



WASTE REPORT for July 18, 2016

A Fox, An Isolated Island, and Waste

Near the tail end of the Aleutian Islands (farther west than Hawaii), sits Shemya, a two-by-four-mile island that is home to Eareckson Air Station (EAS) and **nearly \$100,000 of government waste.**

The Department of Defense (DOD) recently published a \$99,000 grant opportunity to monitor the population of the Arctic Fox on Shemya.¹ The stated rationale for this project is that **the foxes appear to be in declining health**, and their presence is perceived to reduce the Bird/Aircraft Strike Hazard. **It all seems reasonable until you look a little deeper.**

Just 200 miles from Russia in the middle of the North Pacific, EAS was an important air strip during WWII and the Cold War, housing both bomber and fighter groups. However, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, that utility diminished quickly, and EAS was basically closed in 1995. **Today, the once-vibrant airfield handles about three flights a week.**²

While avoiding aircraft-bird collisions is certainly an important and worthwhile goal, the use of the Arctic Fox in this endeavor is not proven to be successful. You see, though the fox will hunt sea birds, it much prefers small animals such as rodents, according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). In addition, according to the Air Force's own *Bird/Wildlife Strike Hazard (BASH) Management Techniques*, **foxes also present a hazard, and it recommends using "pyrotechnics to frighten these species" or occasionally shooting them to keep them away from airfields.**³

But maybe there is a reason to spend almost \$100k to save the Arctic Fox! Perhaps the fox is endangered? Nope. According to the WWF, there are several hundred thousand Arctic Foxes in the world, earning them the status of "Least Concern." Interestingly enough, the foxes are not even native to the island, having been introduced decades before the Air Force arrived. In fact, generally the fox "lives inland, away from the coasts."⁴ Getting inland is hard to do on an island where you are never more than a mile from the water.

¹ *Population Monitoring of Arctic Foxes on Shemya Island, Alaska*, Army Corp of Engineers, Omaha, NE. July 2016 Opportunity Number NWO-CESU-08

² <https://flightaware.com/live/flight/FWK901/history/20160610/1630Z/PANC/PASY>

³ http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af_se/publication/afpam91-212/afpam91-212.pdf

⁴ <http://www.worldwildlife.org/species/arctic-fox>