

**Annual Report to the Alaska Board of Game on
Intensive Management for Caribou
with Wolf Predation Control
in Game Management Unit 9D,
the Southern Alaska Peninsula Caribou Herd.**

**Prepared by the Division of Wildlife Conservation
February 2014**



1) **Description of IM Program¹ and Department recommendation for reporting period**

A) **This report is an annual evaluation for a predation control program authorized by the Alaska Board of Game (Board) under 5 AAC 92.112²**

B) **Month this report was submitted by the Department to the Board:**

February X (annual report) August ___ (interim annual update³) Year 2014

C) **Program name (geographic description/GMU and species/herd):**

Southern Alaska Peninsula Predation Management Area

Subunit 9D

Southern Alaska Peninsula Caribou Herd (SAP).

D) **Existing program does not have an associated Operational Plan, it does however have a detailed Intensive Management Plan in regulation (5AAC 92.112).**

E) **Game Management Unit(s) fully or partly included in IM program area: GMU 9D.**

F) **IM objectives for caribou: population size 1,500 – 4,000 harvest 150 -- 200 annually.**

G) **Month and year the current predation control program was originally authorized by the Board: March 2008**

H) **Predation control is currently inactive in this IM area.**

I) **If active, month and year the current predation control program began:**

Control activities were initiated in May 2008 during regulatory year (RY) 2007 (RY2007 = 1 July 2007 through 30 June 2008) and suspended in July 2010 (RY2010)

J) **Indicate if an habitat management program funded by the Department or from other sources is currently active in this IM area (Y/N): N.**

K) **Size of IM program area (square miles) and geographic description:**

- 3,819 square miles
- includes all lands on the mainland portion of Subunit 9D

L) **Size and geographic description of area for assessing ungulate abundance:**

- 3,819 square miles
- includes all the mainland portion of Subunit 9D

¹ For purpose and context of this report format, see *Intensive Management Protocol, section on Tools for Program Implementation and Assessment*

² [Regulatory numbers for existing IM programs formerly under 5AAC92.125 were divided into groups and given new numbers in October 2012 (see IM Plan template--Version 3, January 2013)]

³ The interim annual update may be limited only to sections that changed substantially since prior annual report [e.g., only Tables 3 and 6 in areas with a fall ungulate survey and only wolf control]

M) Size and geographic description of area for ungulate harvest reporting:

- 3,819 square miles
- includes all the mainland portion of Subunit 9D

N) Size and geographic description of area for assessing predator abundance:

- Less than 200 square miles; The actual size of the area varies annually based on caribou calving distribution
- includes all state lands on the mainland portion of Subunit 9D

O) Size and geographic description of predation control area:

- Defined annually based on caribou calving distribution
- Up to 3,819 square miles
- Can include any drainage of the Alaska Peninsula west of a line from the southernmost head of Port Moller Bay to the head of American Bay (not applicable to federal lands unless approved by federal land management agencies)

P) Criteria for evaluating progress toward IM objectives:

- Fall bull ratio
- Call calf ratio
- Caribou abundance
- Caribou harvest

Q) Criteria for success with this program:

- Fall bull ratio can be sustained within management objectives (35 bulls:100 cows)
- Fall calf ratio can be sustained above 30 calves:100 cows
- The population can grow at a sustained rate of 5% annually
- Harvest objectives are met

R) Department recommendation for IM program in this reporting period:

The Department recommends continuing the suspension of the predation control program during the 2014 calving season while monitoring the herd for progress towards IM objectives (details provided in sections 6).

2) Prey data

Date(s) and method of most recent summer abundance assessment for the Southern Alaska Peninsula Caribou Herd (SAP):

October 27, 2013; Population size is extrapolated from the number of caribou and percent of collared caribou observed during the October composition survey.

Compared to IM area, was a similar trend and magnitude of difference in abundance observed in nearby non-treatment area(s) since program inception and in the last year?

No

Describe comparison if necessary:

The adjacent Unimak caribou herd (UCH) has declined in abundance since SAP program started and in the last year abundance was estimated (2009), while the SAP showed a steady increase in abundance.

Dates of most recent age and sex composition survey (if statistical variation available, describe method here and show result in Table 1):

October 27, 2013.

Compared to IM area, was a similar composition trend and magnitude of difference in composition observed in nearby non-treatment area since program inception (Y/N)? N and in the last year (Y/N)? N. Describe comparison if necessary:

The Unimak Caribou Herd (UCH) bull ratio and calf ratio have remained low since the predation reduction program began on the calving grounds of the SAP, while the SAP bull ratio and calf ratio increased.

Table 1. Caribou abundance, age and sex composition in assessment area (L) since program implementation in year 1 (not exclusively limited to inception of predation control) to reauthorization review in year 11 (2017) in the Southern Alaska Peninsula Predation Management Area. Regulatory year is 1 July to 30 June (e.g, RY 2010 is 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011).

| Period | RY | Abundance | Composition (number per 100 females) ^a | | Total <i>n</i> |
|----------------------|------|-------------------|--|-----------------|----------------|
| | | | Young | Males | |
| Year 1 ^b | 2007 | 600 ^c | 1 | 15 | 431 |
| Year 2 ^b | 2008 | 700 ^c | 39 | 10 | 570 |
| Year 3 ^b | 2009 | 800 ^c | 43 | 21 | 679 |
| Year 4 ^{de} | 2010 | - | 47 | 28 | 532 |
| Year 5 ^{de} | 2011 | 1061 ^f | 20 | 40 | 920 |
| Year 6 ^{de} | 2012 | - | 20 | 45 | 500 |
| Year 7 ^e | 2013 | 1720 | 40 | 50 ^g | 600 |

^a Composition surveys are conducted prior to wolf control activities that occur in the same regulatory year (e.g. during RY2007 the composition survey was conducted in October 2007 and wolf control was conducted in May 2008)

^b Wolf control was conducted on the caribou calving grounds during May and June

^c Post-calving population count conducted by ADFG in July.

^d Scheduled post-calving population counts were not conducted due to poor weather conditions.

^e Wolf control program activities suspended to evaluate the effects of increased calf recruitment.

^f USFWS February, 2012 winter minimum count.

^g Model-based adjustment of bulls probably mis-categorized during survey by a new observer.

Describe trend in abundance or composition:

SAP caribou abundance, bull and calf ratios have consistently increased since the

program was implemented in May, 2008 (RY2007). The fall calf ratio (RY2008) increased dramatically after the first year of wolf removal, and remained high each fall (RY2008 through RY2010) following active wolf control. The fall calf ratio in RY2011 decreased after the program was suspended in RY2010; still it remained high relative to pre-control levels. In RY2013 the fall calf ratio shows a strong increase. The apparent decrease in RY2011 & 2012 was in part related to the preponderance of nonproductive female caribou (<3 years of age) that entered the population following the initial predator control efforts. As the initial influx of surviving females reached reproductive maturity in RY2012, these now productive females have begun increasing herd productivity. The bull ratio has also increased steadily; in RY2011 it exceeded the 2008 SAP management objective of 35 bulls:100 cows, for the first time since 2004 at 40.2 bulls:100 cows. In RY2012 and 2013 it increased further to 45 bulls:100 cows, and 50 bulls:100 cows, respectively.

Table 2. Caribou abundance, age and sex composition of the Unimak Caribou Herd in adjacent Game Management Unit 10 since the implementation of the Southern Alaska Peninsula Predation Control program in Subunit 9D in year 1 (RY2007).

| Period | RY | Abundance (variation) | Composition (number per 100 females) | | Total <i>n</i> |
|--------|------|-----------------------|---|-----------------|----------------|
| | | | Young | Males | |
| Year 1 | 2007 | - | 6 | 31 | 433 |
| Year 2 | 2008 | - | 6 | 9 | 260 |
| Year 3 | 2009 | 400 ^a | 3 | 5 | 221 |
| Year 4 | 2010 | - | 8 | 8 | 284 |
| Year 5 | 2011 | - | 7 | 6 | 117 |
| Year 6 | 2012 | - | 3 | 10 | 83 |
| Year 7 | 2013 | - | 19 | 10 ^b | 67 |

^a Minimum count conducted in winter by USFWS

^b Model-based adjustment of bulls probably mis-categorized during survey by new observer

Table 3. Caribou harvest in assessment area (M). Methods for estimating unreported harvest are described in Survey and Inventory reports.

| Period | RY | Reported | | Estimated | | Total harvest | Other mortality ^a | Total |
|--------|------|----------|--------|------------|---------|---------------|------------------------------|-------|
| | | Male | Female | Unreported | Illegal | | | |
| Year 1 | 2007 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | - | 0 | 10 |
| Year 2 | 2008 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | - | 0 | 10 |
| Year 3 | 2009 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | - | 0 | 10 |
| Year 4 | 2010 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | - | 0 | 10 |
| Year 5 | 2011 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | - | 0 | 10 |
| Year 6 | 2012 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 9 | 0 | 19 |

^aClarify (vehicle mortality, Defense of Life and Property, Mortuary, etc.).

Describe trend in harvest: Izembek National Wildlife Refuge (USFWS) implemented a limited federal hunt from August, 2012—March, 2013. This was the first open hunt of the SAP since RY2006.

We estimate illegal harvest to have remained level over the course of the program

Describe any other harvest related trend if appropriate:

Not Applicable

3) Predator data

Date(s) and method of most recent spring abundance assessment for wolves:

The objective of the program is to remove wolves from the control area (calving grounds of the SAP) during the period when calves are most vulnerable to predation, during the first 2 weeks of life to improve caribou calf survival and recruitment. This wolf control effort was suspended after the RY2009 calving season (Wolves were last removed in June 2010). No wolf survey has been conducted.

Date(s) and method of most recent fall abundance assessment for wolves:

The objective is to annually remove all wolves from the control area (calving grounds of the SAP). This wolf control effort was suspended after the RY2009 calving season (Wolves were last removed in June 2010). No wolf survey has been conducted.

Other research or evidence of trend or abundance status in wolves:

Observations by department biologists of wolves and wolf tracks from the air in Subunit 9D indicate wolves have persisted in the area since the program was implemented. Data from satellite collared wolves indicate dispersal into the area is occurring from northern Alaska Peninsula packs.

Table 4. Wolf abundance objectives and removal in wolf assessment area (N) of the Southern Alaska Peninsula Predation Management Area, Subunit 9D. Removal objective for the wolf populations in caribou calving areas within Subunit 9D is N/A% of pre-control fall abundance in year 1 of wolf predation control program.

Not Applicable: The program is designed to remove the fewest number of wolves possible during the period of time in which calves are most vulnerable to predation to increase calf survival and recruitment. The program does not have a removal objective (% of the pre-fall abundance) and does not require any reduction in the wolf population.

| Period | RY | Harvest removal from area | | Dept. control removal from area | Public control removal from area | Total removal ^a from area | Spring abundance (variation) in area |
|--------|------|---------------------------|------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | | Trap | Hunt | | | | |
| Year 1 | 2007 | 1 | 8 | 28 | 0 | 37 | - |
| Year 2 | 2008 | 0 | 3 | 8 | 0 | 11 | - |

| | | | | | | | |
|--------|------|---|----|---|---|----|---|
| Year 3 | 2009 | 0 | 9 | 2 | 0 | 11 | - |
| Year 4 | 2010 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | - |
| Year 5 | 2011 | 2 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 15 | - |
| Year 6 | 2012 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 5 | - |

^aAdditional removal may be Defense of Life and Property, vehicle kill, etc.

4) Habitat data and nutritional condition of prey species

Where active habitat enhancement is occurring or was recommended in the Operational Plan, describe progress toward objectives: Not Applicable

Objective(s): Not Applicable. There are no demonstrated methods to improve caribou habitat, and no reason to believe that habitat is limiting the caribou population.

Area treated and method: Not Applicable

Observation on treatment response: Not Applicable

Evidence of progress toward objective(s): Not Applicable

Similar trend in nearby non-treatment areas? Not Applicable

Describe any substantial change in habitat not caused by active program: Not Applicable

Table 5. Nutritional indicators for caribou in the area (L) of the Southern Alaska Peninsula Caribou Herd.

| Period | RY | Pregnancy (Females 2+ yrs of age) | Male Calf Weights (kg) | Female Calf Weights (kg) |
|--------|------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Year 1 | 2007 | - | - | - |
| Year 2 | 2008 | 86% | 7.6 | 7.5 |
| Year 3 | 2009 | 90% | 7.4 | 6.4 |
| Year 4 | 2010 | 91% | 7.1 | 6.1 |
| Year 5 | 2011 | 85% | - | - |
| Year 6 | 2012 | 93% | - | - |
| Year 7 | 2013 | 84% | 7.6 | 7.1 |

Where objectives on nutritional condition were listed in the Operational Plan, describe trend in condition indices since inception of (a) habitat enhancement or (b) enhanced harvest:

Not Applicable

Evidence of trend: Not Applicable

Similar trend in nearby non-treatment areas? Not Applicable

Describe any substantial change in habitat not caused by active program: Not Applicable

5) Costs specific to implementing Intensive Management

Table 6. Cost (\$1000 = 1.0) of agency salary based on estimate of proportional time of field level staff and cost of operations for intensive management activities (e.g., predator control or habitat enhancement beyond normal Survey and Inventory work) performed by personnel in the Department or work by other state agencies (e.g., Division of Forestry) or contractors in the Southern Alaska Peninsula Predation Management Area. Fiscal year (FY) is also 1 July to 30 June but the year is one greater than the comparable RY (e.g, FY 2010 is 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010).

| Period | FY | Predation control ^a | | Other IM activities | | Total IM cost ^c | Research cost ^{cd} |
|--------|------|--------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | | Time ^b | Cost ^c | Time ^b | Cost ^c | | |
| Year 6 | 2012 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 0.0 |
| Year 7 | 2013 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.5 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 118.3 |

^aState or private funds only.

^bPerson months (22 days per month).

^cSalary plus operations.

^dSeparate from implementing IM program but beneficial for understanding of ecological or human response to management treatment (scientific approach that is not unique to IM).

6) Department recommendations² for annual evaluation (1 February) following Year 6 (RY 2012) for the Southern Alaska Peninsula Predation Management Area, Subunit 9D — skip in final year and go to section 7

Has progress toward defined criteria been achieved?

Yes. Caribou abundance, fall bull ratio, and fall calf ratio have all increased since the program started.

Has achievement of success criteria occurred?

Success has been achieved for at least one criterion. In RY2011 the fall bull ratio exceeded management objectives for the first time since 2004 and a Tier II hunting season was opened. The fall calf ratio increased during the first year of the program and reversed the negative population trend. The calf ratio continued to increase in subsequent years, until the program was suspended in year 4 (RY2010). The current calf ratio is again above management objectives. Since RY2011 the population has maintained annual growth in excess of 5%. Continued monitoring may determine trends in these

² Prior sections include primarily objective information from field surveys; Sections 6 and 7 involve professional judgment by area biologists to interpret the context of prior information for the species in the management area.

criteria.

Recommendation for IM program (choose one): Continue Modify **Suspend** Terminate

Substantial progress has been made toward meeting the objectives defined for program success. Abundance, as well as fall bull and calf ratios have all increased under this program. Fall calf ratios were above objectives following each year of active predator reduction. Although the calf ratio decreased upon suspension of the program, in RY2013 it rebounded and exceeds management objectives. Because increases in bull ratio and abundance stem from increased recruitment, these parameters should continue to improve as the calves from Years 1 through 4 reach adulthood. We recommend continued suspension of predation control in Year 7. We will continue to monitor progress towards program objectives in the absence of predation control.

7) Evaluation (1 February) for program renewal (following final Year 11 [RY 2017]) and Department recommendations for the Southern Alaska Peninsula Predation Management Area, Subunit 9D.

Has progress toward defined criteria been achieved (describe)? _____

Has achievement of success criteria occurred (describe)? _____

Recommendation for IM program (choose one): Continue Modify Suspend Terminate

Rationale for recommendation on overall program: _____

Other recommendations (if continuation is recommended, specific actions on individual practices): _____