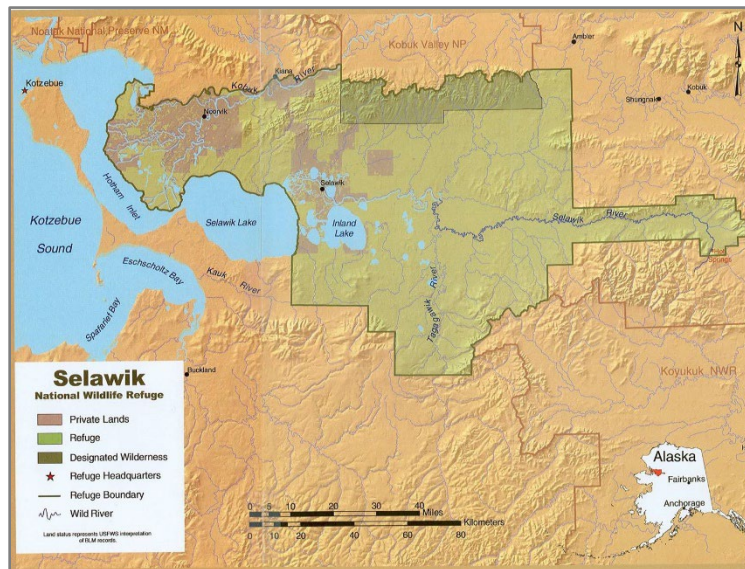




Selawik National Wildlife Refuge

Program Updates

*NORTHWEST ARCTIC SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING,
MARCH 27-28, 2025.*



Refuge Management Updates:

National Wildlife Refuges are created by Congress to conserve America’s fish, wildlife, and plants for present and future generations.

Purposes of the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge include:

- conserve fish, wildlife, and habitats, including the Western Arctic Caribou Herd, migratory birds, salmon, and sheefish;
- provide opportunities for continued subsistence uses by local residents;
- ensure water quality and necessary water quantity within the refuge;
- fulfill international treaty obligations;
- ensure management of Selawik Wilderness and Selawik Wild River align with purposes set forth in the Wilderness Act and Wild and Scenic River Act.

Permitting Updates

OTZ Telecom Microwave Tower Broadband Project

OTZ Telecommunications applied for a permit to construct 2 microwave repeater towers on refuge lands, as part of a network of about 30 towers that would relay broadband internet to communities in the Northwest Arctic. An Environmental Assessment of the project was completed in December 2024 and a decision on permitting the project is expected in April 2025. <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2032192/510>.



NANA Regional Broadband Network

NANA Regional Corporation is proposing to build a high-speed broadband network in the region. The proposed fiber-optic cable route would combine portions of ground-laid, subsea, trenched, and aerial cable to connect communities. Planning for the project is underway, and proposed routes include crossing refuge lands. The refuge anticipates we will receive a right-of-way permit application from NANA in the coming months.

Guided hunting

No guided hunting has occurred on Selawik Refuge since 2016. One big-game hunting guide permit is available for the refuge. Applications for the permit are being accepted through March 31, 2025. Information on how to apply can be found at: <https://www.fws.gov/page/announcing-prospectus-and-request-proposals-big-game-guiding-special-use-permits>.

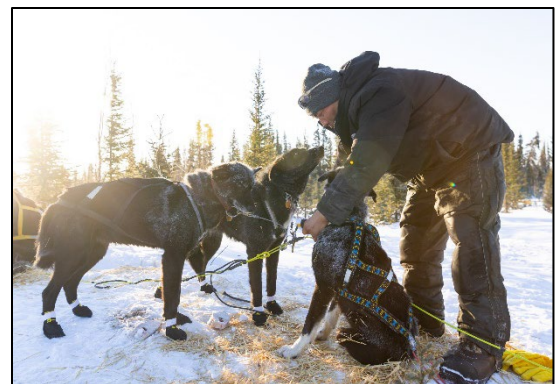


Air Taxi/Transporter Services

Two permits for Air Taxi/Transporter Services were issued in 2024. One group of four hunters was flown to Selawik Refuge by a Transporter. Two moose were harvested.

Competitive races

Each year, the refuge issues Special Use Permits for the Kobuk 440 dogsled race and Archie Ferguson/Willie Goodwin Sr. Memorial snowmachine race to cross refuge lands.



Dempsey Woods Sr. cares for his dog team during the 2022 Kobuk440 race.

These community-based races have been found to be compatible with the purposes of the refuge. The refuge has worked with organizers of the Iron Dog snowmachine race to identify the current race route through the region, which does not cross refuge lands. For the 2026 race, the Iron Dog is proposing a new route that would cross refuge lands. The refuge is currently processing a permit application and expects and will evaluate whether or not the use is appropriate.

Selawik hot springs cabins and shelter cabins

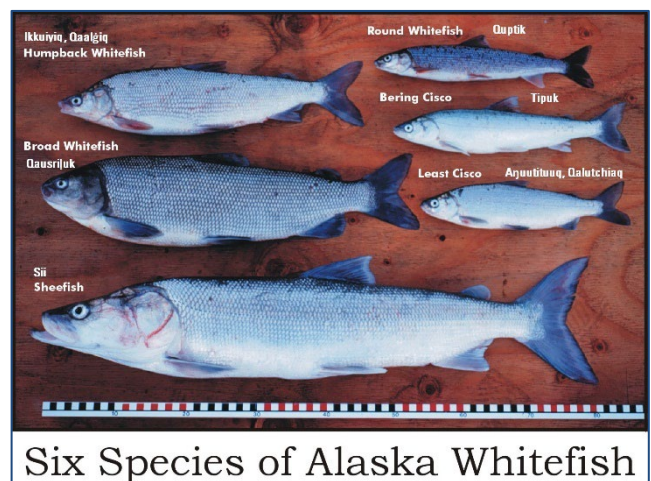
The refuge issues permits for construction and maintenance of shelter cabins and the facilities at Selawik hot springs. The refuge is beginning to discuss with partners, including upper Kobuk communities and Huslia, options for long-term stewardship of the hot springs facilities.

Biological Program Updates

Our focus is on working with others to gather information which informs refuge management and stewardship of the region's resources. The refuge lends expertise on fish and water-related projects and partners with researchers that have other areas of expertise. Updates on some of the projects the refuge supports include:

Sheefish project: In 2024, FWS staff and partners from Selawik finished data collection for a multi-year study investigating potential effect of the Selawik thaw slump on sheefish recruitment (i.e. survival of eggs and young fish). The study was funded by the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program and led by Ray Hander from the USFWS Fisheries Office in Fairbanks. Data analysis is underway, and the final report from the study is expected by October.

Whitefish spawning areas: In fall 2025, the refuge will be exploring streams in the Selawik River and Selawik Lake drainages to identify likely spawning areas. This study is designed to compliment work done in 2013 using radio tags, which located three spawning streams. This work will attempt to capture broad and humpback whitefish in Mangoak and the upper Kugarak and Tagagawik rivers and asses their spawning condition.



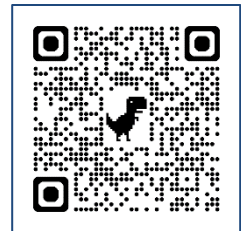
Whitefish population assessment: The refuge is designing a study to assess long term trends in whitefish populations (broad and humpback whitefish). Pilot data collection will occur in 2025. We will be collecting otoliths (ear bones) for aging from known spawning areas to establish baseline age distributions for ongoing collections from these areas to look for changes in age distribution. The genetic samples will also be collected and used to compare to samples collected from the fishery near the Village of Selawik to look for fish from outside these known spawning populations.

Whitefish satisfaction survey: The refuge has begun discussions with Selawik and Noorvik tribes on designing a survey of whitefish user satisfaction. The idea behind this project is to use feedback from local fisher-people as a means of monitoring whitefish health and abundance. The next step in this process would be in-person meetings with tribal members that are active in fishing; likely during break-up when community members aren't traveling.



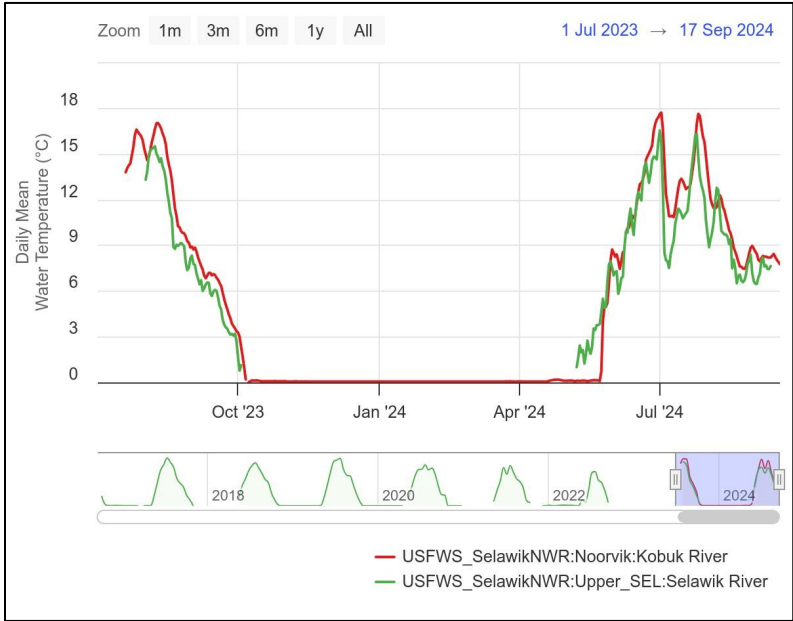
Contaminants in fish: The refuge is partnering with researchers from Texas A&M University and University of Alaska Fairbanks on a project to assess contaminant levels in fish caught near Selawik by subsistence fishers. Fish collections have begun, with a goal of sampling 40 each of sheefish, burbot, broad whitefish, and humpback whitefish. Samples are also being collected in Kivalina by these same researchers.

Ice thickness monitoring: Since 2018, Bill Carter and Sonny Berry of Selawik Refuge have been measuring ice thickness in Kotzebue and Selawik during winter months. Their information goes to the National Weather Service's Alaska-Pacific River Forecast Center (APRFC), who make predictions about spring breakup and flooding potential. An interactive ice thickness map which includes our data, numbers from across the state, and historic data is online at www.weather.gov/aprfc/IceThickness.



Water levels in rivers (discharge): We are continuing to collect data on the annual discharge of the three major branches of the Selawik River as well as the Fish

River, which flows into the Selawik from the Waring Mountains. Discharge measurements include the rate of water flow and the volume of water. The intended purpose for collecting this data is so we may apply to the state for water rights.



<https://aktemp.uaa.alaska.edu/viz/>.

Water Temperature in Rivers:

The Refuge is continuing its river temperature monitoring program, with sensors in the Upper Selawik River, Tagagawik River, Kugarak River, Fish River, and Kobuk River near Noorvik. Data from the sensors is uploaded annually and can be viewed online at:



Aleutian Tern Survey:

This summer, a research team will be conducting both aerial and ground surveys along the coast in search of Aleutian terns. These birds are a focus of concern because their populations across Alaska appear to have plummeted since the 1960s. Read more at <https://www.fws.gov/project/aleutian-tern-surveys>



Permafrost monitoring: The Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI) in Frankfurt Germany has been collecting permafrost data in the region, with a particular focus on the Selawik River Slump, for nearly 10 years. They use a modified DC-3 (pictured above) equipped with an array of specialized instruments to map and document permafrost-related changes on the landscape.



After the Kotzebue flooding in October, AWI reached out to offer their LIDAR data to the response coordinator. A permafrost change map from AWI can be found at <https://alex.awi.de/en/local-view/alaska>



Algae Blooms: This project is a collaboration of the Ajit Subramaniam PhD from Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory at Columbia University, Native Village of Kotzebue and Selawik NWR. At least one more season of data will be collected from the mooring that will be deployed in mid-June off Lockhart Point. The point of this study is to determine the frequency of algae blooms and what the major species are in the bloom.

Beavers: An ongoing study of the impact of beaver on tundra and high latitude alpine streams is being conducted by Ken Tape PhD and his graduate students from UAF. Some of these studies field work will be rapping up in the spring of 2025 with reports being finalized in the fall or early 2026.

Caribou: In 2025 the refuge intends to provide funding and assistance for NANA Regional Corporation-led efforts to better understand predator populations and subsistence harvest of caribou in the region. The refuge also continues to support the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's caribou, moose, muskox, and subsistence research by providing housing, hangar space, and logistical support.

Outreach Program Updates

While we no longer have any full-time outreach staff, we continue to invest in this work where we can. We value keeping the region informed, investing in youth, and fostering relationships.

New Refuge Sign:

We're delighted with the improved design of our refuge signs, a collaboration between local artists Norma Ballot and Christina Nelson. Our Kotzebue office has the new sign in place, showing off the sheefish as our 'wildlife icon,' and over the summer we plan to install signs at other refuge facilities.



Selawik Science-Culture Camp:

The refuge continued its long tradition of partnering with the Native Village of Selawik to fund and conduct an annual culture camp. In 2024 we tried a different schedule with mixed results. In 2025, we plan to again provide funding support, and we will work with the tribe to offer a great experience for students.

“Memories of Muskrat Camp” booklet:

The refuge is creating a printed booklet based on a 2016 oral history project with Selawik elders. Our hope is that this booklet will make the stories and knowledge shared by the elders more widely available to the people of the region. Retired manager Susan Georgette is editing the content, and nonprofit partner Alaska Geographic will take on layout and printing. We envision something similar to the 2007 *Uqausriptigun* caribou booklet and hope to have it ready by this fall.

Mig Bird Calendar Contest:

The theme for this year’s annual student art and poetry contest was “Massive Migrations.” We received 145 entries this year from 4 communities: Selawik, Shungnak, Noatak and Kotzebue. Each site had at least one winner! Our region’s selections went on to statewide judging in Fairbanks. We appreciate Ducks Unlimited’s financial support.



Art by Alyssa Conwell, Kotzebue HS



Spring Birding:

Selawik Refuge teams up with the National Park Service to offer bird-related events each year, because the return of migratory birds to our region is an amazing phenomenon worth celebrating!

Bird Sighting Contest: call in and report the birds you see during April and May at (907) 442-3890. All reports add to our knowledge of birds, and first sightings are entered in a prize drawing.

Over 1,450 observations from prior bird contests (1998-2021) were added to the eBird website by USFWS Migratory Birds staff & Brittany Sweeney.

Kotzebue birding tours: May 30–31 we will offer group birding tours which include binoculars to loan, help with bird ID, and snacks!

Facebook page:

We continue to use our refuge Facebook page to share project updates, safety alerts, wildlife information and fun stuff – like this year’s calendar contest winners! Check it out at <https://www.facebook.com/SelawikNationalWildlifeRefuge/>

Refuge Administration Updates

Staffing

US Fish and Wildlife Service staffing levels have been reduced nationally and we expect continued reductions. Selawik NWR’s staff is the smallest it’s been in the past decade. Current staff includes:

- Wil Wiese, *Refuge Manager*
- Brittany Sweeney, *Assistant Refuge Manager*
- Bill Carter, *Fisheries Biologist*
- Shawn Nelson, *Maintenance Professional*
- Frank Berry, Jr., *Maintenance Worker* (part time, in Selawik)

We expect to hire a seasonal biological technician and admin support assistant to assist with summer projects in 2025.

We are also recruiting now for two interns through the Maintenance Intern Fellowship Program: one maintenance intern and one business team intern. These 12 month paid internships (for those age 18–30) include housing and training. Apply now, start June 2025. More info and online applications at:

 <p>Maintenance Internship https://www.mobilizegreen.org/fws-maintenance-application</p>	 <p>Business Internship https://mobilizegreen.bamboohr.com/careers/740</p>
---	---

Facilities

The refuge headquarters office at 160 2nd Ave in Kotzebue is our main workplace and is open to visitors. Due to staff reductions, the refuge office located within the Native Village of Selawik's administrative building is closed. In late summer 2025, we expect construction of a storage garage adjacent to the office to begin.

The refuge owns and maintains housing in Kotzebue for refuge staff. Additionally, bunkhouse space is made available for visiting staff, cooperators, and partners working on projects in the region that further the mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

"Working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing good of the American people."

Contact Us

If you have any questions, want more information, or would like to share observations please get in touch!

In Kotzebue: (907) 442-3799 or (800) 492-8848

160 2nd Ave. (around the corner from the Borough, or down the street from the bank)
The Kotzebue office is open M-F, 8am-5pm (except during lunch)

Online:

Refuge website: <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/selawik/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SelawikNationalWildlifeRefuge/>

Email:

- Wil Wiese, Refuge Manager: wilhelm_wiese@fws.gov
- Brittany Sweeney, Assistant Manager: brittany_sweeney@fws.gov
- Bill Carter, Fish Biologist: bill_carter@fws.gov
- Shawn Nelson, Maintenance Professional: shawn_nelson@fws.gov

