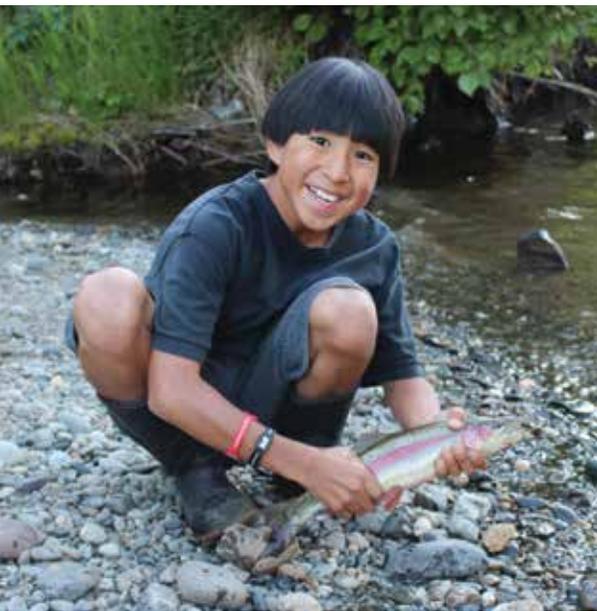


Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2016

Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Division of Sport Fish



Welcome to our Annual Report



The Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Sport Fish 2015—2020 Strategic Plan is our foundation and roadmap for how we will work to protect, maintain, and improve Alaska's sport fisheries over the next five years. It outlines the Division's structure, budget, and core services, as well as the purpose behind activities we are committed to pursue as a means to meeting our stated goals and objectives. As we work to complete our plan, I asked that you hold us accountable for those activities.

It is important to us that we report on the progress made in Fiscal Year 2016 (July 1, 2015—June 30, 2016). It is the first time the Division has produced an annual report to highlight our performance as it relates to the strategic plan and share what is to come with anglers, interested groups and individuals. I am proud of what we have accomplished this past year, and am confident that the actions taken and dollars spent were direct contributions toward the successful pursuit of our mission.

However, we cannot celebrate these accomplishments alone. Our success is due in large part to the contributions that Alaska's anglers make. They enable us to meet the goals and objectives described in our plan. Your support through the purchase of a sport fishing license directly benefits conservation of our fishery resources. Adequate funding is required if we are to pursue and complete the activities contained within our plan. We very much appreciate your support and contribution to fisheries conservation and management in Alaska and hope that you join us in celebrating our accomplishments.

Tom Brookover, Director
Division of Sport Fish



Vision, Mission, and Core Functions



Our Vision:

Excellence in fisheries management and research for the benefit of sport anglers, the state's economy, and future generations of Alaskans.

Our Mission:

The mission of the Division of Sport Fish is to protect and improve the state's sport fishery resources.

Core Functions

- » **Fisheries Management:** Manage the state's sport fisheries for sustained yield and angler satisfaction.
- » **Fisheries Research:** Perform objective-based research based on sound scientific practices to support sport fisheries management.
- » **Fisheries Enhancement:** Create and diversify sport fishing opportunities for anglers.
- » **Fish Habitat:** Protect and restore fish habitats for the benefit of fish and sport anglers.
- » **Communication and Outreach:** Inform and communicate with the public about sport fishing.
- » **Internal Operations:** Provide leadership and administrative support for the Division's core functions.

Expenditures

FY 16 Expenditures by Core Functions

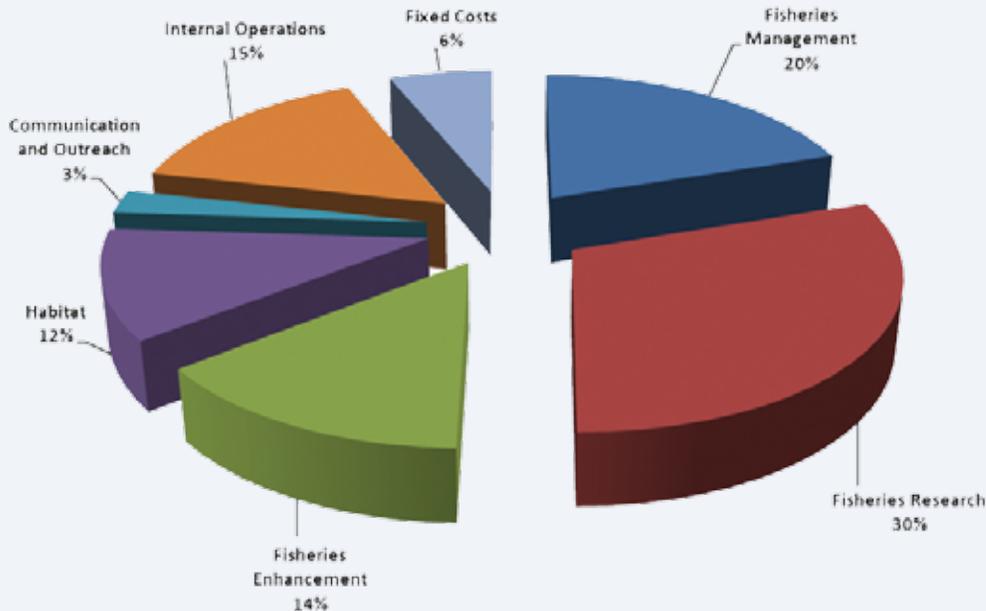


Figure 1. Percent of total expenditures (all funding sources) within core services during FY16



The Division's FY16 operating budget was approximately \$48 million. The primary funding sources were the state's Fish and Game Fund (sport fish license revenue and king salmon stamp receipts) and the federal Sport Fish Restoration Program (federal tax dollars derived from sport fishing-related equipment and fuel sales). These sources are supplemented with competitive grant awards, cooperative agreements, partnerships, and legislative appropriations. All funds are allocated based on goals, objectives, and activities outlined within this Strategic Plan.

FY 16 Expenditures by Fund Source

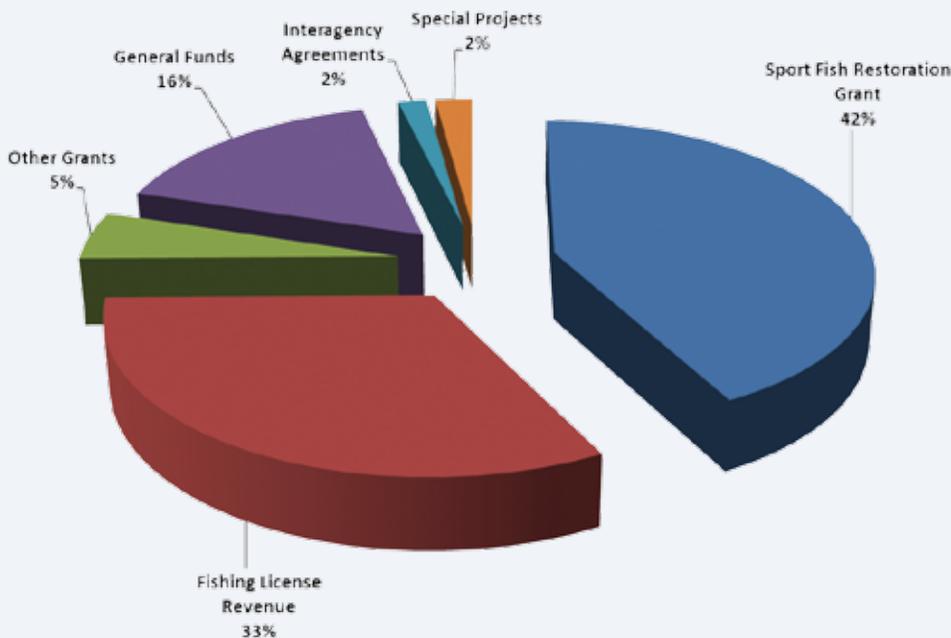


Figure 2. Total expenditures during FY16 by funding source

License sales in FY16 were higher than anticipated, generating \$13.7 million in revenue. Additionally, our annual Sport Fish Restoration Program apportionment was slightly higher than expected; however, the division received less grant revenues than anticipated, resulting in a shift in spending priorities between fund sources and within core service areas. For example, we had allocated approximately 34% of our funding to Fisheries Research. However, given the lower than anticipated grant awards received, actual expenditures approximated 30% (Figure 1). These factors also changed expenditures by fund sources compared to how we initially had planned (e.g. initially planned to spend 34% out of the Sport Fish Restoration Funds, and actually spent 42%) (Figure 2).

Division of Sport Fish Offices



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Region III (Interior) - Regional Office Fairbanks

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1300 College Road

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Goal 1: Fisheries Management



The Division uses a local area-based system to manage Alaska's sport fisheries for sustained yield and angler satisfaction. The sustained yield principal is one of the fundamental elements of stable sport fisheries in Alaska. It balances harvest through the activities of the fishery and replenishment through incremental growth and recruitment of the stock. To this end, our area management biologists worked closely with research staff to actively monitor fish stocks and adjust regulations in-season while maintaining a dialogue with local user groups and anglers throughout the year to ensure the sustained use of Alaska's sport fisheries.

Objective 1: Use area and fishery-based management to develop and achieve fisheries management objectives consistent with the sustained yield principle.

- Conducted area management reviews to prioritize fishery management and research needs.
- Reviewed logbook, creel, and assessment project data throughout the season to inform management decisions for all sport and several personal use fisheries.
- Used research data to actively monitor salmon runs and resident fish stocks; restricted fisheries when necessary and liberalized fisheries where possible.
- Liberalized fishing opportunities for sockeye salmon fisheries in Redoubt Bay near Sitka, Resurrection Bay, Kenai River, and several Kodiak systems, and; for coho salmon in Fish, Cottonwood and Wasilla Creeks in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley.
- Partially or fully reversed pre-season restrictions to Chinook salmon fishing opportunities on the Kenai River, Little Susitna River, the Deshka River, and some enhanced king salmon fisheries in-season, as a result of regionally strong runs.
- Coordinated directly with fisheries management and research staff in the Division of Commercial Fisheries on management actions within fully allocated fisheries.

Objective 2: Improve angler understanding and compliance with sport fisheries regulations.

- Worked to simplify sport fishing regulations by submitting staff proposals to the Board of Fisheries and providing comments to public Board of Fisheries proposals.
- Identified funding for a public survey to assess understanding of current regulation summary booklets.
- Met with Alaska Wildlife Troopers to identify enforcement issues and priority areas for enforcement presence, and provided basic enforcement training to employees.
- Attended Board of Fisheries Advisory Committee meetings to explain regulatory proposals and provided technical assistance with proposal development.

Objective 3: Improve and maintain recreational boating and angler access.

- Maintained legal public access to sport fishing areas.
- Continued development or maintenance work on approximately 25 recreational boating and angler access sites statewide.
- Completed numerous Tanana Lakes facility improvements; renovated Big Lake South and Big Lake North boat launch ramps to improve boater safety.

Looking Forward



- Conservatively managing Chinook salmon stocks as a result of losing key assessment projects due to expiring Capital Improvement funds.
- Pursuing partnerships with local entities that can provide non-federal match for the development, operation, and maintenance of recreational boating and angler access sites.
- Reducing staff attendance and expertise at Board of Fisheries and other meetings due to ongoing budget and travel restrictions.



Goal 2: Fisheries Research

Successful management of Alaska's sport fisheries is dependent upon sound scientific practices and objective-based research. The Division is committed to utilizing scientific principles, incorporating the latest technology, and employing rigorous project planning and design to ensure the data we collect will address management needs and be scientifically defensible. We develop and implement research projects with teams that include research and management biologists, biometricians, geographic information systems specialists, information technology staff, and publications staff to ensure the data collected are relevant to sustainable fisheries, statistically sound, gathered in a cost-effective and timely manner, and that the results are published.



Objective 1: Plan and conduct research projects that are scientifically and statistically sound and address priority management information needs.

- Scientifically and statistically reviewed, approved and had in place 84 operational plans that identified measurable objectives, sampling methods, analytical techniques, and costs for research projects.
- Completed 67 research and stock assessment projects that provided data critical to understanding population statistics and relating fish presence to aquatic habitats.
- Modified Statewide Harvest Survey database system to improve accuracy and repeatability for producing angler participation, catch and harvest estimates.

Objective 2: Publish research results that are peer-reviewed, well written, and timely.

- Met all contractual funding obligations related to annual or final reporting of all sport fisheries research projects.
- Published eight manuscripts in peer-reviewed scientific literature and submitted four manuscripts to peer-reviewed journals.



Looking Forward

- Continuing current or implementing new research projects that rely on external funding sources may not be feasible because the Division's project proposals are not always selected or approved; loss of this funding hinders our ability to address fisheries management needs.
- Making additional modifications to the Statewide Harvest Survey to utilize a process-driven approach for survey sample selection, data collection, editing and analyses, and reporting will further improve the quality and timeliness of providing survey results.
- Exploring standardization of data recording methods and databases, technology, and operations/maintenance issues will streamline and improve data analysis.
- Encouraging manuscript submissions to peer-reviewed publications and the presentation of research results at professional fisheries and aquatic sciences conferences will improve the quality of research.

Goal 3: Fisheries Enhancement



Many of Alaska's most popular and reliable fisheries are created and supported by the Division's enhancement program. Two state-of-the-art sport fish hatcheries and cooperative partnerships with private, non-profit hatchery operators allows the Division to diversify and enhance angler opportunities by producing and releasing Chinook and coho salmon, rainbow trout, and Arctic char into local lakes, streams and marine waters.



Objective 1: Conduct enhancement activities in a manner that does not adversely impact wild fish and habitats.

- Adhered to state and Division policies designed to maintain the genetic integrity and health of wild fish stocks.
- Evaluated impacts of hatchery releases of anadromous fish on wild stocks through sampling efforts of stray hatchery fish into adjacent streams and rivers, reviewed incidental harvest of wild stocks, and estimated the contribution of Gulkana-hatchery reared sockeye salmon to the harvest in the Chitina Personal Use fishery.

Objective 2: Meet regional enhancement needs for prioritized anadromous and freshwater fisheries.

- Released 6.55 million Chinook and coho salmon, rainbow trout and Arctic char at 293 different locations across the state, and substantially met regional enhancement needs.

Objective 3: Produce and stock fish in a manner that is safe, biologically sound, cost effective, and utilizes best practices.

- Maintained enhancement partnerships with private, non-profit hatcheries and met associated production goals.
- Conducted limited post-stocking assessments on a small number of select locations.

Looking Forward

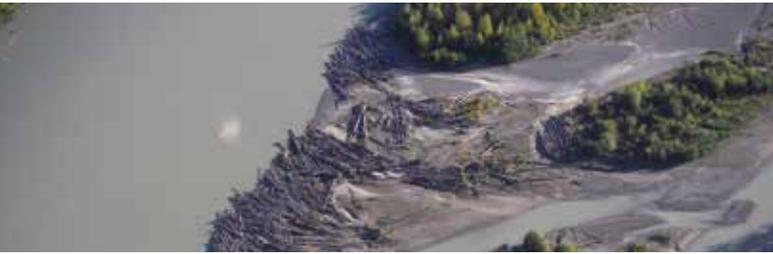


- Consider restoring the previously eliminated Arctic grayling and reduced rainbow trout production programs.
- Conducting more post-stocking assessments.



Goal 4: Fish Habitat

The conservation of Alaska’s fish habitats (fresh water, estuarine, and coastal waters within 3 miles from shore) is imperative to safeguard its productive fisheries. To that end, the Division collaborated with other government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private landowners to protect, improve, and restore fish habitat, while also working to minimize the impacts of invasive species on sport fish stocks and habitat.



Objective 1: Protect fish habitat

- Added 1,101 stream miles of new water-bodies to the Anadromous Waters Catalog, the regulatory tool established by statute to specify the various rivers, lakes, and streams of Alaska that are important to the spawning, rearing, and migration of anadromous fishes.
- Protected 39 miles of fish habitat with the approval of 10 water reservations in priority water bodies.
- Monitored water flows and ensured minimum flow rates were sustained by maintaining four stream gages on these priority watersheds—Peterson Creek near Amalga, Windfall Creek near Juneau, Thorne River near Thorne Bay, and Lake Eva near Sitka.

Objective 2: Improve or restore degraded fish habitat

- Rehabilitated 4,371 ft. (42,345 sq. ft.) of riparian habitat and removed 1,172 ft. of structures detrimental to fish production.
- Improved fish passage to priority fish habitat in 6.6 miles of stream and 371 acres in lakes.
- Conducted four public workshops on riparian habitat protection and restoration in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Kenai, and Matanuska-Susitna Valley.

Objective 3: Minimize impacts of invasive species on sport fish stocks and habitat.

- Completed first phase of eradication of invasive northern pike from Soldotna Creek on the Kenai Peninsula.
- Developed survey and monitoring standards for community-based aquatic invasive species monitoring program.
- Mapped the distribution of invasive tunicate in Whiting Harbor near Sitka, and conducted field trials to investigate treatment agents and methods to eradicate.



Looking Forward

- Designing online and mobile device tools for detecting and monitoring aquatic invasive species using established protocols.
- Actively seeking partnerships that will fund surveys of aquatic systems in the western portion of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.
- Developing a more systematic approach to evaluating fish passage improvement projects.
- Delivering online or virtual riparian habitat protection/restoration workshops.

Goal 5: Communication and Outreach



The Division's communication and outreach efforts were directed toward providing anglers and other members of the public with information about fisheries management, research, enhancement and educational programs, with an emphasis on exceptional public service. It is our belief that an informed and engaged public is central to our decision-making processes. We strived to provide quality information and services, and conducted activities to promote participation in sport fishing opportunities throughout the state.



Objective 1: Provide information on sport fishing opportunities, stewardship, fisheries enhancement, angler access, regulation compliance, research, and fisheries management.

- Provided in-person public information services year-round or during peak seasons at three regional offices in Anchorage, Douglas, and Fairbanks; 14 local area management offices statewide; and on the Department website.
- Served over 3,000 visitors to the Ship Creek Fisheries Center at the William Jack Hernandez Sport Fish Hatchery and nearly 950 visitors to the Tanana Valley Fisheries Center at the Ruth Burnett Sport Fish Hatchery.

Objective 2: Promote participation in sport fishing

- Offered more than 50 sport fishing skill-building events.
- Loaned nearly 1,000 rods and 20 ice augers to the public at no cost.
- Issued 65 Trophy Fish Certificates and 10 "Five Salmon Family Challenge" Certificates.

Objective 3: Modernize the Division's approaches to communicating with, and providing services to, anglers and the public.

- Completed development of GovDelivery, a subscription email service that allows people to subscribe to topic-based information and allows the division to email select audiences with important information, reminders, or other notifications.
- Made online issuance and reporting for Personal Use Permits available to the public.
- Launched a pilot electronic logbook (eLogBook) app for freshwater sport fishing guides.
- 2016 online license sales composed 35% of all items sold, and 42% of all revenue.

Looking Forward



- Transitioning to the Department's new E-Vendor licensing system for license sales in regional public information centers; this will likely improve efficiency and accuracy of data collected.
- Developing exhibits in the Ship Creek Fisheries Center at the William Jack Hernandez Sport Fish Hatchery and the Tanana Valley Fisheries Center at the Ruth Burnett Sport Fish Hatchery.
- Developing an outreach strategy for the "wefishak" brand to promote sport fishing as a fun and inexpensive activity, especially for families.



Goal 6: Internal Operations

An informed and engaged workforce is crucial to the responsible management of our staff and fiscal resources. The Division Leadership Team provided oversight to the Division while striving to develop our workforce and provide resources to support the goals identified in our strategic plan. Our administrative staff supported the Division's core functions through day-to-day operations that included budgeting and financial management, payroll and personnel management, and customer service.

Objective 1: Recruit, develop, and retain highly qualified and motivated staff.

- Supported two high school, seven college, and one graduate intern positions during the 2016 field season.
- Supported appropriate, low-cost staff training requests.

Objective 2: Promote a positive, energized workplace where people feel valued and do their best work.

- Prioritized the Division's annual budget request, allocation, and reduction based on the goals, objectives, and activities identified in the Division of Sport Fish Strategic Plan.
- Submitted nominations to the Governor's Peak Performance Awards program.

Objective 3: Operate in a fiscally responsible manner

- Reduced administrative burden associated with grant administration by implementing policy to improve the cost-to-benefit-ratio.
- Analyzed and assessed the Division's budget and financial information multiple times during the year.
- Protected against the diversion of federal Sport Fish Restoration funds and asserted the state's authority over the use of those funds.

Objective 4: Improve internal communications

- Held frequent teleconference meetings with staff in outlying areas to ensure a good exchange of information between managers and research staff.
- Distributed Division Leadership Team meeting notes to all staff.



Looking Forward

- Developing and implementing an employee satisfaction survey specific to the Division.
- Exploring videoconferencing options for hosting topic-based administrative workshop sessions.
- Revitalizing Division Director's employee awards program.
- Developing financial reports for posting to the web in order to improve the Division's transparency to the public.



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