

## Innoko National Wildlife Refuge

**Refuge Information:** The Innoko National Wildlife Refuge encompasses approximately 3.85 million acres. The refuge is bordered on the west by the Yukon River, on the north by the Khotol Hills, and on the east and south by the Kuskokwim Mountains. It includes the middle portion of the Innoko River and its drainages. About one half of the Refuge consists of black spruce muskeg, wet meadow and sedge or horsetail marsh. There are many lakes and ponds of varying sizes. The other half of the Refuge is mostly spruce and birch covered hills. Most of these hills do not exceed one thousand feet. The well-drained permafrost-free slopes host stands of white spruce, paper birch and aspen.

The poorly drained areas and northern exposed slopes are usually covered with stunted black spruce woodland with an understory of lichens, mosses and shrubs. The Yukon River is vegetated on its banks and islands with a mixture of white spruce, paper birch, cottonwood and aspen. Willow and alder are present along most rivers and streams and bordering many wet meadows and marshes.

The Innoko NWR is located in western interior Alaska, 70 miles west of McGrath. McGrath is located 220 miles northwest of Anchorage and is accessible by commercial airliner only. There are no roads to the Refuge all transportation is by air in a small float plane. Once on the Refuge transportation is by foot, in uneven, marshy or wooded terrain, or by small river boats.

**Wildlife:** The extensive wetlands of the Innoko Refuge provide habitat each year for well over 100,000 waterfowl and shorebirds. This is an important nesting area for white-fronted and lesser Canada geese, pintail, widgeon, shoveler, scaup, scoters, red-necked grebes, lesser yellowlegs and Hudsonian godwits. This is also a very important area for moose, black bears and wolves. Beaver are very numerous with lodges common on all rivers and streams and most lakes, even in the muskeg areas where their normal food is scarce. Other fur-bearers include marten, lynx, red fox, river otter and wolverine. Caribou use the Refuge, particularly in late winter when deep snow moves them down from the mountains.

The fishery resource of the Refuge has not been thoroughly investigated as yet. Sheefish, whitefish, grayling, chum salmon, and northern pike are found in the rivers, and northern pike and blackfish in some lakes (northern pike are found in all waters save those isolated shallow lakes which freeze to the bottom in winter). Perhaps the most common and abundant wildlife on the refuge is the mosquito.

**Summer Projects:** Neotropical Migrant Birds Survey  
White-fronted Goose Banding  
Waterfowl Survey  
Lake vegetative survey  
Stream Classification  
Environmental Education Camp for Rural Students  
and much more . . .

**Field Conditions:** The field camp living conditions at the Refuge are sparse. There are six sleeping cabins which are heated and insulated with cots for beds. There is a kitchen building which has a stove/oven, refrigerators and a radio for communication with the Refuge Office. There is also a satellite phone for official and emergency use. Electricity is provided by a generator on an as needed basis. There is no running water, showers are provided via a pump and fire heated water, outhouses are utilized. Food preparation and clean-up is a community project in which all people at the field camp participate. Living in close association with others 24 hours a day for all summer requires cooperation on everyone's part. Weather can be cold and wet to warm and wet in mid summer. Temperatures range from 40 - 80<sup>0</sup> F. Bugs are an ever present item during the summer months. After passing a Bear Safety class all employees are required to carry a firearm for protection in the field.