

## **ALEUTIAN CANADA GOOSE**

The Aleutian Canada goose is one of the smallest subspecies of Canada goose, weighing between four and six pounds, which makes it slightly larger than a mallard duck. Even though the goose's taxonomy was redefined in 2004, which resulted in it being renamed the Aleutian cackling goose, the term used here is the "old" one because that is how it has been identified under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Even though the Aleutian Canada goose is one of the few delisted species to have benefited substantially from the Endangered Species Act, almost all the ESA-related conservation measures that helped the goose could have been accomplished under laws other than the Act. Furthermore, state and especially private conservation efforts were critically important to the goose. In addition, ESA proponents' most valued conservation tool under the Act—land use control through the ESA's "harm" by habitat modification rule—had little if anything to do with the goose's rebound.

The story of the Aleutian Canada goose's rebound involves fourteen topics:

- Hunting restrictions on wintering grounds in California, Oregon and Washington were the most important conservation measure.
- Next most important was eradication of non-native foxes from nesting grounds in the Aleutian Islands, which could have occurred much more quickly and cheaply but for opposition from pressure groups that also support the ESA.
- Conservation of almost all nesting habitat occurred long before the ESA's passage in 1973.
- Wintering habitat conservation occurred largely on private lands.
- Conservation of private wintering habitat was very political, with wealthy landowners in California receiving public funds, while working-class farmers in Oregon and Washington received no compensation for valuable pastures grazed by the geese.
- The ESA's land use controls had virtually nothing to do with the goose's conservation.

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- Translocations by the FWS of geese in the nesting range were of relatively minor importance.
- A very small number of geese expanded their habitat range naturally.
- Bald eagle predation was the major barrier to establishing geese on islands rendered fox-free.
- A major contributor to the 1990 downlisting, from endangered to the less-imperiled status of threatened was data error; in this case two small populations that were discovered subsequent to the goose's listing under the ESA.
- With each revision of the recovery plan, in 1982 and 1991, the FWS made recovery goals more difficult to achieve. This moving the goal posts had some merit, but also had the effect of pushing back the recovery date, providing more time and therefore opportunity for the FWS and pressure groups to use the goose as a land-use control tool, and giving the FWS and others more time and opportunities to acquire funding for goose conservation.
- ESA supporters who purport to be experts on the ESA have badly misrepresented the goose's conservation.
- The FWS belatedly delisted the goose.
- When the FWS finally delisted the goose in 2001, politics again came into play.