

FEASIBILITY STATEMENTS FOR COMMON EIDER GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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Goal: Increase the number of Common Eiders nesting in Maine and the public's knowledge and appreciation of eiders and their habitats.

Population Objective: By 2016, increase the number of nesting Common Eiders in Maine by 20%.

Desirability: Population viability for eiders in Maine is maintained and improved by high rates of adult survival and improvements in recruitment rates. Improved eider numbers would be desirable to both the consumptive and nonconsumptive users of the eider resource.

Feasibility: In general, avian and mammalian predators, human disturbance, competition for nesting sites, over-hunting, habitat degradation, catastrophic weather, oil spills, disease, and competition with commercial fisheries or loss of food resources limit eider populations. For this species, it is likely that all of the above act in concert to limit Maine's eider population. Increasing Maine's eider population would be feasible through a program designed to control predators on nesting islands, regulate against over-hunting of Maine eiders, protect important habitat for eider nesting, brood-rearing, and feeding, and establish an oil spill contingency plan.

Capability of Habitat: Eiders are colonial nesters and, in Maine, can be found nesting in densities of 200 or more per acre. Maine possesses approximately 1,700 vegetated islands. Most of these islands would be suitable as nesting islands for eiders, but, because of the presence of mammalian and avian predators or excessive human disturbance, they are currently unsuitable nesting habitat. Eiders are currently nesting on 320 islands and many if not all of these islands can support a higher density of nesting birds. Lastly, eiders will likely colonize a few additional suitable islands through the planning period.

Possible Consequences: Commercial fishermen annually compete with eiders for blue mussels, green urchins, and periwinkles in the Gulf of Maine. It is not known whether human exploitation of these marine resources has created food limitations for eider ducks. Eiders, and other sea ducks as well, will deplete blue mussels at mussel farms and leased mussel beds. While Maine's wintering eider population consists of both resident birds and ducks from eastern Canada, it is likely to assume that more eiders in Maine may contribute to future conflicts with the commercial mussel industry.

Habitat Objective 1: Increase the number of Common Eider nesting islands in conservation ownership by 1 per year until 2016.

Desirability: In the past, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) island acquisition efforts were guided by a priority listing of islands referenced in the Coast of Maine Wildlife Management Area Plan. In developing this list, the following factors were considered: 1) coastwide assessment based on species diversity and abundance; 2) existing level of protection; 3) existing level of protection for key species; 4) vulnerability to development based on location and accessibility; and 5) regional balance within species statewide breeding range. Today, the Department's Land Acquisition Plan guides acquisition efforts. In general, MDIFW's goal is to acquire clear title to an island without easements. However, alternative arrangements that would, at a minimum, secure protection from development and assure management oversight by MDIFW, may be pursued.

Feasibility: Protecting seabird nesting islands via acquisition is a high priority activity by federal and state wildlife agencies and several non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It is feasible to assume that MDIFW would work with landowners to acquire a fee title, conservation easement, management agreement, or other protection strategy for one additional island per year over the planning period.

Capability of Habitat: In 2000, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife records indicate that 132 of the 320 islands with nesting eiders were not in conservation ownership.

Possible Consequences: The transfer of ownership of a privately owned island to MDIFW will result in a loss of property taxes to some towns.

Habitat Objective 2: Working with partners, develop investigations to understand issues associated with (1) recreational use of Common Eider nesting islands and (2) commercial harvesting of resources in Common Eider brood-rearing and feeding habitats.

Desirability: Increased presence and signage around the nesting islands during the critical nesting period (April 15-July 31) and additional work in Information and Education about the importance of these disturbance issues is desirable. Information regarding the effects of rockweed harvesting on eider brood-rearing and feeding habitat is lacking.

Feasibility: Working with partners, a number of strategies can be employed to minimize human disturbance on nesting islands from recreational use including: signs, volunteer policing, notices in public documents, information to Maine Island

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Trail Association, and island stewards. Investigations of the effects of commercial harvesting of marine resources in eider brood-rearing and feeding habitats will require coordination with University researchers, the Department of Marine Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and others.

Capability of Habitat: Not applicable.

Possible Consequences: Department staff time for additional responsibilities in this area is limited.

Outreach Objective: By 2003, develop and implement, in conjunction with partners, an outreach program to promote an understanding and appreciation of Common Eiders and their habitat requirements in Maine.

Desirability and Feasibility: Heightened awareness of eider and other coastal wildlife issues through information and education efforts is both feasible and desirable but would require a redistribution of personnel time and additional financial resources (both in short supply) to accomplish.

Capability of Habitat: Not applicable.

Possible Consequences: Department staff time for additional responsibilities in this area is limited.