

Key Site 20: Kukjutkuk and Hutchison Bays, Northwest Territories

Location: 69°41'10"N, 132°24'41"W

Size: 315 km²

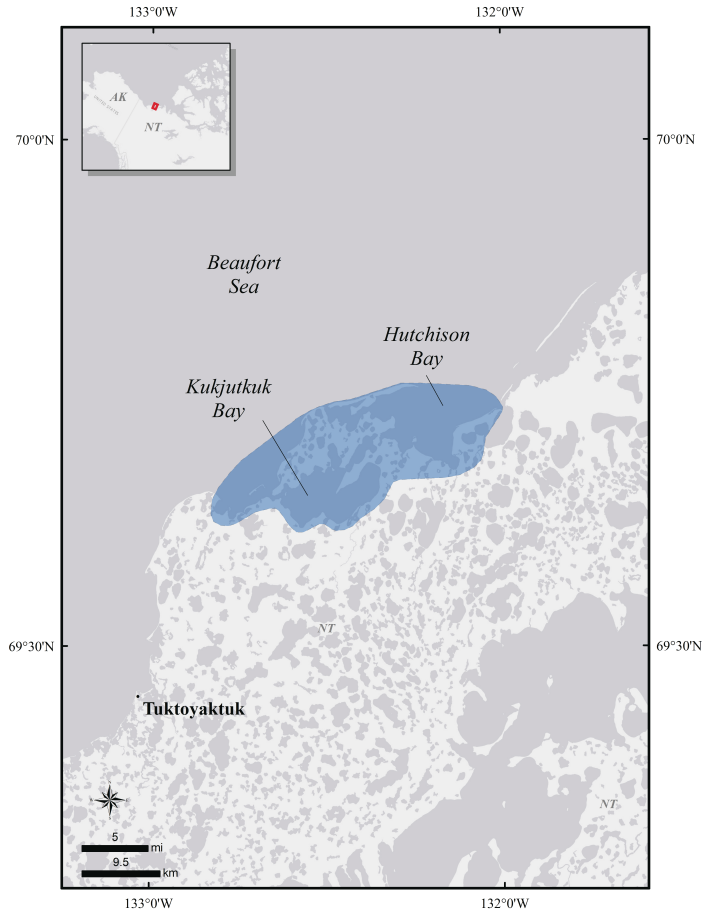
Description: Kukjutkuk and Hutchison bays are located on the northern coast of the Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula, 25 to 50 km northeast of the community of Tuktoyaktuk. This and other parts of the northern Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula have a highly irregular coastline and diverse geographic features, including sandy barrier islands, sand spits, and sheltered bays and lagoons. Inland from the coast, the relief is low and the landscape is characterized by numerous ponds and lakes, abundant tundra polygons, extensive wetlands, and lowland tundra with numerous pingos.

Kukjutkuk Bay and Hutchison Bay are each approximately 100 km² in area. These shallow bays provide molting waterfowl with protection from terrestrial predators, shelter from wind and rough seas, and, in the case of sea ducks, abundant food at an accessible depth.

Precision and Correction of Abundance

Estimates Presented: Abundance estimates presented for this key habitat site have not been adjusted to account for incomplete detection or other biases. Abundance estimates should, therefore, be treated as minimum estimates.

Biological Value: The area is used by waterfowl at all times during the spring and summer but is especially important to molting or pre-molting diving ducks. Hutchison Bay annually supports over 15,000 molting or pre-molting diving ducks, mainly Long-tailed Ducks (*Clangula hyemalis*), Surf Scoters (*Melanitta perspicillata*), and White-winged Scoters (*M. deglandi*), with lesser numbers of Red-breasted Mergansers (*Mergus serrator*) and Common Mergansers (*M. merganser*) in late summer (Barry and Barry 1982, Sirois and Dickson 1989, Cornish and Dickson 1994). Similar quantitative surveys have not been carried out at Kukjutkuk Bay, but reconnaissance surveys suggest that molting waterfowl are probably as numerous there as at Hutchison Bay. Thus, a conservative estimate of the number of diving ducks using the overall key habitat site (marine and terrestrial) in late summer is 30,000



birds, of which a high proportion are Long-tailed Ducks and Scoters (Cornish and Dickson 1994).

Populations of many sea duck species have been in decline in the western Arctic since the 1970s (Dickson and Gilchrist 2002), making recognition and conservation of their habitat of even greater importance.

Sensitivities: Lowland habitats are susceptible to terrain disturbance. Sea ducks are sensitive to disturbance during the nesting, brood-rearing, and molting periods.

Potential Conflicts: The general region has been subject to extensive seismic and exploratory drilling activity. Development of gas processing plants and a pipeline network is likely in the near future.

Status: This key site has been identified as Class D (“lands and waters where cultural or renewable resources are of particular significance and sensitivity throughout the year”) in the Tuktoyaktuk Community Conservation Plan (WMAC 2016).

Kukjuktuk and Hutchinson bays are part of a Key Terrestrial Habitat Site (Site 11; Latour et al. 2008). Terrestrial areas are situated on Inuvialuit lands, while marine waters fall under federal jurisdiction.

Literature Cited

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