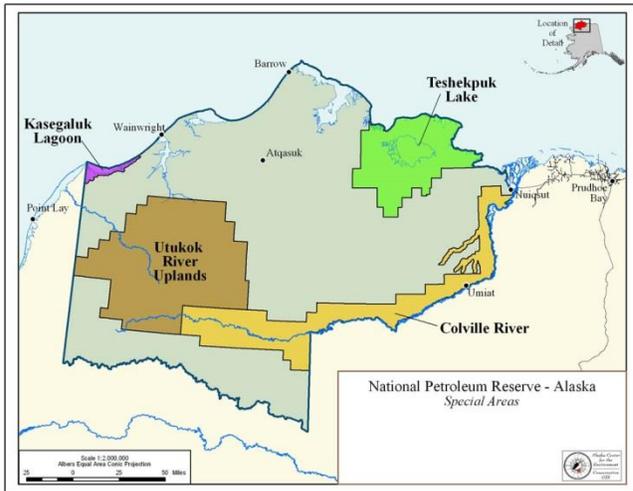


Animals of the Reserve

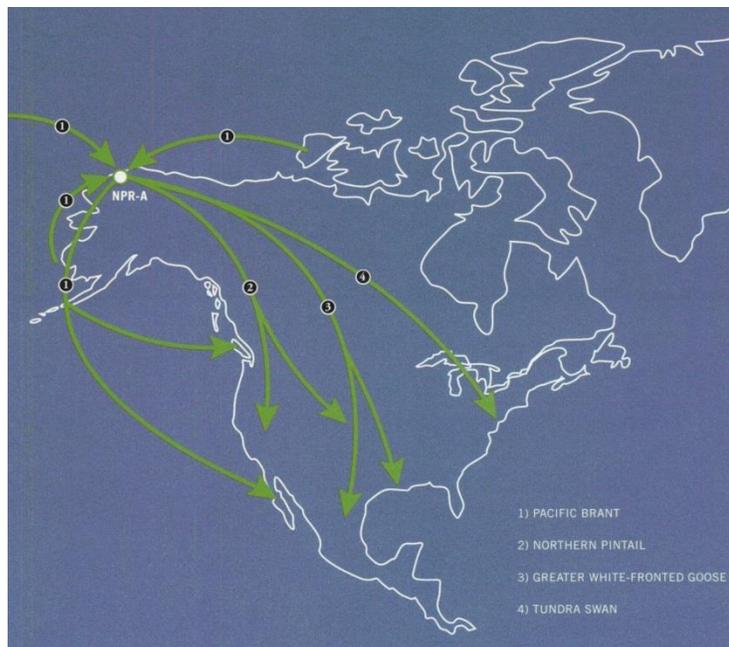


The National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (Reserve), is an area covering 23.5 million acres of land in northern Alaska. The Reserve is the largest single piece of public land in the U.S. and it is home to beautiful wildlife, wild lands, and many rich natural resources. This area was set aside in 1923 by President Harding as an emergency supply of petroleum for the U.S.

Navy. The Reserve is home to many wild animals, including hundreds of species of migratory birds, bears, dozens of fish species, caribou, walrus, wolves and beluga whales. The unique ecosystems contained within the Reserve provide feeding and migration areas to whales, calving areas to caribou, denning and feeding areas for polar bears, nesting areas for countless bird species, haul-out areas for walrus and spotted seals, and streams for salmon.

Birds of the Reserve

The Reserve is one of the most important areas in North America for migratory birds, and many of the birds that travel there to nest and raise their young also travel through the lower 48 states, possibly even your own backyard. Within the Reserve, the area around the Colville River provides homes to peregrine falcons, gyrfalcons and golden eagles. At the delta of the river, more than 68 regularly breeding bird species thrive. The Teshekpuk Lake area on the North Slope of Alaska lies at the heart of one of the most productive wetland complexes in the circumpolar Arctic.



By the Numbers

- A male walrus can weigh nearly **3,000 pounds**. **CLASSROOM ACTION:** bring together enough students and teachers to equal the weight of one walrus.
- Peregrine falcons normally grow to 15 inches in length with a **40-inch** wingspan. **CLASSROOM ACTION:** Have your students measure out the length of their own 'wingspan'/arm-span to see how it compares.
- A polar bear's stomach can hold an estimated **15% to 20%** of its body weight. **CLASSROOM ACTION:** Have your students calculate how much food their stomachs could hold if they were a polar bear based on their weight.
- The Western Arctic Caribou Herd has a population of nearly **350,000**. **CLASSROOM ACTION:** Have your students research how many residents live in their town and compare it to the size of the herd.

This maze of small lakes and tundra wetlands is part of the [word missing? -CH], providing prime habitat for hundreds of thousands of waterfowl, shorebirds and loons, including threatened species such as the spectacled eider. The Teshekpuk Lake area is especially important to vulnerable geese during the period they lose their flight feathers (molt), attracting up to 30 percent of the Pacific Flyway brant population. Waterfowl that breed at Teshekpuk Lake migrate south along all major flyways to overwinter in states across the nation along the Pacific Coast, along the Gulf of Mexico, in the Midwest and on the Atlantic Coast. Other areas of the Reserve are home to red-throated loons, brant, white-fronted geese, king eider, the threatened spectacled eider, yellow-billed loon, bar-tailed godwit, and many other bird species.



Godwit

Photo Courtesy of USFWS



Spectacled Eider

Photo Courtesy of USFWS

Bears of the Reserve

Polar bears, one of Alaska's most iconic residents, are the world's largest carnivore and are found only in the Arctic. Polar bears are primarily marine bears, and so they're very good swimmers – they have been tracked as far away as 200 miles from land. They also spend time walking on ice, and have developed adaptations to help them do both of these. Polar bears have extra thick fur for warmth and traction on ice, a thick layer of blubber for buoyancy and warmth, long necks, narrow heads, and large front feet to aid in swimming. They travel thousands of miles in just one year. Since they spend so much time so far from land, to avoid drowning pack ice is very important for the survival of these animals. Because of the decreasing sea ice, polar bears are currently listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. These incredible bears eat primarily two types of seals, ringed and bearded seals, but are also known to eat walrus, certain whales, birds, vegetation and even kelp.



Photo courtesy of Fish and Wildlife



Grizzly bears, also referred to as brown bears, call the Reserve their home, too. Grizzly bears are omnivorous and will eat a wide range of foods. They will eat grasses, roots, berries, insects, fish, carrion, and depending on their location, moose, caribou, elk and salmon. They can run up to 35 mph! Every winter, grizzly bears hibernate for five to eight months. They spend the summer and fall building up their fat reserves by eating a lot so that they can survive their winter

hibernation. The picture shows two young grizzlies in the Reserve in August, trying to catch a scent on the wind.

Walrus



Photo courtesy of Fish and Wildlife Service

Walrus are a large marine mammal that depends on the coastal ecosystems of the Reserve. Their large size, prominent tusks and facial whiskers make walrus one of the most identifiable Arctic residents. Their distinctive tusks are very useful for cutting ice, getting out of water and onto ice, and even self-defense. They use their sensitive whiskers to find food on the sea floor. Walrus eat all sorts of other marine creatures, including krill, clams and mussels. Adult male walrus can weigh up to 2,700 pounds while the smaller females can weigh 1,900 pounds. Walrus, being very social animals, live in large herds. They spend most of their lives in the water. In fact, two-thirds of their life is spent in the water! The time they spend on land is

important too though. That's when they rest, save up energy, and is where females give birth. Walrus and seals use the ice on the coast of the Reserve for haul-out. Walrus and seals use these haul-out areas to rest and conserve energy when they're not looking for food. In recent years, scientists have witnessed massive haul-outs where tens of thousands of walrus come ashore in a single location. While walrus typically spend the summer months far offshore in the Chukchi Sea where they can forage for food while resting on floating sea ice, scientists believe the lack of sea ice in recent



Photo courtesy of Fish and Wildlife Service

years is a cause for these large haul-outs. Two problems associated with these unusually large gatherings of walrus along a shoreline is that smaller and younger walrus are often trampled, plus scientists are not sure if there are sufficient food sources so close to the shore to support such large numbers. With greater haul-outs occurring, coastal arctic ecosystems such as those in the Reserve are increasingly important for the survival of these sea mammals, but as climate change melts away the coastal ice, walrus and seals are being forced to find new places to rest.

Caribou

Caribou are similar to deer, but have adapted to survive the harsh winters of Alaska. Their hooves are designed especially for walking in snow and fur on the bottoms of their feet for insulation. Their large feet also help them to swim. Caribou are easy to recognize by their distinct antlers. Caribou eat lichen, grasses, willow leaves, mushrooms, and shrubs, however they have to keep continually move and migrate long distances to be able to find new sources of food. Predators of caribou include bears and wolves. The Western Arctic Caribou Herd, which calls the Reserve home, is one of the largest caribou herds in the world. With a population estimated to be nearly 400,000 they spend the summer months in the Reserve where they birth their young and fatten up on abundant food sources before heading south over the Brooks Range to their winter grounds.



Young caribou standing alongside a river in the Reserve

Photo Courtesy of Monica Scherer