

## SHEEP REPORT - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY by ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation

Alaska Dall sheep population and harvest information was reviewed and summarized in order to provide the Board of Game and others with data to discuss and compare with the results of Dr. Todd Brinkman's sheep hunter survey that was conducted this year (2014). The focus of ADF&G's report was to address the issues and topics identified in the regulation proposals to be reviewed by the Board at meetings in February and March 2015. Trends in sheep numbers, hunter characteristics, and harvest data were gathered and presented by time period and mountain range to help identify trends in time and space. Most all of the results were further divided by resident and nonresident. This report was not intended or designed to address all topics and issues for everyone interested in sheep management in Alaska.

Population information focused on trends as reported in the Division of Wildlife Conservation's fourteen management reports. Overall, trends were reported as stable or decreasing. The statewide population is unknown but was estimated without scientific verification in 2010 to be around 45,000. A map of current known Dall sheep distribution in Alaska and a description of the eight range areas reviewed were provided.

Hunting access is limited or totally restricted in some portions of the state due to private land ownership and in some cases federal restrictions on specific National Park service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife lands. Sheep hunting occurs on all or a portion of 18 game management units managed by ADF&G. There are basically three types of sheep hunts available – general harvest ticket hunts, drawing permit hunts, and registration permit hunts. These hunt types are available to residents and most are available to nonresidents as well. Bag limits are generally 1 full-curl with exceptions for some drawing and registration permit hunts.

Overall, the most common method of transportation used by both resident and nonresident hunters to access sheep hunting areas was airplanes. Other preferred methods of transportation used by residents were highway vehicles and off-road vehicles (e.g., ATVs). The second most reported method of transportation nonresidents reported using was horses. Off-road vehicles were also used by nonresidents but to a much lesser extent than airplanes or horses.

The total number of hunters and harvest has changed over time. There has been a general decline in the number of resident hunters and total harvest for over 20 years. Nonresident sheep hunters have remained generally stable over this same time period. For the last few years, nonresident hunters overall make up about 20% of the total number of hunters and harvest about 40% of the total sheep taken. Recently, there are reported to be about 1,800 resident and 450 nonresident sheep hunters. Total annual sheep harvest has been approximately 750 sheep. Success rates for nonresidents is essentially double that of residents and that was found to be generally the case for each of the eight range areas reviewed for this report. This was also found to be consistent across time as well.

Other harvest characteristics were generally similar for residents and nonresidents sheep hunters. The chronology or timing of the harvest showed an obvious pattern for both residents and nonresidents with over half of the total annual harvest occurring in the first ten days of the season. In addition, over half of this portion of the harvest occurred within the first five days of the season. This pattern was generally consistent across the eight range areas. The horn length and age of rams harvested was relatively similar for residents and nonresidents across all range areas and time periods with few exceptions. The total days reported hunting by both successful resident and successful nonresident sheep hunters was very similar while unsuccessful nonresident hunters hunted generally one to two days more on average compared to unsuccessful resident hunters.

Information on the type of commercial services used by sheep hunters has been collected since the early 1990s. Most nonresident hunters reported using guides and/or other commercial services to hunt sheep while the majority of residents do not. Residents that use commercial services hire transporters more than all other types of commercial services. It is likely that the majority of transporters hired by both residents and nonresidents for sheep hunting are air taxis or state licensed airplane transporters.

Harvest report data as well as registered guide and state licensed transporter information from the Division of Corporations, Business, and Professional Licensing indicated that there were some game management units that likely have considerable guide and transporter activity associated with sheep hunting. Some of the information is not as clear due to the nature of the information and how it is collected, but there are trends in the existing data that may warrant additional investigation to better quantify guide and transporter activity.

While it is expected that the findings in the department's report and those from the surveys conducted by Dr. Brinkman will help inform discussions about regulatory changes to sheep hunting in Alaska, the division is fully aware that available data were not able to answer all questions pertinent to the discussion. Additional data will be analyzed as it becomes available and requests for other information will be addressed as staff time and other priorities allow.