

# News Release



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## **SERVICE AND ALASKAN FISHING INDUSTRY UNITE TO PROTECT THE ENDANGERED SHORT-TAILED ALBATROSS AND OTHER SEABIRDS**

In an effort to reduce the taking of seabirds, including the endangered short-tailed albatross, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission today signed an agreement providing \$400,000 to help longliners install seabird deterrent devices on boats fishing the Bering Sea and North Pacific off the coast of Alaska.

"Unfortunately, the short-tailed albatross and many other seabirds have developed the habit of following commercial longline fishing boats and diving on baited hooks -- often with deadly results. This unique partnership addresses this problem without disrupting Alaska's vital fisheries industry," Jamie Rappaport Clark, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, said. "With the support of the Administration and Congress, we've established a Landowner Incentive Program to provide on-the-ground dollars to people to further the conservation of endangered species. That program made today's agreement possible. This agreement is yet another example demonstrating how the Endangered Species Act can and does work."

The fishing industry, the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service, along with researchers at the University of Washington's Sea Grant Program, have been working together to develop and test various means of reducing the by-catch of seabirds, including the short-tailed albatross. Preliminary results suggest that, with a relatively small investment in seabird deterrent devices, the loss of thousands of seabirds annually can be dramatically reduced.

Today's agreement between the Service and the Commission will promote the continued development and installation of seabird deterrent devices on longline fishing boats in the Bering Sea and North Pacific. The Commission will assist the Service in providing cost-sharing dollars to fishers for the installation of various devices that will significantly reduce the by-catch of seabirds. The Service anticipates that the \$400,000 provided by the Landowner Incentive Program will be leveraged to more than \$600,000 by cost-sharing with the industry. This will allow all of the 36 large freezer longliner fishing vessels and approximately half of the 2,000 smaller longline vessels to install seabird deterrent devices.

"This effort is good for the albatross and other seabirds, good for the fishing industry, and is a tribute to all those individuals who focused on finding solutions to this conservation challenge, " David B. Allen, the Service's Alaska Regional Director, said.

The short-tailed albatross, a long-lived seabird that is also the largest in the northern hemisphere, spends nearly its entire adult life soaring over the Bering Sea and North Pacific Ocean. The short-tailed albatross is listed as endangered internationally under the Endangered Species Act. The Service has proposed extending this designation to also cover U.S. waters.

The world's population of short-tailed albatross, which once totaled about 5 million birds, was devastated by feather hunters during the late 1800s and early 1900s. In the 1930s its numbers were further decimated by volcanic eruptions on Torishima, Japan, one of only two islands where it was known to nest. By the 1940s scientists estimated that fewer than 50 adult birds survived. Today, the entire world population totals only 1,200 birds. Nearly the entire population nests on Torishima Island, and efforts are being made to stabilize the steep eroding slopes of their habitat on this volcanic island.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 520 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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