



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
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INFORMATION BULLETIN - September 2026

Aerial Salmon Survey Contact: Truett Cawlfeld

Togiak Refuge has initiated aerial surveys of the Salmon River which flows into the Kuskokwim Bay. The aim of this survey is to establish a baseline for salmon run timing and run size for this system. A weir is installed to enumerate escapement on the Salmon River from 2023-2027 and is managed by the Kenai Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office, who is partnering with the Togiak Refuge staff on this project. The weir will be utilized to ensure the accuracy and precision of aerial surveys.

Arctic Char Population Inventory Contact: Truett Cawlfeld

Togiak Refuge has developed a multi-year study to inventory Arctic char populations throughout the Refuge. This species was previously confirmed to occur in 27 lakes. Since the beginning of the study 36 lakes have been sampled, and Arctic char occurrence has been documented in 17 new lakes. We have collected size and genetic information from 375 fish and provided the UAF museum with voucher specimens. If you have any first-hand knowledge of small or unique Arctic char populations and would be willing to share that information, please contact Truett Cawlfeld at the Togiak Refuge office.

Mulchatna Caribou Contact: Truett Cawlfeld

A July 2026 post-calving photo survey for the Mulchatna herd was conducted in cooperation with ADF&G staff. Refuge staff surveyed the portion of the herd on TNWR, south of the Kanektok River and west of the Togiak drainage. The survey yielded a minimum count of 1,349, down from the previous year's minimum count of 1,464.

A Wildlife Special Action will be considered by the Federal Subsistence Board February 2-5, 2027, to open the southwest corner of Togiak National Wildlife Refuge, and other federal lands, to caribou hunting on parts of units 17 and 18 to the communities of Platinum, Goodnews, Togiak, and Twin Hills.

Nushagak Peninsula Caribou Contact: Truett Cawlfeld

A photocensus of the Nushagak Peninsula Herd on July 8, 2026 estimated the population at 568 caribou, down from the 2025 population estimate of 643. A composition survey in early October 2025 estimated 53 bulls and 60 calves per 100 cows. The calf to cow ratio and bull to cow ratio were higher than the October 2024 estimate of 30 bulls and 58 calves per 100 cows.

The Nushagak Peninsula Caribou Planning Committee met via teleconference on July 17, 2026 to review results of previous hunts, population and lichen monitoring, and the harvest strategy. Hunters reported

taking 120 caribou during the 2025-2026 season. The season opened August 1, 2026 and will close March 31, 2027 or when 150 caribou have been harvested. Two permits are available per person.

Moose Contact: Truett Cawlfeld

In 2026 long term monitoring of radio collared moose in units 17 and 18 on Togiak NWR continued to study twinning rates and calf production. Additional reporting will be forthcoming on the results. The same individuals will be relocated in October to monitor calf survival on Togiak moose populations.

March 2026 in cooperation with ADF&G Dillingham staff and APB Refuge staff, Togiak Refuge conducted a moose GSPE in GMU 17A. The resulting population estimate for 17A was 1840 +/- 255, which is down from the 2022 estimate of 1,976 +/- 358.

Walrus Contact: Jannelle Trowbridge

Since 1985, the Refuge has monitored walrus use of coastal haulouts on Refuge lands using a variety of field methods. The spatial and temporal extent of monitoring activities has expanded over time. Field methods have included daily ground counts during non-winter months (1985–2008), infrequent aerial surveys (2003–2012), and year-round time lapse photography using remote cameras (2010–present). Survey objectives guiding the choices of analytical methods and the focus of survey reports also have changed over time. Recently, survey objectives entailed quantifying the timing, daily peak numbers, and maximum known number of walruses using coastal haulouts monitored at Cape Peirce, Cape Newenham, and Hagemeister Island. In 2025, Refuge staff collaborated with the Alaska Inventory and Monitoring Program to review and update the Refuge's existing study plan for monitoring walrus haulouts. Togiak refuge is moving away from counting individual walrus and will instead focus on providing reliable contemporary information quantifying timing, presence and absence of walrus at the monitored haulouts. The updated study plan will be finalized in fall 2026.

Seabirds Contact: Jannelle Trowbridge

The abundance of black-legged kittiwakes, common murres, and pelagic cormorants has been monitored at Cape Peirce since 1990. Monitoring was not conducted in 2015 and 2020. The average number of birds counted on study plots in 2026 was 627 kittiwakes, 177 murres, and 44 cormorants. Over the past 35 years of data, the average number of birds counted on study plots are 990 kittiwakes (range = 238-1,906), 2,183 murres (range = 53-4,490), and 77 cormorants (range = 15-149). It is evident that the common murres have not recovered from the massive 2015-2016 die-off that occurred from starvation during a marine heatwave. If you see sick or dead wild birds report them to 907-229-6357.

In the 2026 field season refuge staff witnessed higher than normal marine mammal strandings. Reach out to the Alaska Marine Mammal hotline if you see a dead, injured, or distressed marine mammal. 1-877-925-7773.

Invasive Plant Surveys Contact: Jannelle Trowbridge

Elodea spp. is a highly invasive and difficult to control aquatic plant implicated in the degradation and loss of fish habitat across the world. It was confirmed present in Alaska in 1982 and is now found in several waterbodies across the State. Refuge and Park staff conducted another season of *Elodea* surveys within the Togiak Refuge, Wood-Tikchik State Park, and the surrounding area. Both aquatic and terrestrial invasive plants were evaluated at high use areas such as popular camps, float plane beaching areas, boat ramps, and docks. Surveys are currently underway. Thus far, no *Elodea* has been detected.

Togiak refuge was able to install two boot brush stations this year. These stations help prevent the spread of invasive plants whose seeds may be hitching a ride on your shoes. One was installed at the main office in

Dillingham, and the other at Quinhagak Airport. The Quinhagak boot brush station was done in partnership with Native Village of Kwinhagak. We also have outreach material about invasive species and have been connecting with guides, recreational users, visiting techs, and community members in the field to educate and help strengthen efforts in preventing the spread of invasive species. Stop by the Dillingham Togiak Refuge office for invasive plant ID guides and stickers!

Pollinator Surveys Contact: Jannelle Trowbridge

Togiak Refuge is participating in the Alaska Bee Atlas effort to document bees in Alaska to understand conservation concerns. This is an effort through the Alaska Center for Conservation Science at the University of Alaska Anchorage. In the 2026 season Togiak Refuge did 18 pollinator surveys. The pollinators captured will be sent to the Alaska Bee Atlas team to be identified. Results will be publicly available at the following website: <https://accs.uaa.alaska.edu/wildlife/ak-bee-atlas/>

Water Temperature Monitoring Contact: Truett Cawlfeld

Stream temperature monitoring has been conducted at 21 locations on 14 rivers in Togiak Refuge since August 2001. Continuous hourly water temperatures are recorded at each site. Over 2.4 million temperature records were collected, quality-graded, and digitally stored in a database. The warmest month each year was July. The warmest temperatures were observed in the Kukaktlim Lake outlet and the coolest temperatures were observed in the Weary River. In addition to the stream temperature monitoring, we monitored lake temperature using moored all-season temperature arrays to record hourly temperatures throughout the water column in 2 lakes since 2011. The lakes differed significantly in surface area, water volume, and elevation with Ongivinuk Lake being smaller and at higher elevation than Snake Lake. We observed variation in lake ice timing and fewer days of ice cover on Snake Lake than on Ongivinuk Lake. We observed that both lakes turn over in spring and fall. We observed water temperatures in excess of standards for fish rearing and migration habitats during summer down to 12.5 m in Snake Lake and down to 5 m in Ongivinuk Lake. Project reports are available upon request.

Quantifying River Discharge Contact: Truett Cawlfeld

Togiak Refuge and the USFWS Water Resources Branch have worked cooperatively since 1999 to acquire hydrologic data of the flow regime (magnitude, duration, timing, frequency, and rate of change) and water quality on rivers throughout the Refuge. A network of stream discharge gages collected stream flow data from 1999-2005 at 20 locations. A subset of five of these stations continued to collect data through fall 2009, after which three of the five stations were removed. We continue to monitor discharge in the Togiak and Kulukak Rivers, although due to Covid-19 travel restrictions, the gages were inoperative in 2020-2021. Both stations were brought back into operation in July 2022. Stations have been visited and maintained by Fish and Wildlife staff each year since.

Education and Outreach Contact: Terry Fuller

Togiak Refuge has an active education and outreach program. From an education standpoint, during a normal school year, Refuge staff conducts an average of 60+ classroom visits throughout 12 Bristol Bay villages annually. Classroom visits include lessons about the Migratory Bird Calendar, National Wildlife Refuge Week, careers in natural resource conservation, as well as teacher requested presentations. The Refuge works with several school districts and private schools including the Southwest Region, Lower Kuskokwim, Dillingham City school districts and the Dillingham 7th Day Adventist School. Some topics often include bird walks, wilderness survival skills, salmon life cycles, aquatic resources, and bear safety. The refuge website, one of our educational tools, is undergoing a migration to a new platform, and we are excited about better access it will allow and the content it will provide.

Togiak Refuge conducts a National Archery in the Schools Program in the Dillingham City School District,

during the school year, in conjunction with Dillingham Elementary School. We hope to grow this program in the future, as well as expanding its footprint in other Refuge villages.

Togiak Refuge, in partnership with Dillingham City School District, is planning to conduct hunter safety courses (as sponsored by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game) in Dillingham Schools. Previously, the Refuge had partnered with SWRSD and ADF&G to conduct classes throughout western Bristol Bay Villages. Previous classes have impacted more than 100 students in Manokotak, Dillingham, Twin Hills, Togiak, Aleknagik and Quinhagak. Dillingham City School District recently received a grant by which DCSD teachers and Refuge staff went to a class in Anchorage to become certified instructors.

The Refuge education program also produces Bristol Bay Field Notes, an award-winning weekly radio program on KDLG 670 AM that covers an array of outdoor-related topics (past episodes can be found on KDLG's website). Togiak Refuge has an active and heavily followed Facebook page which disseminates information to a rapidly growing global audience.

The Refuge normally hosts an Open House event, in celebration of National Public Lands Day and National Hunting and Fishing Day.

Togiak Refuge staff has a history of working with the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council and the ADF&G to conduct household subsistence waterfowl surveys. Refuge staff and volunteers conduct surveys in a number of southwest Alaska communities, Aleknagik, Dillingham, Togiak, Clark's Point, Newhalen, Chignik Lake and Chignik Lagoon. Due to budgetary constraints in recent years, those surveys are on hold for the foreseeable future.

Togiak Refuge has historically had two Science camps for area teens, and assisted with a third. Those camps are in flux, for a host of reasons related to budgets and travel. This summer the Refuge was able to offer one camp to HS students. Originally 3 students from Dillingham and 3 from Togiak were chosen, but due to scheduling conflicts, the 3 Dillingham students dropped out and were replaced by students from Togiak. A modified float camp took place on the Kashaiak and Togiak Rivers, during the week of August 17-21. 6 Togiak HS students participated. Students learned rafting skills, water safety, Leave No Trace camping practices, and bear safety during the camp. Students also participated in other outdoor activities such as wilderness survival skills and archery. The camp provided students with an opportunity to learn about the biological diversity found on the Refuge, while developing a deeper sense of stewardship for local natural resources.

Staffing notes: Deputy refuge manager Stan Culling was chosen as the new refuge manager, following the retirement of Kenton Moos, and fish biologist Truett Cawlfeld has taken on moose and caribou programs, following the retirement of Andy Aderman. The entirety of Togiak Refuge staff has stepped in to try and keep up with the many roles and duties left by those who retired in 2025.