

Initial Study Report Meeting

Study 10.15 Waterbird Migration, Breeding, and Habitat Use

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Prepared by

ABR, Inc.—Environmental Research
& Services



Study 10.15 Status

ISR documents (ISR Part D Overview):

- Initial Study Report: Parts A, B, and C (June 3, 2014)
- Study Completion Report (SCR) (November 4, 2015)

Status:

- Spring and fall migration surveys have been completed.
- Breeding-season surveys have been completed.
- **The Study Plan objectives have been met and this study has been completed.**

Study 10.15 Objectives

(ISR Part A, Section 2)

- Document the occurrence, distribution, abundance, habitat use, and seasonal timing of waterbirds **migrating** through the Project area in spring and fall.
- Document the occurrence, distribution, abundance, productivity, and habitat use of waterbirds **breeding** in the Project area.
- Review available information to characterize food habits and diets of piscivorous waterbirds documented in the study area as background for Study 5.7 (Mercury Assessment and Potential for Bioaccumulation).

Study 10.15 Components

(ISR Part A, Section 4)

- **Spring and Fall Migration Surveys** (ISR Part A, Section 4.1):
 - Aerial surveys.
 - Ground-based radar and visual surveys (for all bird species, not just waterbirds).
- **Breeding Season** (ISR Part A, Section 4.2):
 - Breeding-population surveys.
 - Harlequin Duck surveys (pre-nesting and brood-rearing).
 - Brood surveys.
- **Information for Mercury Study** (ISR Part A, Section 4.3):
 - Literature review on food habits and diets.
 - Locate nests for potential acquisition of samples (feathers, eggs) for lab analysis.

Study 10.15 Variances

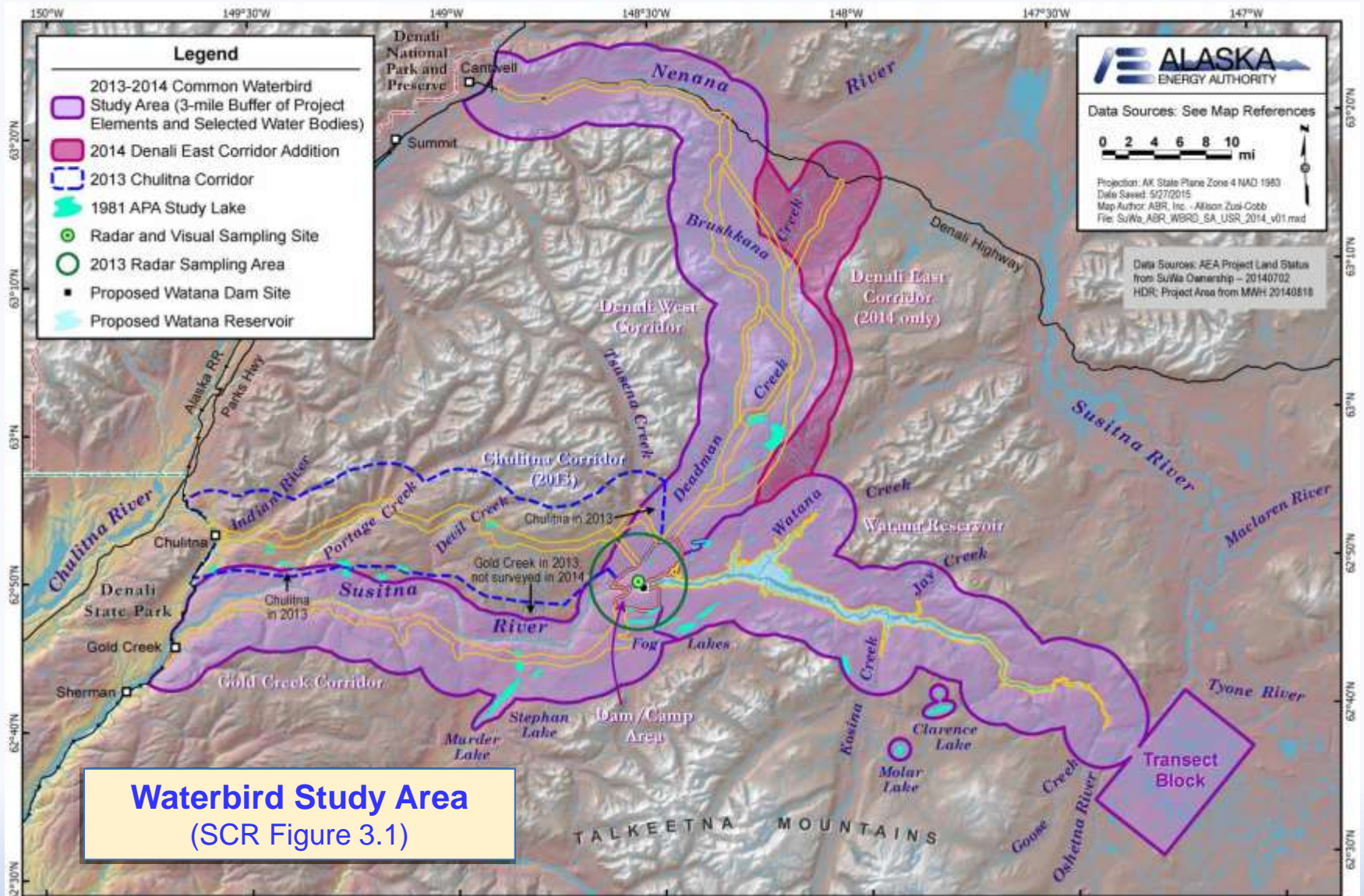
- The **number of aerial surveys flown during migration** (RSP Section 10.15.4.1.1) **was reduced** slightly in spring and fall 2013 and 2014 to maintain a 5-day interval between surveys, and in response to variations in seasonal chronology.
- The “breeding-pair survey” proposed in RSP Section 10.15.4.2.1 was replaced with “breeding-population survey,” a more inclusive survey method.
- **Harlequin Duck surveys** (RSP Section 10.15.4.2.2) **were restricted to 10 river miles beyond the study-area buffer** in 2013 and 2014 due to logistical constraints, and based on the published home-range size of Harlequin Ducks.
- After further clarification of the ground-based visual and radar methods proposed in the Study Plan, the USFWS dropped its recommendation (which was accepted by FERC in the February 1, 2013, Study Plan Determination) to use 4 observers simultaneously for visual surveys during migration studies, so **visual surveys were conducted using a single observer, as originally proposed** in RSP Section 10.15.4.1.2.

Study 10.15 Variances (continued)

- The **Chulitna Corridor** was removed from the study area by AEA after the filing of the June 2014 ISR, so that area was not surveyed in 2014.
- The **Denali East Corridor Option** was added to the study area in the June 2014 ISR, and that corridor was surveyed in 2014 (SCR Section 3).
- The **collection of tissue samples of piscivorous waterbirds** was consolidated under **Study 5.7**, after consulting with resource agencies to identify suitable target species for potential sampling.

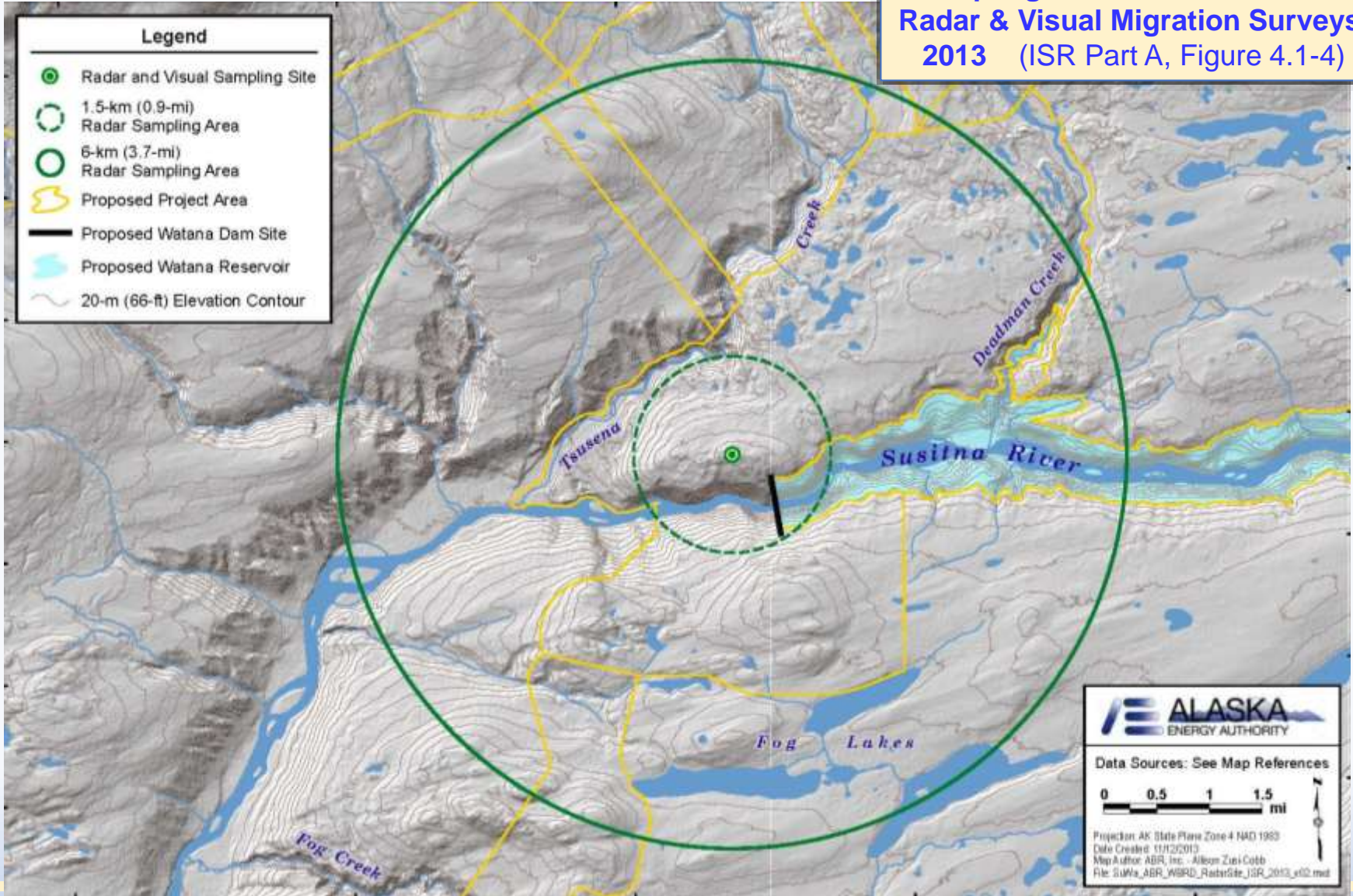
Study 10.15: Summary of Results

(ISR Part A, Section 5, and SCR Section 5)



Study 10.15: Summary of Results in ISR

Sampling Site for Ground-based Radar & Visual Migration Surveys, 2013 (ISR Part A, Figure 4.1-4)



Study 10.15: Summary of Results in ISR

Spring and Fall Migration 2013 (ISR Part B – Appendix T, Table 1)

	Survey Type			
	Waterbird Aerial Surveys	Ground-based Visual Surveys	Diurnal Radar Surveys	Nocturnal Radar Surveys
Spring Survey Period (days / hours)	Apr 23–May 29 (7 / na)	Apr 20–Jun 3 (45 / 651)	Apr 20–Jun 3 (42 / 88)	Apr 20–Jun 3 (42 / 184)
Fall Survey Period (days / hours)	Aug 14–Oct 18 (11 / na)	Aug 16–Oct 15 (61 / 652)	Aug 16–Oct 15 (53 / 94)	Aug 16–Oct 15 (59 / 367)
Survey Area	Water bodies within 3-mi (5-km) buffer of Project area	Within 10 km of proposed dam site	Within 6 km of proposed dam site	Within 6 km of proposed dam site
Number of Survey Points	na	1	1	1
Species Recorded	Waterbirds	All	All (undifferentiated)	All (undifferentiated)
Key Results	Abundance, species composition, distribution, seasonal variation, relative importance of waterbodies	Abundance, species composition, movement rates, flight altitude, flight behavior, flight direction, seasonal and daily variation	Passage rates, flight altitude, flight direction, seasonal and daily variation, landscape patterns	Passage rates, flight altitude, flight direction, seasonal and daily variation, landscape patterns

Study 10.15: Summary of Results in ISR

Ground-based Visual Migration Surveys, 2013

(ISR Part B – Appendix T, Tables 2 and 3)

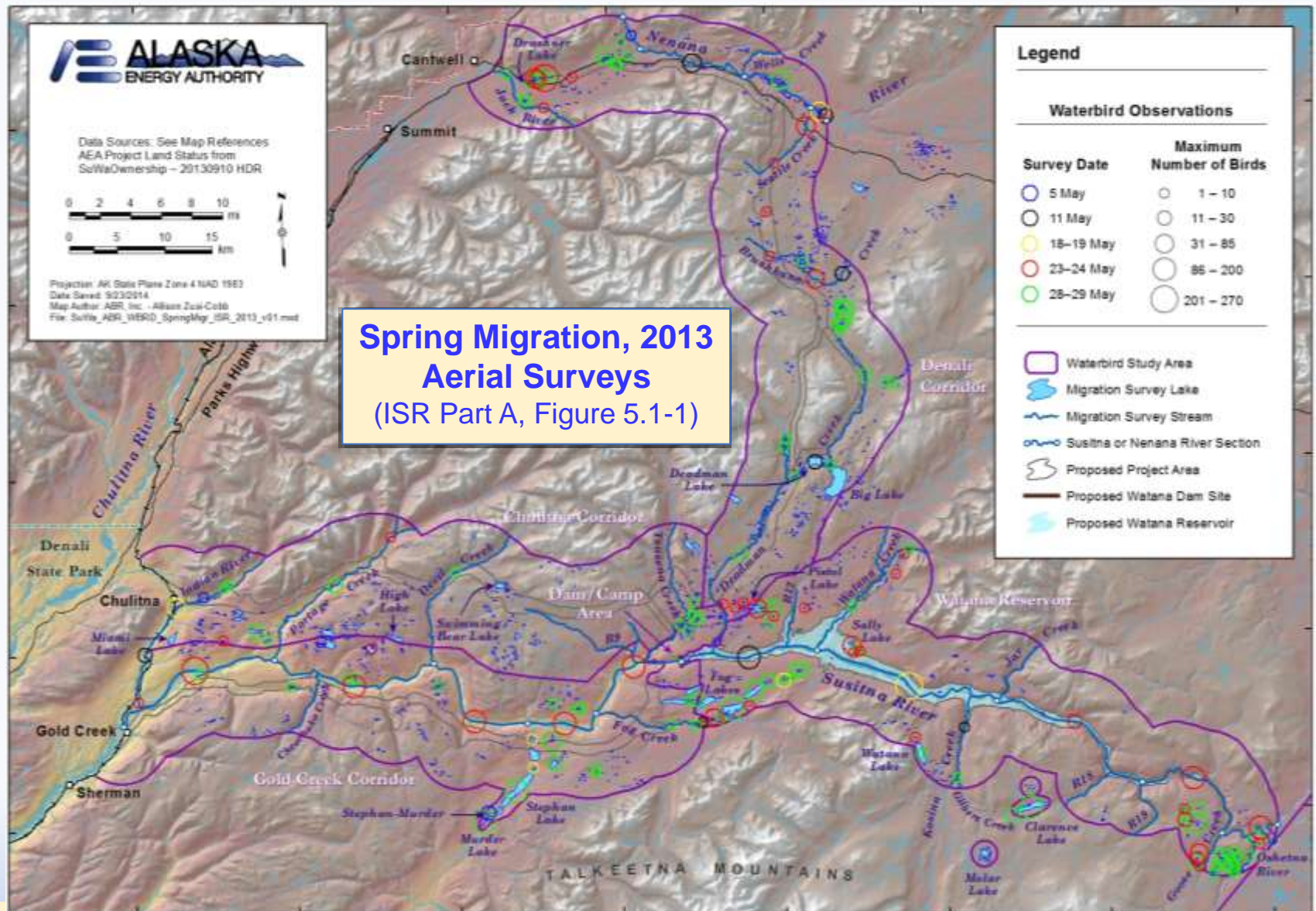
Species Group	Spring		Fall	
	Relative Abundance	Peak Occurrence	Relative Abundance	Peak Occurrence
Waterfowl	2,658	May 5	372	Sep 23
Swans	1,086	May 5	301	Sep 30
Geese	308	May 7	19	Oct 2
Ducks	1,136	May 28	3	Sep 28
Raptors	468	May 21	173	Sep 28
Eagles	215	May 21	52	Sep 28
Other raptors	218	May 9	108	Sep 28
Cranes	23	May 9	1,754	Sep 24
Shorebirds	1,181	May 17	0	–
Passerines	3,369	May 17	3,913	Sep 12

Study 10.15: Summary of Results

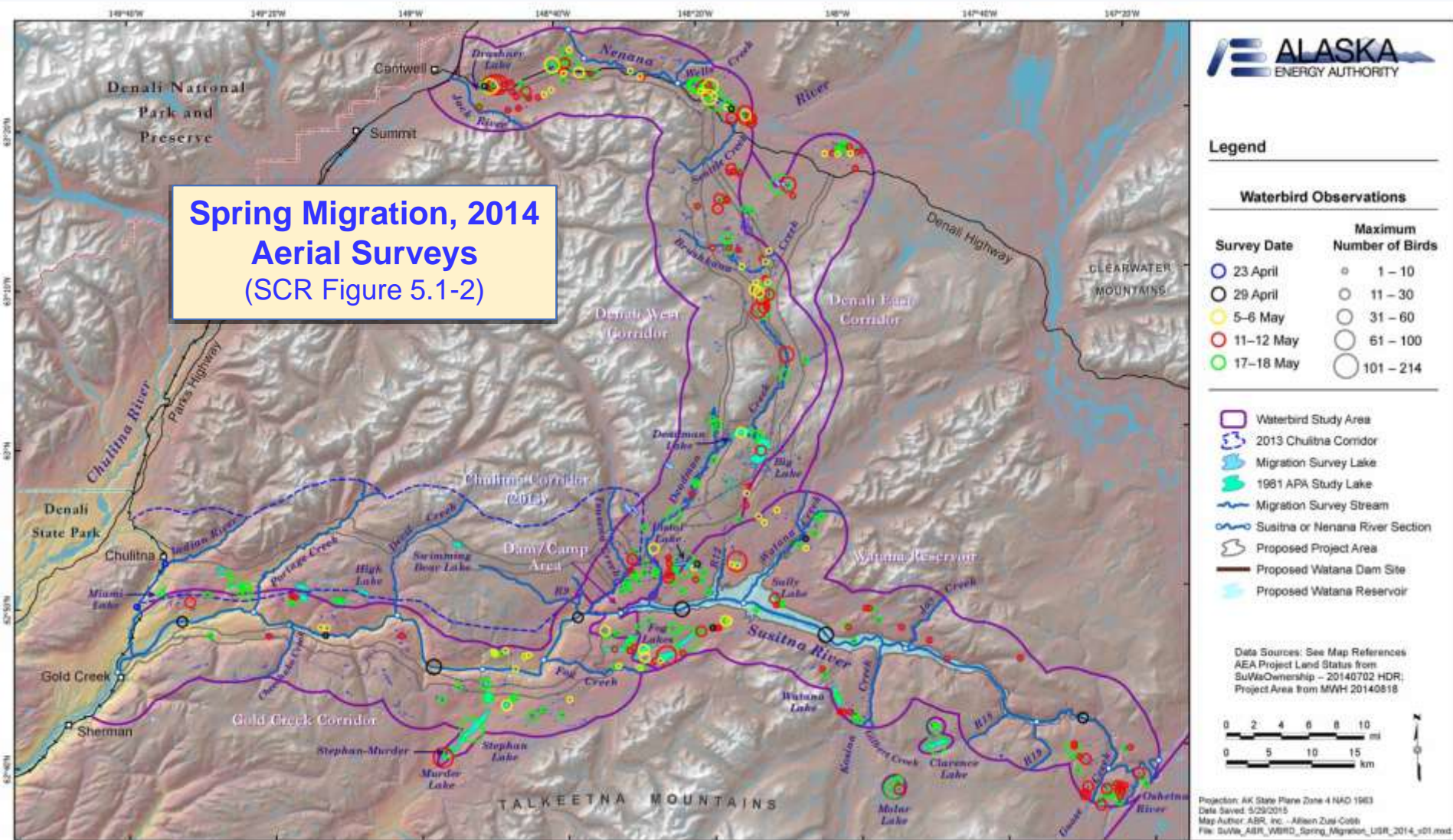
(ISR Part A, Section 5, and SCR Section 5)

	Aerial Surveys in 2013 and 2014					
	Spring Migration	Breeding Population	Harlequin Duck (Pre-nesting)	Waterbird Broods	Harlequin Duck (Broods)	Fall Migration
2013 Survey Period (# Surveys)	Apr 23–May 29 (7)	Jun 1–17 (2)	Jun 1–17 (2)	Jul 20–Aug 5 (2)	Aug 1–18 (2)	Aug 14–Oct 18 (11)
2014 Survey Period (# Surveys)	Apr 23–May 18 (5)	May 24–Jun 6 (2)	May 24–Jun 6 (2)	Jul 9–Aug 6 (3)	Aug 2–19 (2)	Aug 24–Oct 18 (10)
Survey Area	Waterbodies within 3-mi (5-km) buffer of Project area	Waterbodies within 3-mi (5-km) buffer of Project area	Rivers up to 10 mi (16 km) outside of Project area	Waterbodies within 1-mi (1.6-km) buffer of Project area	Rivers up to 10 mi (16 km) outside of Project area	Waterbodies within 3-mi (5-km) buffer of Project area
Species Recorded	Waterbirds	Waterbirds	Harlequin Ducks	Waterbird broods	Harlequin Ducks	Waterbirds
Key Results	Abundance, species composition, distribution, seasonal variation, relative importance of waterbodies	Abundance, species composition, distribution, seasonal variation	Abundance, distribution, seasonal variation	Abundance, species composition, distribution, brood size and age, nest initiation, seasonal variation	Abundance, distribution, brood size and age, nest initiation, seasonal variation	Abundance, species composition, distribution, seasonal variation, relative importance of waterbodies

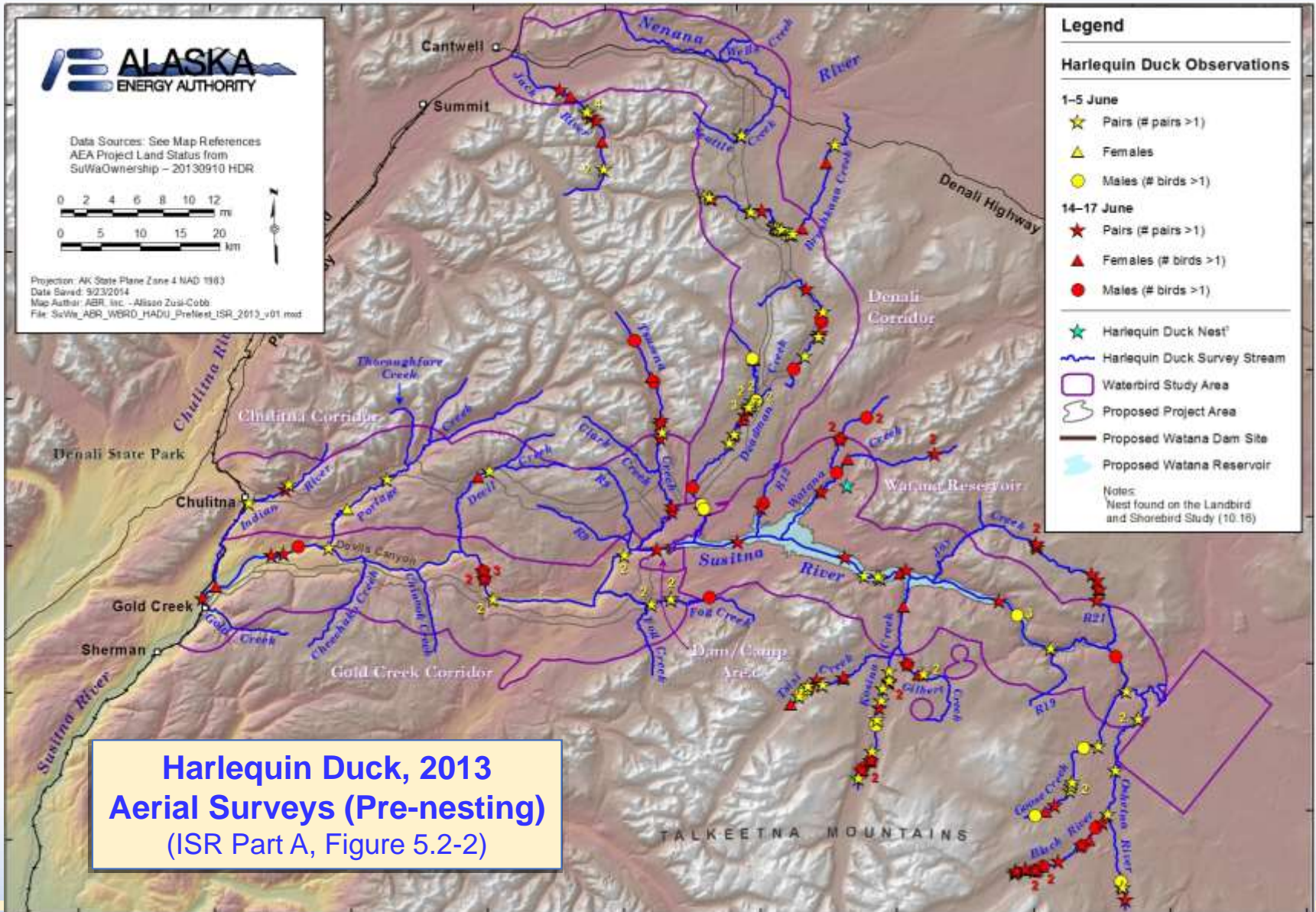
Study 10.15: Summary of Results in ISR



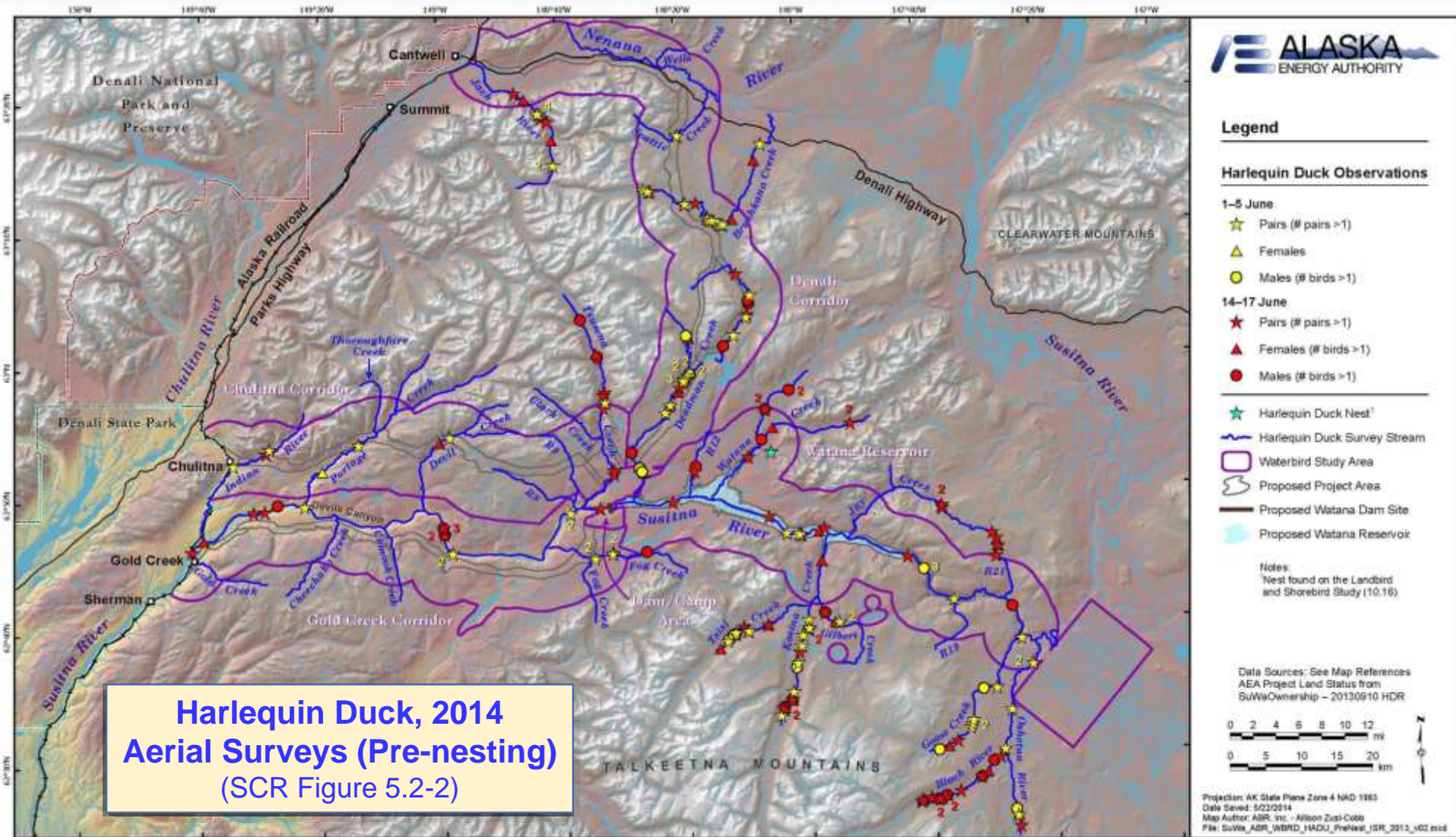
Study 10.15: Summary of Results in SCR



Study 10.15: Summary of Results in ISR



Study 10.15: Summary of Results in SCR



Decision Points from Study Plan

- The Study Plan (RSP Section 10.15.6) stated that the decision to continue the ground-based radar and visual migration surveys would be based on evaluation of the results obtained in 2013, the first year of study. Further discussion with USFWS, ADF&G, and other licensing participants began in technical meetings on March 6, 2014, and will continue during the ISR meeting and comment process to assess the adequacy of the 2013 radar/visual migration surveys in fulfilling the Study Plan objectives and providing sufficient data to address potential protection, mitigation, and enhancement measures regarding migrating birds in the Project area.
- AEA considers the data obtained in 2013 to have met the objective stated in the RSP to “document the occurrence, distribution, abundance, habitat use, and seasonal timing of waterbirds migrating through the Project area in spring and fall.” The radar and visual surveys of bird movements in 2013 in the vicinity of the proposed Watana Dam site were the most comprehensive migration surveys conducted for the upper Susitna River Basin to date and the results have been compared with those of other comparable studies in interior and southcentral Alaska in ISR Part B, Appendix T.

AEA's Proposed Modifications to Study 10.15

- **The objectives and methods in this study related to mercury analysis**, including the literature review of food habits and diets of piscivorous waterbirds and collection of feather samples, **have been consolidated under Study 5.7** (Mercury Assessment and Potential for Bioaccumulation). (ISR Part C, Section 7.1.2)
- **AEA will not conduct a second year of the ground-based migration monitoring effort**, based on the results of the ground-based radar and visual migration surveys (RSP Section 10.15.4.1.2) conducted in 2013 and reported in ISR Parts A and B (Appendix T). The study objective has been met. (ISR Part C, Section 7.1.2)
- **AEA plans no further modifications of the methods for this study, as the study objectives have been met.**
- **This study is now complete.**

Steps to Complete Study 10.15

(ISR Part D, Section 8)

The field work, data collection, data analysis, and reporting for this study successfully met all study objectives in the FERC-approved Study Plan. In light of the results, variances, and modifications described above, AEA has completed this study.

Licensing Participants' Comments and Proposed Modifications to Study 10.15?

- Agencies
- CIRWG members and Ahtna
- Public

