

U.S. Fish + Wildlife Service
Fairbanks

light brown hair -
Harrison Ford of Raiders
of the Lost Ark look

Mark Beatham
Lead b.i.

2014-10-07

clean shaven

since 93 AK 50

Refuge supervising b.o. Prog

X-F Diverge

Kakhi shirt name tag - gold patch of USWS,

wetland drain - 30%

17,000 sq mi 10-30,000 ponds

waterfowl - highest densities in AK
breeding

Yukon R. - b.i. refuge

liferhood of refuge

5 villages on Yukon River -

Stevens V. - SW corner 100-150 residents ^{Alut. fish & Kosonkan}

Beaver - Frank Yasuda - Athab. mixture
op Birch Crk - Village 20 people at most

Chandalar River comes in

80 mi up - Venetia 200 people

FT Yukon hub of Interior AK B-200 "

up Porcupine R. - up Black Chalk Pt

on up outer edge Circle

Land selections - BLM still finalizing on joining

Nat. A. 16 towns - a huge # - sm. private land holders

Land exchange tried w/ Doyon - not go -

Wildlife - 4 purposes

To conserve wildlife - habitat

fire management - where treated
other areas - not go

Floods - severe this year - damages pop. areas

② but recharges wet lands
intl treaty - waterfowl + salmon
obligations Canada + Mexico w/ Canada

③ ensure birds - to Russia, lower 48, Cent. Amer.
adequate water + quantity
pristine enviro -

concerned about headwaters that
flow into refuge
④ Subs. opportunity
Subs. priority
mandated by fed
local residents ~ 1920s

villages like Ft. W. Service
Museum FY.

? oil + gas

Land exchange - seismic work since 1970s

Refuge / on land - 1/2 privately owned

2 1/2 m - Nat. Corps own

Dayon - create jobs +
develop. resources -

checkboard pattern - buffer zone

colored
map

seismic work near St. Vit.

areas around refuge managed by BLM

e.g., White mts

? Arctic N.W.R.

photos of him w/ orange bull
moose shot w/ bow
checked fall + arrow

Rampart Dam - Gruening's plan 1950s

concern of residents ^{most}
huge reservoir - incl. ~~all~~ villages

laid foundation for wildlife studies

banded ducks 4 yrs 40,000 ducks
found it was intl feeding ground

limited access - limits public use - most use
by local residents

some fly in trappers, guides
intl travellers floating

not much resource devel.

port jobs

Tourist - some locals doing

connects w/ old Crow Basin in Canada

priority for selection -

a melting pot of habitats

9-10-13

Mark Bertram
Lead Wildlife biologist for Yukon Flats W.R.

2014-10-07

Been here since '93, with F&W since 86.
Background in wildlife management.

Here at the Refuge, my primary responsibilities are biological program, just one segment of what we do here at the Refuge. Originally from Missouri. B.S. in Missouri, degree in wildlife management.

? overview of Y-Flats W.R.?

It's diverse. It's a huge expanse - most of the diversity comes from the land out there. There's a huge wetland basin, 10,000 sq mile wetland basin, the Yukon Flats basin, within the boundaries of the refuge. That wetland basin comprises probably about 30% of the actual land base out there, but considering we're talking about 17,000 sq-miles, a considerable portion of that is the wetland basin. That's what gives the Yukon Flats its international acclaim, its basin.

Getting back to the diversity - within the wetland basin there's somewhere between 10 and 30,000 lakes & ponds, depending on what you use to call a lake or pond. Something less than an acre, we've probably got something like 30 or 40,000 lakes & ponds out there. But if you're looking at something a little larger than that, not so many lakes and ponds.

It's got all these lakes & ponds, and what's interesting is that they're very different. Different water chemistry,

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diff. vegetation types surrounding each wetlands, diff. water levels - some are very deep, up to 100 feet deep - many are very shallow. The geology around it contributes to what makes up that water basin as well.

- ✓ what this all equates to is really diverse types of lakes + ponds. And what that means is that is really attracts a lot of wildlife, esp. waterfowl. This basin is home to some of the highest densities of waterfowl nesting in AK.

It's got an intl reputation for being a breeding area for waterfowl. A lot of what we do is designed around managing the waterfowl, ^{although we do much more than} that's one of the ~~that~~ driving forces for us.

? Is it the Yukon River a big part of that?

- ✓ Huge. The Yukon River bisects the Refuge. It goes right down through the heart of the Refuge. All these lakes and ponds are all adjacent to the Yukon R., so - as - we had a huge flood year this year, so a lot of those lakes and ponds were recharged by the Yukon R. So it's all one big system. I call it the life blood flowing through the Refuge, because not only do you have the water coming through, all those nutrients that are coming through and being shared with those lakes + ponds, you're also got 5 villages that are directly on those rivers, on that Yukon River within the Refuge. It's not a coincidence that people live on the Yukon R because it's historically the logistical place - the place to be logistically. And it's where a

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lot of resources are. For instance, it's also a wintering ground for what moose we have on the Yukon Flats.

2. Villages?

Well, we'll work our way upstream. There are villages on the western edge of the refuge, on the SW corner, Stevens Village. There must be a hundred, 150 residents there. Primarily, well, they have a mixture of Athabascan and Cuitchan Native Americans living there. It's kind of a border for that. Downriver there's a lot of Koyukon Athabascan - upriver it's more Cuitchan.

Then, as you go upstream to Beaver, Beaver is the next village up. About the same size: 100 to 150 residents. That's an interesting village because - people who've read history - Frank Yasuda was the one who founded it years and years ago. He was a Japanese man, so there's a lot of ethnic mixture there.

Now, adjacent to Beaver, not ~~really~~ really on the Yukon River, there's a tributary that comes into the Yukon R that's called Birch Creek. Up Birch Creek 100 or so miles is the village of Birch Creek which is a small village, 30 people reside there at most. It's a very small village.

And, then as you go upstream from Beaver on up the Yukon River, you'll hit

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The Chandalar River. That's another large tributary coming in to the Yukon. You go another, maybe 50 to 80 miles upstream you'll hit the village of Venetie. That's a very large village, made up of about 200 people.

Back down to the Yukon river, upstream you'll hit Fort Yukon, and that's the hub of Interior AK, eastern interior region that we're in. Fort Yukon has from 6 to 700 people, approximately; it goes up and down a little bit seasonally. It's the hub.

If you were to go up the Porcupine, the mouth is right at ~~the~~ adjacent to Fort Yukon. If you go up the Porcupine, and then up the Black River, you'll hit Chalkyik. That's up in the north east corner of the refuge. There are about 100 to 150 people there.

As you continue upstream [the Yukon R.], the outer edge of the eastern part of the refuge is the village of Circle. That really completes the villages that are ~~in~~ on or adjacent to the Yukon Flats. Central is fairly close also. Arctic Village is pretty far distant from Venetie, but there's a lot of interaction between Venetie and Arctic Village ethnically. So, there's a lot of families that exchange back and forth. But those are the primary villages we deal with on the Yukon Flats.

? Since land claims, a lot of village selections

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? within the refuge. How has that worked out?

It's an ever-on-going process. BLM is in the process of still finalizing all these land claims that were made back in '72. It's an on-going process. We are constantly adjusting our land status maps because we're, we get word through BLM that there's a selection that's been settled. Most of those selections are minor adjustments. The thing that we're more involved with more than anything else are a lot of Native allotments in the Refuge also. There's a huge number of Native allotments out there, which means there's small, private land holders. We consult with people about the Native allotment status out there, but really the thing that's happened to us recently - we just recently went through a proposal by one of the Native village corporations and Dagon, Limited. And it was to have a land exchange, and the land exchange did not take place, but it brought to light these types of things could happen. This particular land exchange was exchanging Native village lands for Refuge lands. Got into an environmental statement to make the final decision and the public weighed in, the villages weighed in, and there was enough public sentiment against the land exchange that it didn't take place. This is one of the things that can happen out there as far as

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land acquisitions go,

7. What's the primary responsibility in terms of the wildlife?

We've got 4 purposes that we follow, our directive from Congress.

The first one is to conserve fish and wildlife and their habitats in their natural diversity. We have a very significant wetland habitat on the refuge and so we do focus on that a lot, we do a lot of inventory monitoring of wildlife resources.

We also are ~~at~~ focused on the habitat that those populations live on. Probably the one thing we're, we make annual decisions on is fire management. Fire really sculpts the land out there. Each year the Refuge manager, Steve here, will get a phone call from the fire management officer and we've got to make a decision on a certain fire. Different types of fire management categories depending on what where the land is located. Generally speaking, the closer it is to populated areas, the more likely it is that we are going to take some type of action to put the fire out, to try to control it or direct it - altho it's not really practical to direct fire in AK as you know.

A lot of the areas that are away from the populated areas are in what they call limited areas, let fire in those areas grow

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From a management standpoint, when you're trying to conserve ~~and~~ wildlife populations and promote their growth, the habitat is very important. So, fire from our perspective is a good thing. It helps to reshape the landscape; it's part of the natural process out there. Fire, also like flooding, can be very destructive depending on how you look at it, but flooding also coming in the right place can do good things also. We had severe floods in Circle and in Stevens Village this year, and especially Circle. A lot of damage for the populated areas, but when you get away from the pop. areas, out on the river corridor, ~~but~~ that's the mechanism recharges wetlands.

Our second purpose that we have on the refuge is to fulfill our intl treaty obligations. There's waterfowl treaties and there's salmon treaties. We have a treaty with Canada as many Alaskans know. We've got to - we have to allow ^acertain number of salmon to pass over the border into Canada each year, so we follow that obligation.

And we also have waterfowl treaties set up with Canada and with Mexico. We try to adjust harvest and bag limits internationally. These are intl resources. The birds don't know boundaries. Birds on the Yukon Flats use - they go to Russia, they go

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to Mexico, they go down to the Bahamas. They go to all of the lower 48 states. They go down to Central America to winter.

This is a primary breeding ground for a big amalgamation of birds. We provide a real critical role there.

✓ We talked about conserving wildlife in their natural diversity; we talked about intl treaty obligations. The next thing we have to do is insure adequate water quality and quantity. That is an important purpose for us. Just as an example of what that means, we have a very pristine environment up here in AK, compared to the lower 48, we try to maintain that quality of resource out on the refuge. It's very difficult to do because as people know of the history of water rights, it's difficult to control water. Most of the water is coming from outside our boundaries, because we have the Yukon river flowing right through us.

we're very concerned about the headwaters on the refuge, that feed into the refuge. We like to make sure the headwaters stay adequate so they don't contaminate any of the resources that are on the Yukon Flats.

✓ The last objective, the last purpose that the refuge has is to offer a subsistence opportunity to all the local residents in the Yukon Flats. It's called a subsistence

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priority in the federal govt. we're mandated to provide that opportunity. That subsistence opportunity could be hunting, fishing, it could be berry picking. it could be the opportunity to go out and trap. We make sure our management actions don't interfere with, or don't take away from local residents' ability to do subsistence activities on the refuge.

? Local residents - the keyword?

When I say local residents, I'm really referring to those residents of those villages that we named earlier - about 1200 people that live within the boundaries of the Yukon Flats or adjacent to it.

? ANILCA - villagers liked the idea?

I'd say we've got a good working relationship with the villages. We try to interact with them as much as possible. Generally, we're welcomed in the villages whether we're going out to a public meeting, or maybe conducting some kind of biological project out of a certain village - we have facilities in 2 of the villages. We have an office and a cabin up in Fort Yukon. We have a fueling facility there. And we also have kind of a storage facility, a fueling facility down in Bellevue. Those are strategically placed to allow us to work

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out there. We burn a lot of gas flying back and forth to Fairbanks.

✓ We do have a good working relationship. People generally welcome the subsistence priority purpose the refuges have. It's really to their advantage, I think, in many, many ways. They recognize that as a positive thing. In that regard there's nothing contentious about it at all. It's kind of a win-win for them so it works out well for our relationship.

? Resource development - oil & gas drilling?

✓ I talked earlier about a proposed land exchange. The underlying purpose of that land exchange was to access oil & gas on federal lands. ~~There~~ There's been seismic work done on the Yukon Flats since the 1970s, and there's a lot of open knowledge and also a lot of proprietary information regarding oil & gas reserves. My understanding is that if you look at the land ownership pattern on the Yukon Flats, you'll see that even though we've got this 11 m. acre refuge, a quarter of that is privately owned. ~~We~~ ~~have~~ A large part of the inholdings in the refuge are privately owned. So 2 1/2 m of those 11 m acres are privately owned. Those are owned by Native corporations and by the villages themselves. One of the Native corporations is Doyon Limited

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and Doyon Limited works with native villages and interacts with the fed. govt. to create jobs and to develop resources across A.C. They're the largest private land owner in the United States.

Backtracking a little bit, if you look at the land status through the Yukon Flats, you'll see ~~the~~ checkerboard pattern where we've got maybe a 5 or 800 or maybe a 1000 sq. mile section around each of the villages that provides kind of a buffer between fed. lands and the villages themselves. It's a big private buffer.

The ownership pattern is arranged by township, and basically Doyon and the Native villages ~~then~~ when they selected lands back in the early 70s, they selected kind of (a checkerboard pattern) and that was to maximize the footprint around the village. And in those days they were really thinking about natural resource development, oil & gas development.

That issue has been around for a long, long time. The proposed land exchange was... (gets maps) part of the land exchange was to exchange some of the private lands for some of the federal lands. What that would have... if the deal would have gone through it would have given Doyon Ltd access to some federal lands that they don't have

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ack like
ervation

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as these other areas to the west, but these other areas to the west are more homogeneous in that they have less diversity. This area is just like a melting pot of habitat types. It makes it very unique. There's nothing like it in Alaska.

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access to right now. That deal did not go through, and as a result, Dozer is actively pursuing oil & gas development over by Stevens Village. There's seismic going on. It's happened 2 times in the last 3 winters.

There is movement afoot for oil & gas development on the Yukon Flats. It's starting out right down by Stevens Village now. That's of concern to us. We're not against resource development, but we are if... we are also interested in protecting the biological resources on the Fed. lands, on the refuge. So, we've got to balance that.

We're also equally concerned about any developments that are going to affect the watersheds, such as mining. We have the opportunity. The areas around the refuge, many of the areas around us that are open to mining are managed by BLM and the State of AK. We do have the opportunity to weigh in on as management plans, conservation plans are being developed for those areas. We've had that opportunity for the last several years to weigh in on some of the management plans that BLM has been putting together for areas in the White Mts for instance south of the refuge and in areas over in the eastern part of the refuge.

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year round operations with a lot of Japanese tourists coming in to see the Northern Lights. They get to storm some of the subsistence fish camps.

? Ecosystem - system wide refuge idea?

They were very successful on the Yukon Flats as that, because - as you can see just looking at the map, it's one, big contained area. It actually connects - this area connects up with the old Crown Basin over in Canada. That's actually a natural connection through us across the US boundary.

When they were choosing lands, I talked to some of the biologists, matter of fact, I talked to a biologist last week who was in one some of the selection proposals here back in the early 70s and then again in 1978. Yukon Flats was one of the govt's high priorities because it was such a good, intact basin. And it included several watersheds. And it was just a unique area. There's really nothing like it ~~in~~. This is part of Interior AK, but if you go west to the other parts of Interior AK, you get into the Kaniut or Koyukuk drainages. All the down river drainages on the Yukon River and there's nothing like it. ~~I~~ I would say the Yukon Flats has similar habitat types

Like Arctic Natl Wildlife Refuge, Congress can change this through congressional - Pressure on BOWP - it doesn't feel like it's here.

I think it has a lot to do with that proprietary data. The proprietary data up there is pretty, got a big bullseye on it, I can't - I do think we have oil & gas reserves in the Yukon Flats basin, where they're all at and where they're concentrated, I can't really tell ya. There hasn't been as much political pressure targeted at the Yukon Flats. I think it's a pretty unique area and it's got a lot of people living in the middle of it.

An interesting side note that I didn't get into... is the Rampart Dam project. I think the Rampart Dam might be a good example of why it's possible we don't have the big target on us for oil & gas development. Back in the 50s Senator Gruening was proposing to dam up the Yukon River down by Rampart. That was a real ominous proposal to our people, especially the 1000 or so people living in the Yukon Flats. What that means, if the dam would have been, if that dam had happened, the Yukon Flats as we know it would be one large reservoir. Everything beneath about 300 foot elevation would have been water.

That would include most of the villages ^{all of them} that are on the Yukon river and Birch Creek village and Chalkyik.

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~~Chalky~~ might be right
because of the access.

? Example of a well-run refuge?
checkboard -

maximize footprint

Historically, there just hasn't been a lot of successful resource actions up there. I remember years ago - this was in the news, nine years ago - Fort Yukon attempted to grow rice for a while. That didn't seem to work out. There's a biomass project right now. They're looking into whether some timber harvest. There's a lot of good white spruce along the river but you get off the river, it's a lot of black spruce. There's not as much fuel there. People on the landscape here have always lived off the land. And that's very challenging to do. They really hasn't been a lot of variation from that.

The employment within these villages is gov't. There's village councils, city gov'ts in Ft Yukon for instance. You've got regular aircraft, regular flights going in every day to all these villages except, maybe irregular trips into Birch Creek - most of these villages have regular air service that provides jobs also.

We have some entrepreneurs in Ft Yukon that are catering to the visitors, the tourists. We've got

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Chalkyick might be right on the edge, but they would probably be underwater also. That proposal met a lot of scrutiny. It really laid the foundation for our biological program. What happened was Fish & Wildlife Service was charged with collecting - they had to do an EIS - it was before the Environmental Impact Statements were required for the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Before all that, there had to be some type of info collected to base this decision on. What happened was biologists from the Fish & Wildlife Service - this was before the Yukon Flats was formed - they were designated to come up here and band ducks, because everyone knew in the area that this is a big wetland basin. It was probably important for waterfowl. We just didn't know how much. They came up, and what they did was they banded over 40,000 ducks over a 4 year period. A lot of that happened on some of the really large lakes across the Yukon Flats.

All that banding information was how they determined that [where all the waterfowl went]. We found out that this was an intl breeding ground for waterfowl and I think there were a lot of other reasons that the dam didn't happen. I think economically, it wasn't probably a well-thought out idea. It was probably a hard sell.

all the local villages were against it, was my understanding. The Rampart Dam idea came and went, and it hasn't been proposed since. I think it, for obvious reasons, wouldn't be successful today.

? Access limited?

✓ Circle and the Yukon River Bridge and by air. That's it. What that does is, what it has done historically really limits our access and limits public use. The majority of the public use on the refuge is by local residents. Although we do have people that regularly use the refuge from FBCs and outside areas. We have a small number of people from FBCs that fly in and ~~trap~~ trap on the refuge during the winter months.

✓ We have a couple of guides that have clients ~~into~~ the refuge each year. We have a number of floaters that come down Beaver Creek and set into parts of the refuge but not many people float all the way through. Of course we have a lot of intl travelers that float the Yukon River. So, we've got that public use also.

It's hard to document all that public use, it's so remote and logistically difficult to do. Generally speaking, we don't have a lot of public use, just