

Utukok River Uplands Special Area

Birthplace of the Western Arctic caribou herd.



About

In the shadow of the Brooks Range lies the lush grassland ecosystem of the Utukok River Uplands Special Area. This region serves as the calving grounds and insect relief habitat for the Western Arctic caribou herd. Here you'll also find the highest concentration of grizzly bears in the Arctic, as well as large populations of moose, wolves and wolverines. Many Pacific golden plovers who nest in this area migrate to Hawaii, but their migration can extend all the way to New Zealand.



The Utukok River Uplands Special Area is the largest of the five special areas at approximately four million acres, or about 22 percent of the Western Arctic.



More than 40 villages across the northwest Arctic and Norton Sound region rely on the Western Arctic caribou herd as a subsistence resource. The area is home to the headwaters of the Utukok River, a 225-mile-long waterway that empties into Kasegaluk Lagoon and the Chukchi Sea.

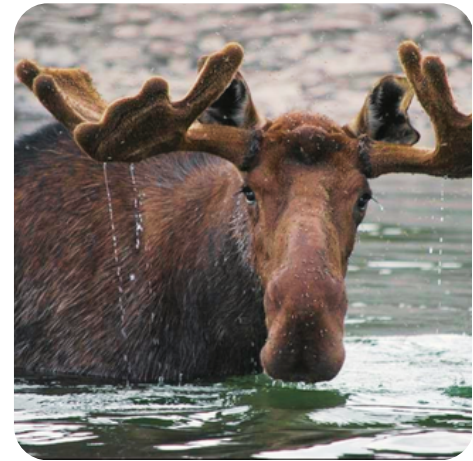
Photo: Florian Schulz

Threats to this Special Area

DEVELOPMENT

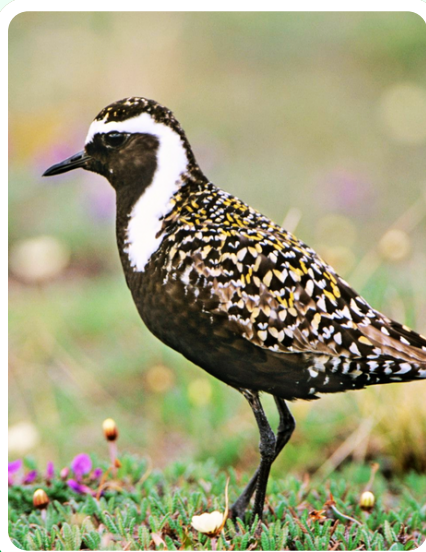
Protecting the Utukok River Uplands is **critical to preserving this Special Area's wildlife and subsistence values.**

However, **potential development could bring great harm to key resources in the Utukok**, which provides **migration routes and birthing grounds for the Western Arctic caribou herd** as well as important habitat for bears, wolverines and other wildlife.



CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is also having a **profound effect on the region.**



Average temperatures are increasing in both summer and winter, which **affects everything from the stability of permafrost to the growing seasons and availability of various vegetation for wildlife.** Scientists are already warning that changes to food sources like lichen due to climate change could have **far-reaching impacts on caribou and other creatures** that inhabit the area.