



# NEWS RELEASE



## Alaska Department of Fish and Game

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### For Immediate Release

Oct. 26, 2020

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## Public Meeting and Hearing Announced Regarding 2020 GMU 2 Wolf Harvest

CRAIG, Alaska – Biologists with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service, will hold a public meeting and hearing to share information and solicit comments on the intent to close the state and federal hunting and trapping seasons for wolf in Game Management Unit (GMU) 2 (Unit 2 in the Federal regulations) at 11:59 p.m. on Nov. 30, 2020.

The meetings will be held telephonically on Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. The public meeting will be held from 6-7 p.m. to provide the opportunity for the public to share information and interact with managers. A public hearing will immediately follow from 7-8 p.m. where the public can provide testimony. Participants may dial 888-566-1030 and enter the passcode 3344290.

#### Background

The Alaska Constitution requires ADF&G to manage all wildlife populations, including wolves in Unit 2, on a sustained yield basis. Beginning in 2019, the wolf harvest management strategy on Prince of Wales and associated islands, collectively known as GMU 2, changed from a harvest quota calculated as a percentage of the most recent population estimate to one where season length is annually adjusted to achieve a level of harvest that will maintain the wolf population within a sustainable fall population objective range of 150-200 wolves as established by the Alaska Board of Game. ADF&G worked with the Forest Service, Fish and Game Advisory Committees, the Alaska Board of Game, the Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, and trappers to develop this new strategy that provides trappers with the flexibility and responsibility they desired while sustainably managing harvest of this wolf population.

The current harvest management strategy is based on annual estimates of the abundance of GMU 2 wolves. Dense forest cover makes aerial surveys impractical, so ADF&G, with support from the Forest Service, estimates wolf abundance in GMU 2 using a DNA-based mark-recapture technique. In fall 2019, ADF&G collected wolf DNA samples within the same large, northern and central Prince of Wales Island study area used in 2014-2018. ADF&G also collaborated with the Hydaburg Cooperative Association (HCA) to establish an additional study area,

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monitored by HCA, adjacent to the southern boundary of ADF&G's study area. This collaboration effectively expands the study area to nearly 80 percent of Prince of Wales Island and over 60 percent of the land area of GMU 2.

### Interpreting Estimates and Harvest

Analysis of wolf DNA samples collected from October through December 2019 resulted in a fall 2019 GMU 2 population point estimate of 316 wolves, with high confidence that the actual number of wolves in GMU 2 prior to the fall 2019 hunting and trapping seasons was within the 95 percent confidence interval range, 250 to 398 wolves. This is the most current population estimate. We cannot directly count GMU 2 wolves, so we estimate their abundance. Estimates are not counts, and any type of estimate involves uncertainty. Therefore, we present each GMU 2 wolf population estimate as a point estimate within an estimated range of plausible values which account for that uncertainty. Within that range of possible values the point estimate used for harvest management is the value most likely to be correct given the data collected that year.

The fall 2019 harvest was high relative to the 2018 point estimate, but that estimate and its range of possible values represent the estimated number of GMU 2 wolves over 14 months prior to the fall 2019 season. To properly evaluate the effect of the 2019 harvest on the GMU 2 population, managers needed to know the estimated fall 2019 population and take into account other indicators of wolf abundance following the trapping season. The 2019 population estimate was much higher than the 2018 estimate. Other information including anecdotal reports of post-trapping season wolf abundance, distribution, and reproduction based on reported sightings and trail camera images also suggested wolves remained relatively abundant and well distributed throughout GMU 2. More recently, the rate at which wolf DNA samples are being collected during ADF&G's ongoing fieldwork for the fall 2020 population estimate also indicates the GMU 2 population remains secure. Taking that information into consideration, ADF&G and the USFS conclude that the fall 2019 population point estimate of 316 wolves is a reasonable estimate of wolf abundance at that time.

The reported fall 2019 harvest of 165 wolves from a population estimated at 316 wolves results in a harvest rate >50%. The maximum sustainable harvest rate for a productive wolf population is generally considered to be about 30%. We believe this high harvest resulted from much greater trapping effort than has been typical in recent years. Although ADF&G does not collect information on trapping effort, the greater number of trappers who sealed wolves during the 2019-2020 season suggests that effort was much higher than usual and exceeded the levels anticipated in ADF&G's GMU 2 Wolf Harvest Management Plan. Fortunately, that plan provides managers with options to reduce potential harvest by limiting season length.

### Fall 2020 Harvest Management

Harvest effort during fall 2019 was much higher than anticipated and resulted in an unsustainable level of harvest. However, a single year of high harvest did not threaten the long-term viability of this population. Fall 2020 harvest management will focus on preventing overharvest through a shortened season. We also ask trappers to promptly seal wolves as they are harvested. To ensure harvest during the fall 2020 hunting and trapping seasons remains sustainable and the population remains within the objective range, managers intend to limit state and federal wolf trapping seasons in GMU 2 to 16 days. State and federal trapping seasons would open on Nov. 15, 2020, and close on Nov.30, 2020. The Federal GMU 2 wolf hunting season was closed by Special Action prior to the normal opening date of Sept. 1 through Oct. 30, 2020 while the 2019 population estimate was being determined. The federal hunting season will reopen on Oct.31, 2020 and would close on Nov. 30, 2020. The state GMU 2 wolf hunting season normally opens on Dec. 1, but for 2020 it would be pre-emptively closed by Emergency Order. Hunters and trappers are reminded that the goal of this GMU 2 wolf harvest management strategy is to maintain the estimated fall wolf population within the range of 150-200 wolves as established by the Alaska Board of Game.

Please call the ADF&G Ketchikan area office at 907-225-2475 for more information. For more information from the USDA Forest Service, please call District Ranger Scot Shuler at 907-826-1600. Maps of Federal lands within GMU 2 are available at Forest Service offices. Maps and additional information on the Federal Subsistence Management Program can be found on the web at <http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/index.cfm>.

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