



# Summary of Activities

## *Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge*



Photo credit: FWS/Ronan Dugan

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Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge  
907-456-0329 or 877-220-1853  
kanuti\_refuge@fws.gov  
<http://kanuti.fws.gov/>

➤ ***Staffing Updates***

We are happy to announce that long-time Kanuti Refuge Wildlife Biologist, Chris Harwood, has accepted our Lead Wildlife Biologist position, which has been vacant since 2014. Chris has more than 30 years of biological experience working for Alaska Refuges, including 17 years at Kanuti Refuge. He received his Master's degree from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks for his thesis on the breeding ecology of Whimbrels in Interior Alaska. Chris has extensive field experience working at remote sites in Alaska. Though he specializes in birds, he has experience working with multiple species. His field, GIS and data management experience will be a great asset to Kanuti Refuge in terms of providing biological depth, up-to-date analyses and scientific decision-making tools to managers so that they can make the most effective decisions possible. We are thrilled to have Chris leading our biological program.



➤ ***Fish, Wildlife and Habitat Research and Monitoring***

Lynx Movements Study:

In March 2020 Kanuti Refuge again participated in an Interior-wide study of lynx movements along with Koyukuk/Nowitna/Innoko, Yukon Flats, and Tetlin Refuges, Gates of the Arctic National Park, and the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Unfortunately within about a week of getting our crew to Bettles to set up their traplines, we had to recall them back to Fairbanks due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Among the project sites on other lands where trapping occurred earlier in the season, fewer lynx were caught in 2020 than in prior years. This was not

unexpected given that snowshoe hares seemed to be down regionally. We expect to resume the project at all study sites when things are back to normal.



USFWS photo of a collared lynx.

#### Molting Goose Survey:

Pilot/biologists from Yukon Flats and Koyukuk/Nowitna/Innoko refuges completed our annual aerial molting goose survey during July 7 and 9, 2020. The survey historically includes 25 line transects covering Greater White-fronted Goose (“white-fronts”) habitat on the Refuge, as well as the mouth of the Kanuti River, and Lake Todatonten. The 25 transects are located in three core areas (“hot spots”) historically used by molting white-fronts: 1) South Fork Koyukuk River area in the north, 2) Katalahosa Lake area in central Refuge, and Kanuti Lake-Mud Lakes area to the south. Here are our preliminary results.

For white-fronts this year, the crew saw 475 birds, including 442 adults (the most in a while!) and 32 young. Most white-fronts were in several large flocks at the Mud Lakes; this area annually hosts the most white-fronts. They also saw 14 adult and 34 young Canada Geese.

The crew noted generally high water on the refuge, which might have discouraged nesting or gosling survival. We also had major flooding of Kanuti River in the spring (at least at the cabin). That, too, may have depressed local nesting near the cabin. Five flying white-fronts were seen at Lake Todatonten, which again had low water.



July 2020 photo of Lake Todatonten by Nikki Guldager/USFWS.

#### Trumpeter Swan Census:

The same crew who flew our molting goose survey completed our swan census the week of August 10-16, 2020. We try to conduct this survey every five years to monitor the Trumpeter Swan population within the refuge. Though many swans were observed, the results of the census were not available at time of submitting this report.



USFWS photo of Trumpeter Swans by Amanda Zuelke.

### Lesser Yellowlegs Study:

We had to cancel our Lesser Yellowlegs research in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We had hoped to base out of the Johnson B. Moses administrative cabin at Kanuti Lake again and resight birds we tagged in 2019, as well as capture and tag new adults. Nevertheless, of the 10 birds we GPS-tagged in 2019, we know that three of them returned in spring 2020 to the Lake Taiholman area where we had first tagged them. We hope to resume the study in 2021.



Photo of Lesser Yellowlegs by Zak Pohlen.

### Beaver Cache Survey:

In late September, we hope to conduct an aerial survey to estimate beaver caches (food piles) on the Refuge. We use this cache survey to monitor beaver abundance and track distribution on the Refuge. We last completed this survey in 2010 when we estimated 1,104 caches (with confidence range of 933-1,274). With much of Alaska predicted to be appreciably drier by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, regularly surveying aquatic habitat-dependent species like beavers will help us track habitat conditions in the refuge.



USFWS photo of beaver cache taken during 2010 survey in Kanuti Refuge.

➤ ***Fire Management***

Wildfire Activity:

Kanuti Refuge had an unusually quiet fire season in 2020, with no fires reported to date.

➤ ***Public Use Management***

Special Use Permits:

This year we issued special use permits authorizing three air transporters and one air taxi operator to conduct commercial operations in Kanuti Refuge. One of the air taxi operators subsequently cancelled their permit prior to conducting any activities in 2020.

At the time of this report, the single big game hunt guide who is permitted to conduct operations in the refuge anticipates conducting moose hunts in September. We also issued one company a permit to conduct guided sport fishing activities.

Law Enforcement:

At the time of this report, we plan to conduct aerial and boat-based law enforcement patrols in the refuge during the moose hunting season.

Outreach and Environmental Education:

Due to our commitment to prevent the spread of COVID-19 into rural communities we work closely with, as well as Tanana Chiefs Conference's decision not to insert and staff the Henshaw Creek Salmon Weir for the same reasons this year, we were unable to offer the Henshaw Creek Weir Science and Culture Camp. We look forward to hosting it again next year if conditions allow.

**Questions?**

If you have any questions about the Refuge, feel free to call us at 877-220-1853. Our headquarters office is located in the Fairbanks Federal building at 101 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Our field station is located near the airport at Bettles, along with the Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve ranger station and visitor center. If any WIRAC members are ever in the vicinity of Fairbanks or Bettles, we invite you to stop by for a visit!



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