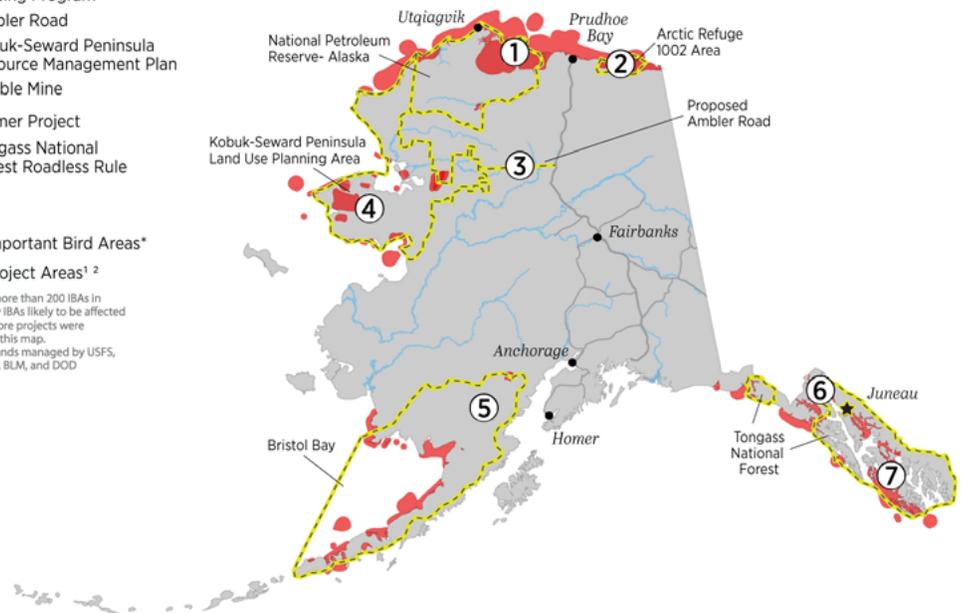
Audubon Alaska is working to protect bird habitat across Alaska's landscapes. This map demonstrates the places and issues on which we are currently taking conservation action across the state.

Projects

- ① NPR-A Integrated Activity Plan
- ② Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain Leasing Program
- ③ Ambler Road
- ④ Kobuk-Seward Peninsula Resource Management Plan
- ⑤ Pebble Mine
- ⑥ Palmer Project
- ⑦ Tongass National Forest Roadless Rule

- Important Bird Areas*
- Project Areas^{1 2}

*There are more than 200 IBAs in Alaska. Only IBAs likely to be affected by one or more projects were included on this map.
 **Includes lands managed by USFS, NPS, USFWS, BLM, and DOD



Looking Ahead

Audubon Alaska made critical strides over the past year, preparing us for even greater impact in the year ahead. With policy victories in place and a new administration committed to greater conservation and climate action, we are poised to move from a position of defensive actions against threats to Alaska's lands toward proactive strategies for protecting its important ecosystems long into the future.

We're so grateful to you for your support of Audubon Alaska. Our work would not be possible without your commitment to protecting birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow. We truly are stronger together and, with your partnership, we are shaping a brighter future for birds and communities across Alaska.

Thank you.



Photos (Cover) Willow Ptarmigan, Photo: Milo Burcham; (p2) Northern Shovelers, Photo: John Strassenburgh/Audubon Photography Awards; (p3) Staff at Imago Initiative, Photo: Emily Sullivan; (p4) Tufted Puffin, Photo: Teresa Lapetino/Audubon Photography Awards; Bald Eagle, Photo: Howard Arndt/Audubon Photography Awards; (p5) Advocacy Sign, Photo: Emily Sullivan; (p7) Tundra Swans, Photo: Joshua Pelta Heller/Audubon Photography Awards