

# VICTORY -ON- KODIAK

Score a big one for the Boone and Crockett Club's conservation agenda! Last May, Interior Secretary, Bruce Babbitt, signed agreements with the presidents of two Alaska Native corporations to protect more than 150,000 acres of prime habitat for brown bear, salmon, bald eagles and other species on Kodiak Island. The historic land transactions were a combination of fee acquisitions and conservation easements protecting habitat important to fish and wildlife species injured by the Exxon Valdez oil spill.

The \$60.5 million package used funds from the \$1 billion 1991 settlement between the federal government, State of Alaska and the Exxon Corporation. Lands acquired from Akhiok Kaguyak, Inc. and Old Harbor Native Corporation were deeded to them by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and now are returned to the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge.

"These agreements will preserve important habitat, provide additional opportunities for hunting, subsistence, commercial and sport fishing, and other outdoor activities, and strengthen the

local economy on Kodiak Island," Secretary Babbitt told an audience of Native Alaskans, sportsmen's and environmental groups present at the ceremony in his office. "President Franklin Roosevelt established Kodiak National Refuge a half-century ago at the urging of hunters and conservationists, the Eisenhower Administration enlarged it in the 1950's, and now, in keeping with President Clinton's commitment to protect the environment and provide economic opportunities for Native peoples, we are taking another step in preserving this natural treasure."

The two Native Alaskan village corporations retain some land around their village to allow for subsistence hunting and fishing, to preserve traditions, and for economic development. A third Kodiak agreement with Koniag, Inc. is being finalized at press time and will protect an additional 58,000 acres.

The agreements help implement the Exxon Valdez Final Restoration Plan designed to restore the environment in the 1,500 mile oil spill region from Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula in the north to Kodiak and the

Alaska Peninsula to the southwest. (*Fair Chase*, Spring 1994)

Sportsmen's organizations, including the Boone and Crockett Club, lined up impressive national support for Kodiak, and native lands in the Kodiak bear refuge contained nearly half of the best fish and wildlife habitat in the entire oil spill region according to biologists and marine scientists hired by the oil spill trustees.

In July, 1993, Boone and Crockett President, Stephen S. Adams, put the Club on record in a letter to the six member Exxon Valdez Trustee Council, stating "The Department of Interior has long sought to re-acquire Kodiak Native corporation inholdings along the salt water edge and the salmon rivers within the bear refuge. These are some of the most biologically productive habitats within the oil spill zone, and they are under imminent threat of commercial development even though their highest and best use is clearly intrinsic wilderness."

Kodiak is legendary among hunters because the storm tossed archipelago in the Gulf of Alaska is home to the larg-

est brown bears in the world. The top three brown bears and seven of the top ten, and 33 of the top 50 on the Boone and Crockett list are Kodiaks.

"This agreement culminates more than a decade of hard work and hope of our people to find a win-win solution of our refuge inholdings," say Akhiok Kaguyak, Inc. president Ralph Eluska. "We had to either develop our land assets in ways that would harm the bears' habitat or continue locked in poverty. It took support from people literally across the nation to make this deal a reality. We owe Secretary Babbitt, the Boone and Crockett Club, and all of our allies an enormous thank you. We are also confident the lands the public gained are some of the finest fish and wildlife areas in North America."

Former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director John Turner, now with the Conservation Fund, agrees with Eluska on the importance of Kodiak. Turner made Kodiak Native inholdings the number one land acquisition priority of the Department of Interior during his tenure under George Bush and Bill Clinton, and got the ball rolling on Kodiak in 1992 with a Land & Water Conservation Fund budget request that passed Congress with the support of Alaska Senator Ted Stevens, Congressman Don Young and the Congressional Sportsman's Caucus.

"We were able to create ninety-two units of the National Wildlife Refuge System, more than Teddy Roosevelt, and it was an exciting four years," reflects Turner, "so I see Kodiak as a culmination of a very dynamic period. Of course when you look at the richness of Kodiak's biotic resources the agreements are a great use of the Exxon settlement, not only for the finest population of great bears, but also some of the most productive wild salmonic fisheries on the globe."

"I really salute the Native corporations in waiting for a fair settlement from the United States, and their stewardship of the land and using it for subsistence was a key element," Turner adds. "When I met with them as Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, they sensed we wanted to deal in good faith. We appreciated where they were coming from with the economic needs of the villagers, the aspirations of their people, and they were obviously at a crossroads."

Also with the Conservation Fund, Dr. Bob Putz, former regional director of the Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska

became chief negotiator for the Exxon Valdez Trustee Council during the often difficult Kodiak agreements.

Emil Christiansen, president of Old Harbor Native Corporation, echoes both the predicament the Native corporations faced and the satisfaction in the win-win result.

"Personally, I didn't know if the effort would pay off, but I would go to almost any lengths to preserve this land for future generations," Christiansen says. "Fish and wildlife habitat that is not protected will be destroyed by man, just look at the rest of the Washington and Oregon salmon systems, and even some major systems in Alaska. We were determined not to let Kodiak start on the downward spiral of habitat degradation, because we make our livelihood from the quality of the resources just like the bears do. We also love it just the way it is."

world occur in the Karluk drainage including Karluk Lake (Troyer and Hensel, 1964; Cowan, 1972). The river typically produces one third of the commercial harvest of salmon from the Kodiak refuge. The mainstem Karluk River is 21 miles long and drains an area of 236 square miles. It provides spawning or rearing habitat for all five species of Pacific salmon, rainbow/steelhead trout, and Dolly Varden/Arctic char.

The Karluk River is one of two drainage systems in the refuge (and one of the few such drainages within the boundaries of an Alaskan national wildlife refuge) where both steelhead and chinook salmon populations occur in abundance. Average annual escapement of all five species of Pacific salmon combined have reached or exceeded 2.5 million fish during the even years and nearly a half million in odd year returns.

THE EXXON VALDEZ OIL SPILL AGREEMENT IS REACHED. FROM THE LEFT: RALPH ELUSKA, PRESIDENT OF AKHIOK KABUYAK, INC., SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR, BRUCE BABBITT WEARING ALUTHIQ NATIVE HEADGEAR, AND EMIL CHRISTIANSEN, PRESIDENT OF OLD HARBOR NATIVE CORPORATION.

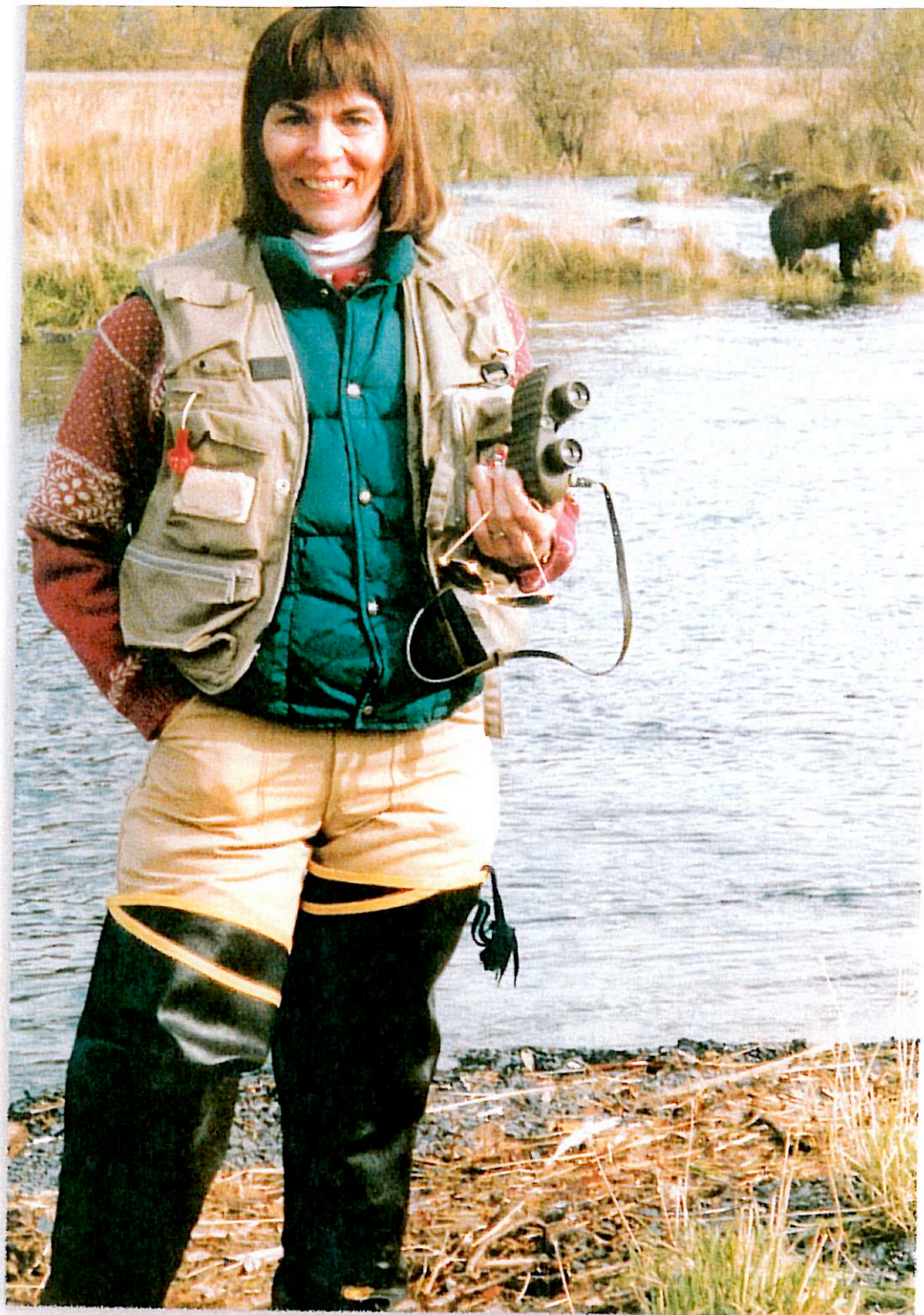


### FINAL PUSH TO PROTECT KARLUK & STURGEON RIVERS

The land agreements already signed protect 80% of the targeted Native corporation inholdings in the Kodiak bear refuge. The Department of Interior and the Exxon Valdez Trustee Council want to finish the job of making Kodiak refuge whole by acquiring the Karluk and Sturgeon Rivers.

The Karluk is one of the most storied rivers in all of Alaska. The highest known brown bear densities in the

Kodiak refuge manager, Jay Bellinger is elated with the accomplishments of the Exxon Valdez acquisitions so far, but feels the clock is running on protecting the Karluk and the neighboring Sturgeon River. "The number one priority for me is to see the refuge whole, with all the large Native corporation blocks protected," says Bellinger. "And that means finishing the job on the Karluk and Sturgeon Rivers. With the mounting pressures for human development and for subdividing these land blocks for private cabins and



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE DIRECTOR, MOLLIE BEATTIE, ON LOCATION AT THE KARLUK RIVER IN THE KODIAK BEAR REFUGE. BEATTIE HAS PUT THE SERVICE INTO OVERTIME TO SAVE PRIME BROWN BEAR HABITAT.

lodges, it is a now or never proposition before the Exxon Valdez Trustee Council on these two rivers.

As for Secretary Babbitt and the Trustee Council, there is no disagreement on the ecological importance of the Karluk or Sturgeon. In fact, both parcels scored off the charts on both "link to injury" and "degree benefit" to fish and wildlife species injured by the oil spill. These two factors are what drive the prioritization process in the oil spill restoration plan. The Native corporation which owns them, Koniag, Inc., is a willing seller.

The hang up so far is price. An appraisal done for the Trustee Council came up with an offer of \$127 per acre, a price so low in the eyes of the Native corporation, that negotiations have virtually ceased according to Uwe Gross, chief executive office for Koniag, Inc.

"By way of background, there was a U.S. House acquisition bill that passed in early 1980's where a price of \$600 per acre was agreed to, subject to confirmation on appraisal, for all the Native inholdings, which then totaled more than 300,000 acres," say

Gross. "Subsequently, as a part of the negotiations with the Department of Interior during the Reagan Administration on land exchanges for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge coastal plain, Koniag agreed to a value of approximately \$650 per acre for 115,000 acres, which included the Karluk and Sturgeon."

Asked if there is a way to reach an agreement, Gross continued, "Subject to successful completion of the phase one negotiations (58,000 acres referenced above), Koniag is willing to begin negotiations on the Karluk and Sturgeon rivers, the crown jewels of our refuge inholdings. But the belief that we'd let them go for \$650 an acre, or less, is a non-starter from our point of view."

Both sides of the table know that the stakes are high and that in an era of dwindling government largesse, the Exxon Valdez Restoration Fund is probably the buyer of last resort. The current make up of the Trustee Council is favorable to land acquisition, and President Clinton is favorable to land acquisition, but if President Clinton is not reelected in 1996, the opportunity to save the most famous bear habitat in North America could be lost.

Dave Cline, the Alaska VP for the Audubon Society and chairman of the Kodiak Brown Bear Trust believes intensified efforts are needed by all of Kodiak's supporters. "You have to be an optimist to be in this battle," say Cline, "but we've come more than three-quarters of the way to making the refuge whole and protecting some of the finest hunting lands in the world. Given the threats that bears face all over the world, Kodiak should go down in history as one of the greatest conservation successes ever."

Cline, like John Turner, believes the Kodiak acquisitions present the most long lasting and meaningful expenditures to date of the monies from the Exxon Valdez tragedy. "There are a lot of thank yous to pass around for Kodiak so far," says Cline, "and the Boone and Crockett Club stands in the first rank. Kodiak and the habitat acquisition on Afognak Island and the rest of the spill region is unique in that there are funds available. "Completing the job is really a matter of conservation leadership."

# INTERVIEW WITH A KODIAK BEAR BIOLOGIST

VIC BARNES, NATIONAL BIOLOGICAL SERVICE

**Q.** How many brown bears do you have on Kodiak?

**A.** There are approximately 3,000 Kodiak bears in the entire Kodiak archipelago. The highest densities are located on Kodiak Island, the largest island in the group. Two-thirds of Kodiak Island, almost two million acres, has been a federally protected bear refuge since 1941. The highest density population of brown bears in the refuge is the Karluk Lake drainage where there is an area of 100 square miles with over one bear per square mile.

**Q.** Is Kodiak Island still producing huge bears?

**A.** Yes. Each year there's eight to ten world class bears taken in the harvest which means they meet minimum requirements for listing in the Boone and Crockett Club, which is the 28 inch skull or larger. In the last four years there have been two animals ranking in the top ten or fifteen in the all time list.

**Q.** How many Kodiak's are taken per year?

**A.** The sport harvest averages about 155 per year throughout the archipelago. Approximately 70-75% of sport harvest occurs within the refuge. We keep an eye on increased development of recreational buildings because defense of life and property kills rise with increased human development in bear habitat. \* (See Editor's Note) Our studies take into account all mortality, both sport and non-sport kills, so there's an increasing competition for a limited number of animals.

**Q.** How important were the recent land agreements with Kodiak Native Corporations to both Kodiak bear quality and quantity?

**A.** The land deals were exceptionally important because they allow for a uniform, consistent management strategy on almost the entire refuge now. We know bears don't honor ownership boundaries, so if some critical habitat components for populations are on private lands, while other components are on public lands, it is difficult to manage. Development on private lands effects the population density and composition on the public lands. With the Exxon Valdez agreements made with Native corporations, 80% of the targeted private inholdings within the refuge are now protected. We still need to get the Karluk and Sturgeon River drainages and this would make the Kodiak refuge whole.

**Q.** Why do Native inholdings on the Karluk and Sturgeon Rivers pose problems?

**A.** The Sturgeon River is an area where critical feeding sites occur both on Native land and adjacent public land, where bears will be effected if there is a substantial use of private lands. This would degrade the habitat of the area we have identified as critical feeding area for brown bears. And we are definitely seeing pressure on Karluk lands because of ecotourism, as well as, all the flight-seeing trips where the planes are circling and watching bears. This, combined with the dramatic increase in sport fishing pressure on the Karluk River, is having an affect on bears. If recreational use increases on the portion of the Karluk that is private, it will pressure the refuge to restrict use on the area of public lands on Karluk Lake to compensate, to give the bears some relief.

**Q.** How does Kodiak differ from other bear-viewing tourist areas in Alaska?

**A.** The main difference is that human activity at McNeil River and Brooks River is tightly controlled. People move in controlled groups along the same trails everyday, all season. Bears know and accept this behavior. By contrast, Kodiak has a few closed areas to humans for limited time frames, but beyond that people have free run of the refuge within the normal access and camping permit rules.

At Katmai National Park there is concern that ecotourism is growing beyond the extent that it impacts bears. Hunting is another big difference in that McNeil and Katmai are parks where no hunting is allowed. Here on Kodiak we want a diverse management style for consumptive and non-consumptive users.

Kodiak is unique in that bear hunting was an original purpose of the refuge in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's executive order and hunters led the effort to conserve bears. The only other comparable prime bear area is Admiralty Island, but even there, a no-hunting sanctuary was created around the bear-viewing area. Kodiak is unique amongst high density brown bear areas in that we don't have any sanctuaries within the refuge closed to hunting, and our objective is to maintain that in the future to accommodate all the uses.

\*ALASKA LAW PROVIDES FOR INDIVIDUALS TO KILL BEARS IN DEFENSE OF THEIR LIFE OR PROPERTY. A PERSON WHO IS "ATTACKED" BY OR WHO BELIEVES THEY ARE ABOUT TO BE ATTACKED BY A BEAR MAY LEGALLY KILL THE BEAR. AS MORE AND MORE HUMAN-BEAR INTERACTION TAKES PLACE MORE BEARS ARE KILLED IN DEFENSE OF LIFE AND PROPERTY. IN MANY INSTANCES BEARS HAVE BEEN KILLED UNDER THE DLP STATUTE BY INDIVIDUALS WHO WERE INEXPERIENCED IN DEALING WITH BEARS IN THE WILD AND WHO SIMPLY SHOT BEARS THAT WERE NOT A SIGNIFICANT THREAT. AS HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN BEAR HABITAT INCREASES MORE AND MORE BEAR WILL BE IN JEOPARDY UNDER THE DLP RULE. PERSONS WHO KILL A BEAR UNDER THIS RULE ARE REQUIRED TO REPORT THE KILL TO THE ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME AUTHORITIES AND TURN THE HIDES AND SKULL OVER TO SUCH AUTHORITIES.

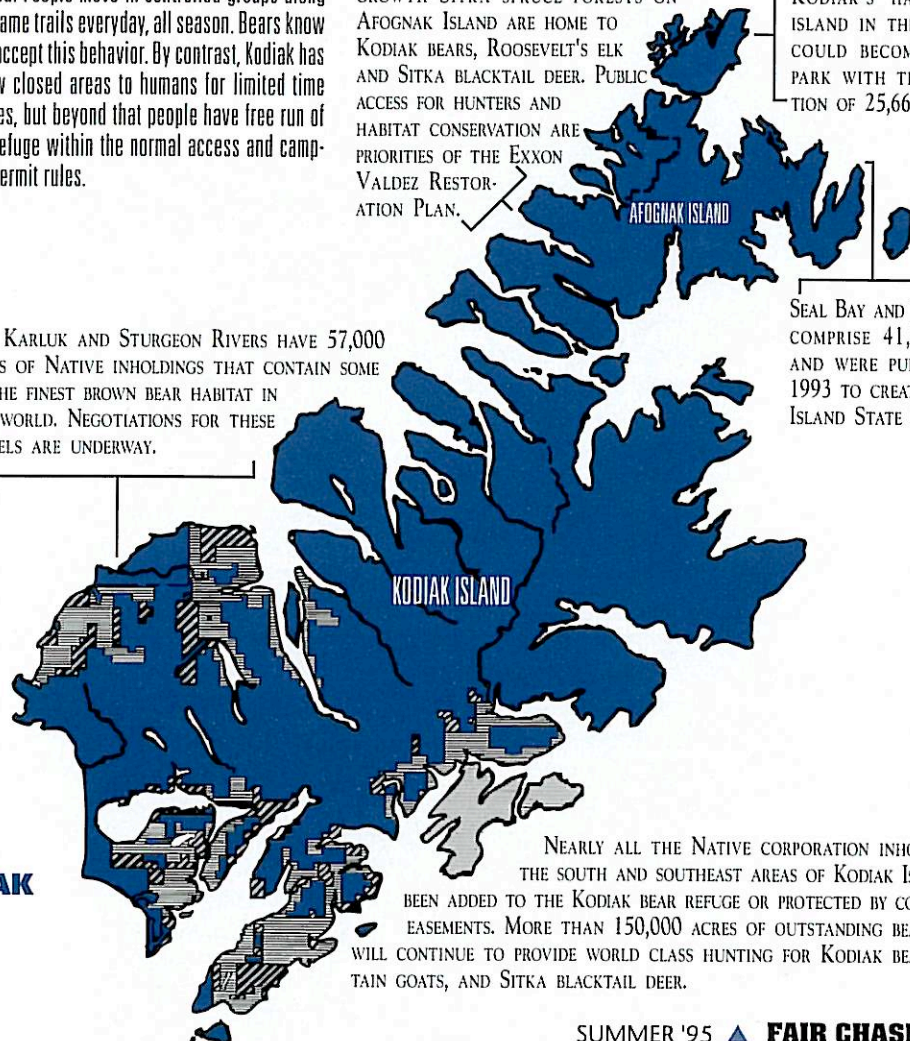
## KODIAK PROTECTING A HUNTER'S PARADISE

NATIVE LANDS CONTAINING OLD GROWTH SITKA SPRUCE FORESTS ON AFOGNAK ISLAND ARE HOME TO KODIAK BEARS, ROOSEVELT'S ELK AND SITKA BLACKTAIL DEER. PUBLIC ACCESS FOR HUNTERS AND HABITAT CONSERVATION ARE PRIORITIES OF THE EXXON VALDEZ RESTORATION PLAN.

ALL OF SHUYAK ISLAND, KODIAK'S HARDEST HIT ISLAND IN THE OIL SPILL, COULD BECOME A STATE PARK WITH THE ACQUISITION OF 25,665 ACRES.

SEAL BAY AND TONKI CAPE COMPRISE 41,550 ACRES AND WERE PURCHASED IN 1993 TO CREATE AFOGNAK ISLAND STATE PARK.

THE KARLUK AND STURGEON RIVERS HAVE 57,000 ACRES OF NATIVE INHOLDINGS THAT CONTAIN SOME OF THE FINEST BROWN BEAR HABITAT IN THE WORLD. NEGOTIATIONS FOR THESE PARCELS ARE UNDERWAY.



### LAND STATUS ON KODIAK

- U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE LAND
- NATIVE LAND SELECTED
- NATIVE LAND CONVEYED

NEARLY ALL THE NATIVE CORPORATION INHOLDINGS ON THE SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST AREAS OF KODIAK ISLAND HAVE BEEN ADDED TO THE KODIAK BEAR REFUGE OR PROTECTED BY CONSERVATION EASEMENTS. MORE THAN 150,000 ACRES OF OUTSTANDING BEAR HABITAT WILL CONTINUE TO PROVIDE WORLD CLASS HUNTING FOR KODIAK BEARS, MOUNTAIN GOATS, AND SITKA BLACKTAIL DEER.