

Community Coastal Impact Assistance Program

Identification of Important Wildlife to Protect Coastal Areas of St. Lawrence Island

Award Amount

\$ 35,155

Grantee

Bering Straits Coastal Association

Project Contact

Willa Eckenweiler, Program Director
P.O. Box 231, Unalakleet, AK 99684
Telephone Number: (907) 624-3780
E-mail Address: wteckenweiler@hotmail.com

Location

This project will be located in the Bering Straits Coastal Association (BSCA) region which includes the area of the former Bering Straits Coastal Resource Service Area, generally the Norton Bay and Seward Peninsula area in Western Alaska. This project investigates the areas used by wildlife on St. Lawrence Island and in adjacent waters. The two coastal communities on St. Lawrence Island include Savoonga and Gambell. Savoonga is located 39 miles southeast of Gambell at approximately 63.694170° North Latitude and -170.478890° West Longitude.

Project Duration

Project Start date: October 1, 2014
Project End Date: March 31, 2016
Project Duration: 1.5 years

Project Description

The purpose of this project is to gain a better understanding of the importance of St. Lawrence Island and surrounding waters to wildlife. It will also include an assessment of risks to wildlife species and identify measures to prevent or reduce impacts to the coastal habitats of these species. Wildlife areas to be addressed in the project include habitats for bird species, such as spectacled and Steller's Eiders, and habitats for marine mammals, including beluga whales, bowhead whales, walrus, and seals. This study will compile existing published information and obtain new local and traditional knowledge about the importance of this area to feeding, reproduction, and rearing of these species.

This project will benefit the natural coastal environment of St. Lawrence Island through the development of information that will result in improved information that will promote informed decisions. In addition, the project will result in coastal benefits by providing St. Lawrence Island residents an improved understanding of the importance of wildlife habitats and how their actions affect those habitats. In addition, agencies will have access to a single document that synthesizes existing information and incorporates local and traditional knowledge.

The BSCA Program Director will manage this project and ensure project goals and objectives are

met. The Program Director will develop a request for proposals for a qualified consultant to assist in completing the project goals and objectives. With approval of the board, the Program Director will enter into a contract with the consultant. The consultant will assist with the following project tasks.

Year 1

- Develop the final study design which will address priorities identified by the BSCA.
- Complete a literature search to determine what studies have been completed about wildlife species in the St. Lawrence Island area.
- Complete an annotated bibliography about sources of information about use of the area by wildlife species.
- Contact state and federal agencies to determine what unpublished information they have about wildlife and habitats in the project area and information gaps that exist.
- Train the Program Director to conduct interviews with community leaders and elders from Gambell and Savoonga to gather local and traditional knowledge about use of habitats by wildlife species. The consultant may also participate in these interviews.

Year 2

- Complete and distribute a draft report for comment that synthesizes existing information and incorporates local and traditional knowledge about wildlife in the St. Lawrence area.
- Complete a final report that responds to comments on the draft as appropriate.

This project involves consultation with state and federal agencies to determine what research and studies have been conducted in the project area.

Measurable Goals and Objectives

The project includes the following goals and objectives.

Year 1

- Complete an annotated bibliography about existing wildlife studies for the St. Lawrence Island area.
- Conduct at least 25 semi-structured interviews with residents of Gambell and Savoonga about local and traditional knowledge to supplement existing studies. The interviews will include questions about changing environmental conditions, risks to wildlife habitat and potential measures that would reduce impacts from these risks.
- Complete the draft study and distribute it for review and comment by agencies and the communities of Savoonga and Gambell.

Year 2

- Complete and distribute the final report (20 hard copies and 20 CDs to the BSCA and additional copies to each of the agencies contacted during the research for this project).

CIAP Authorized Use

This project is consistent with Authorized Use #1 – Projects and activities for the conservation, protection, or restoration of coastal areas, including wetlands. This project will educate local St. Lawrence Island residents and state and federal agencies about ways to protect and conserve coastal areas that are important for the wildlife of St. Lawrence Island. The use of the information from this study will result in improved conservation and protection of coastal areas. It will lead to a reduction of impacts as community members and state and federal decision makers are made aware of the risks to wildlife habitat and measures to avoid, minimize or mitigate impacts that are identified during the study. The project will give St. Lawrence Island residents an improved understanding of the importance of wildlife habitats and how their actions affect those habitats. In addition, agencies will have access to a single document that synthesizes existing information and incorporates local and traditional knowledge. A greater understanding of the area's wildlife by state and federal agencies will benefit the natural coastal environment because permitting agencies have the ability to add stipulations to their permits to protect sensitive habitats.