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Bureau of Biological Survey

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DIVISION OF INFORMATION

Will Develop Wild Life on Alaska
Refuge, Largest in North America

Greater protection for the native birds and fur animals in the largest wild life sanctuary in North America - a remote area consisting of approximately 1,000 islands stretching 1,200 miles from Alaska toward Asia - has been established by Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes.

The action announced today consisted of the approval of regulations designed to save the wild life resources on the vast 3,000,000 acre Aleutian Islands Wild Life Refuge of Alaska. This island chain, sparsely inhabited, swings across the North Pacific Ocean 1,200 miles from the southwestern tip of Alaska to a point only 450 miles from the Asiatic coast. The Bureau of Biological Survey reported that heretofore the Aleutians Refuge has been inadequately administered because of lack of personnel and funds.

The new regulations approved by Secretary Ickes will have three important effects, Survey officials said: (1) The blue fox industry, which annually yields about 3,000 pelts with a total valuation of some \$100,000, will be required to operate so as to avoid destruction to important forms of birds; (2) native birds will be studied and attempts made to prevent their extermination; and (3) natives, particularly the 450 Aleuts on the islands, will be given the means to achieve economic independence.

Highlights of the new regulations are: Some islands will be maintained exclusively for wild life-conservation work; all outstanding permits for fur or fox farming on various islands are revoked and lessees must apply for new permits to continue operations on the same or other islands; islands will be leased for a minimum payment of \$25 annually plus \$1 for every pelt taken from the island; and no permits will be granted to aliens or to corporations in which aliens own more than 50 percent of the stock.

"Every possible consideration will be given the natives in the reassignment of islands for fox farming purposes", Survey officials said.

In recommending refuge regulations to Secretary Ickes, Survey officials pointed out that though the Aleutian Islands Refuge has been under Biological Survey administration since March 1913 no provisions were made for active administration of the area. As a result, the Survey declared, the unregulated blue fox industry proved dangerous to other forms of wild life on the islands.

Many sea birds are now dangerously close to the point of extinction here, while others are severely depleted in numbers. Prevalent species in this region are auklets, murre, puffins, fulmars, guillemots, eider and harlequin ducks, green-winged teal, emperor geese, shearwaters, ptarmigans, and oyster catchers. The whiskered auklet and ancient murrelet are now almost extinct here, Survey observers reported. Bird populations suffering most from depredations of foxes at the present time are the ground-burrowing forms, the petrels, puffins, and auklets.

Control of the blue fox industry is necessary, it is believed, because the animals are turned loose on the islands to forage for food and habitually raid various bird rookeries. Recent Biological Survey investigations indicate that on certain islands about 60 percent of the blue foxes' food consists of birds taken during the nesting period.

Permits to use islands to raise blue foxes in the wild have in the past been given to natives, Aleut communities, and white persons. Under the new regulations, preference in issuing permits will be given to native communities. Islands with large bird colonies, however, will remain inviolate sanctuaries.

About 600 people live on the various islands, all but 150 being Aleuts. At the easternmost tip of the Aleutian chain is False Pass, with a population of 34. Other towns are massed in the eastern portion of the islands: Akutan, with 40 inhabitants; Biorka, 16; Dutch Harbor and Unalaska, 233; Makushin, 11; Kashega, 43; Nikolski, 101; and Atka, 96.

At the westernmost tip of the chain lies the isolated village of Attu with a total population of 42.

The natives subsist almost entirely on the resources available on the area, taking what they can from the sea and getting what revenue is possible from trapping or raising blue foxes.

Patrolling the entire area and conducting studies on the wild life resources of the sanctuary will be a staff of Biological Survey workers, with headquarters at Unalaska, who will use the Brown Bear, the Survey's 115-foot, twin-Diesel motor vessel, for this purpose. A 10-man crew will man the boat, which can operate on a 24-hour basis when necessary, and the vessel is expected to be active nine months each year.