

**FEDERAL AID
ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
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**Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Wildlife Restoration Grant**

GRANT NUMBER: AKW-10 Wildlife Restoration FY2016

PROJECT NUMBER: 14.0

PROJECT TITLE: The Status of Wolf and Factors Influencing Their Populations

REPORT PERIOD: July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016

PROJECT LOCATION: Statewide

REPORT DESCRIPTION: This performance report describes wolf survey and inventory activities. Activities are listed by game management unit.

**The Status of Alaska Wolves and Factors Influencing Their Populations in
Region I**

Statewide

Prepare triennial wolf management reports based on the regional reports.

Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on wolf management.

Region I (Units 1-5)

Region-wide Activities:

Activity 1: Prepare triennial wolf management reports based on the regional reports.

Accomplishments: No wolf report was written during this report period. The State of Alaska is switching to a five-year reporting schedule with brief annual reports.

Activity 2: Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on wolf management.

Accomplishments: Information on wolves and wolf management was provided to state and federal regulatory bodies as requested.

Activity 3: Collect data when wolf pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters.

Accomplishments: All pelts of hunted and trapped wolves were sealed, data were collected, and those data were entered into state-wide database.

Activity 4: Record wolf activity/sightings while conducting aerial surveys for moose and mountain goats.

Accomplishments: Region I biologists recorded wolf sightings during moose and mountain goat surveys and reported sightings in survey memos.

Activity 5: Contact reliable observers to obtain general information about the status and trends of wolf populations, including the use of an annual trapper survey.

Accomplishments: Region I managers maintained contacts with reliable trappers in their management areas and discussed locations where wolves were observed and abundance.

Unit 1A

Activity 1: Use motion cameras and hair snares to accumulate data on wolf presence, distribution, and population size on Gravina Island.

Accomplishments: The Ketchikan Area Management Biologist maintained trail cameras and did snow track surveys on Gravina Island to estimate the number of wolves there.

Unit 1C

Activity 1: Monitor wolf sightings in the Juneau area through discussions with deer hunters and trappers.

Accomplishments: Managers in the Douglas office gathered anecdotal information on wolf distribution and abundance in the subunit through opportunistic conversations with deer and moose hunters, trappers, and other members of the public.

Activity 2: Capture and monitor up to 3 wolves in Gustavus through the use of downloadable GPS radio collars.

Accomplishments: One juvenile male wolf in the Gustavus area was collared with a GPS collar, and location data were periodically downloaded.

Unit 2

Activity 1: Collect information on wolves presented for sealing, and solicit anecdotal information about wolf populations.

Accomplishments: All pelts of hunted and trapped wolves were sealed, data were collected, and those data were entered into state-wide database. Management biologists also gathered anecdotal information on Unit 2 wolves from hunters and trappers.

Activity 2: Closely monitor wolf harvest during season through information gathered during sealing process to assure harvest stays within guideline levels.

Accomplishments: Region I managers in cooperation with federal managers set a joint harvest quota for Unit 2 and carefully monitored hunting and trapping harvest to ensure that quota was not exceeded.

Unit 3

Activity 1: Collect wolf scat and hair samples for genetic analysis and to establish presence or absence on Mitkof, Kupreanof and Kuiu Islands.

Accomplishments: Hair and scat samples were opportunistically collected in Unit 3 for use investigating food habits and regional structuring of the population.

Activity 2: Capture and radio-collar wolves on Mitkof, Kupreanof, and Kuiu Islands to assess home range size, dispersal and survival of wolves.

Accomplishments: No activity during this report period.

Submitted by: Tom Schumacher, Management Coordinator

The Status of Alaska Wolves and Factors Influencing Their Populations in Region II

Regionwide:

ACTIVITY: Collect harvest data when wolf pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters.

All wolves taken in Region II were presented to staff for specimen collection (if necessary) and sealing. Wolves taken in other parts of the state were often sealed in region II offices. See area specific activities for additional information.

ACTIVITY: Monitor the wolf harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires, and contact with trappers and hunters.

These are standard activities accomplished in each office. See area specific activities.

ACTIVITY: Conduct aerial surveys to estimate wolf population densities, pack sizes and distribution.

Surveys were completed on the Kenai Peninsula during this period. See the activities under GMU 7 and 15.

ACTIVITY: Develop population estimates using the “Sample Unit Probability Estimator” (SUPE) technique in select areas.

No surveys of this type were completed during this period due in part to poor weather conditions and other higher priorities.

ACTIVITY: Examine pelts presented for sealing for the presence of louse infestation.

All wolf pelts presented to ADF&G and appointed sealers were examined for the presence of lice. Wolves infected with lice currently exist on the Kenai Peninsula within Region II. A wolf taken in GMU 6 was reported to have lice.

ACTIVITY : Draft a triennial wolf management report.

Wolf management report was prepared and submitted for publication in 2012. Area staff continued to collect information for publication of next management report. The department is transitioning to a 5-year report and plan. The next wolf report will be published in 2016.

ACTIVITY : Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on wolf management.

Staff routinely interact with federal staff and discuss management of wolves relative to the respective regulatory systems. Staff prepared information for presentation to the state Board of Game meeting in March 2015.

Activities by Unit:

Unit 6

ACTIVITY 1 : Fourteen wolves (9 males and 5 female) were harvested in Unit 6 during the reporting period. In the previous reporting period, at least 6 of 14 wolves taken in GMU 6A were suspected to have lice. Two pelts were submitted for diagnosis and no lice were found, though the hides were of poor quality.

ACTIVITY 2: A lack of snow led to poor tracking conditions and the inability to complete normal winter field work. No wolves were seen during the moose recruitment survey that was conducted in March on the west Delta. This supported anecdotal reports of very few wolves in Unit 6C this year. Anecdotal reports in the Bering River drainage are that the population appears stable compared with last year.

Units 7&15

ACTIVITY 1: Eight wolves were taken by trappers and hunters during the reporting period in Game Management Units (GMU) 7 and 15. This is a 79% decline in harvest from the previous 5 year average. The harvest decrease was most likely due to low snow conditions which made hunting and trapping difficult and closed snowmachine access to much of the Peninsula during the trapping season.

	GMU7	GMU15A	GMU15B	GMU15C
Harvest	0	5	0	3

ACTIVITY 2: An aerial survey was attempted in subunit 15C but conditions deteriorated too quickly for the survey to be completed. Lack of good snow cover inhibited the completion of this survey and surveys in other subunits. No conclusions could be drawn from the attempted survey.

ACTIVITY 3: Pelt condition continues to improve. No lice were reported on the few pelts harvested during the 2015/16 season.

ACTIVITY 4: Other management activities. No wolves were taken under the board directed Predator Control Program in 15A (See 2016: 15A Predator Control Report).

Unit 14C

ACTIVITY 1: No wolves were reported taken for the fifth year in a row from Unit 14C.

ACTIVITY 2: No wolves were taken in GMU 14C therefore no wolf pelts were examined for louse infestation.

ACTIVITY 3: No aerial surveys were conducted to estimate wolf densities, pack sizes and distribution.

Submitted by: Cynthia M. Wardlow

The Status of Alaska Wolves and Factors Influencing Their Populations in Region III

Region III (Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26B and 26C)

Region wide Activities:

1. Prepare triennial wolf management reports.

Compiled information and data and began drafts of nine 5-year Wolf Management Reports and Operational Plans for Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26B, and 26C. These operational plans will be completed in FY17.

2. Monitor wolf harvest through field observations, sealing reports, trapper questionnaires, and contact with trappers and hunters.

Monitored the harvest of wolves in Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26B and 26C in FY16 through sealing reports, field observations, trapline checks, interviews with successful hunters and trappers and analyses of harvest data. Harvest data were analyzed for use in operational planning.

3. Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys.

Wolf surveys we're not conducted due to poor survey conditions, lack of funding, and pilot conflicts.

4. Provide wolf management information to state and federal regulatory processes.

Communicated and coordinated with and attended meetings of 15 local Fish and Game Advisory Committee, the Alaska Board of Game, 2 Federal Regional Advisory Councils, the Federal Subsistence Board, numerous local village councils, Native corporations, and the Wrangell-St. Elias Subsistence Resource Commission about wolf management and to review and analyze regulation proposals for the Alaska Board of Game and the Federal Subsistence Board.

5. Encourage participation in the statewide trapper questionnaire when wolf trappers present pelts for sealing.

Conducted interviews opportunistically with wolf hunters and trappers in the field, and during wolf sealing and marten carcass collections.

The Status of Alaska Wolves and Factors Influencing Their Populations in Region IV

Region wide Activities:

ACTIVITY 1: Prepare triennial wolf management reports.

Triennial wolf management reports were not due during this reporting period however operational planning did commence and the related reports will be due in 2016.

ACTIVITY 2 AND 3: Collect harvest data when wolf pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters, and monitor the wolf harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires, and contact with trappers and hunters.

Unit 9: 68 wolves harvested.

Unit 10: 1 wolf harvested.

Unit 11: 13 wolves harvested.

Unit 13: 55 wolves harvested.

Unit 14A: 0 wolves harvested.

Unit 14B: 0 wolves harvested.

Unit 16: 3 wolf harvested.

Unit 17: 24 wolves harvested

ACTIVITY 4: Develop population estimates using the "Sample Unit Probability Estimator" (SUPE) technique in select areas.

No SUPE surveys were conducted during this reporting period.

Submitted by: Todd A. Rinaldi, Region IV Management Coordinator

The Status of Alaska Wolves and Factors Influencing Their Populations in Region V

Region wide Activities:

Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on wolf management.

Area management staff reviewed State and Federal regulatory proposals, attended regulatory process meetings, and presented wolf information to the State Board of Game, State Fish and Game Advisory Committees, Federal Subsistence Board, and Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils.

Maintain the ability in all units to monitor harvests by collecting data through the wolf sealing process.

The area offices in Barrow, Bethel, Kotzebue and Nome maintained designated fur sealers in villages in each Game Management Unit to collect harvest information through sealing certificates. Staff supported 29 fur sealers in Unit 18, 17 in Unit 22, 9 in Unit 23, and 6 in Unit 26A.

Distribute the annual statewide trapper questionnaire to obtain harvest and population assessment information.

Staff supported this activity by contributing furbearer information and summarizing trapper responses and observations to be included in the trapper questionnaire report.

Develop updated population objectives in cooperation with the public and other agencies.

Meetings with the public and other agencies were not held due to conflicting schedules. Population objectives were not updated.

Use public communication and education to obtain better harvest data through increased observance of sealing requirements.

Staff discussed sealing and harvest reporting with trappers/hunters, and the public. During public meetings we explained the importance of harvest reports and encouraged trappers to report their harvest.

Activities by Unit:

Unit 18:

Monitor wolf harvests through the fur sealing program, and interviews with village residents.

We monitored Unit 18 wolf harvests using fur sealing data for the RY15 trapping season. Harvest figures are preliminary, but include at least 23 wolves.

Assess population status and trends utilizing sealing records, track surveys, hunter/trapper interviews, and observations by staff and the public.

Sealing data, as well as observations by staff and public, indicate that the Unit 18 wolf harvest was low for this reporting period. Winter weather, specifically snow conditions that are favorable for travel by snowmachine, plays a major role in harvest. The winter of RY15 was more favorable than RY14, but access was still poor compared to most years. The wolf population was probably close to normal south and east of the Kuskokwim River in Unit 18. Wolf number on the Yukon River within Unit 18 appeared to be average to lower than normal levels. This was collaborated by hunter/trapper interviews, observations by staff and the public, and opportunistic track sightings made during aerial survey work for other species.

Assess the effects of wolf predation on prey populations through field observations and interviews with hunters/trappers.

Observers participating in aerial moose, caribou, and muskox surveys, and/or telemetry flights in 2015-2016 recorded wolf kills on both the Kuskokwim and Yukon rivers. In RY15 all wolf kills observed were of moose and caribou. Looking at annual recruitment and continued rapid population growth in moose populations in both the Yukon, and Kuskokwim drainages and riparian areas, wolf predation is not a factor effecting either population. Reports of wolves killing muskox on and Near Nelson Island are occasionally reported to the department. Wolf predation on Nelson Island has not influenced population growth or hunt management of Nelson Island Muskox in RY15. Observation of Mulchatna caribou being killed by wolves was observed by department staff and the public in RY15. The most recent population estimate for MCH are unavailable at the time of this report so it is unclear to what extent, if any, wolves are effecting the population with in Unit 18.

Provide public education regarding wolves through the media, during public meetings, and other opportunities.

We discussed wolf numbers, regulations and management at all Advisory Committee meetings and with numerous trappers and hunters during this reporting period.

Unit 22:

Monitor wolf harvest through the fur sealing program, annual hunter/trapper questionnaires and Community-based Harvest Assessments conducted annually in selected villages, and through interviews with trapper/hunters.

Regulatory year 2015-2016 sealing certificates report 80 wolves were sealed in Unit 22: 20 in Unit 22B, 3 in Unit 22C, 19 in Unit 22D, and 38 in 22E. Sex composition of harvest was 47 males and 32 females, and 1 unknown. All wolves were harvested by Alaska residents. Snowmachine was the main mode of transportation (96% n=77) for harvesting a wolf.

Assess population status and trends utilizing track surveys, sealing records, hunter/trapper interviews and questionnaires, Community-based Harvest Assessments and observations by staff and the public.

Wolf distribution and abundance varies depending on location and abundance of caribou. During this reporting period, a large portion of the Western Arctic caribou herd was distributed approximately 30 miles East of Shishmaref, Northern Unit 22D, and Western Unit 22(B). Wolf hunters in Shishmaref reported wolves around caribou, reindeer, and moose.

Department staff and members of the public have reported wolf signs and observation throughout Unit 22. The increasing observation of wolves in Unit 22 does not always correlate with relatively low reported harvest numbers.

Examine pelts presented for sealing for the presence of louse infestation

Wolf hides that were sealed by department staff were examined for hair loss and patches of broken guard which may indicate the presence of lice. Wolves that were inspected by staff did not appear to have visible signs of lice infestation.

Record wolf sightings during wildlife surveys as an indicator of wolf population trends.

Observers participating in the 2016 Unit 22 spring moose survey reported observations of wolf tracks and sightings. Unit 22 staff will continue to make observations on wolf and track sightings within the unit during survey and census work for other species.

Units 23 and 26A:

Monitor wolf harvest through the fur sealing program, annual hunter/trapper questionnaires and Community-based Harvest Assessments conducted annually in selected villages, and through interviews with trapper/hunters.

Unit 23: Preliminary sealing certificates indicated that 52 wolves were sealed in RY15, of which 31 were males and 21 were female. Forty-eight hunter/trappers reported method of take as firearm, 1 reported using traps, and 3 reported using snares. Snowmachines were indicated as transportation method for 44 wolves and 9 were taken by airplane. Of the 52 wolves harvested, 43 were gray, 1 was white, 6 were black, and 2 were unknown. Five were taken by nonresidents, 4 by non-local residents, and the remaining 43 by area residents.

Community-based Harvest Assessments were completed by Division of Subsistence in Kotzebue in Unit 23, and in Point Hope in nearby neighboring Unit 26A. Data analysis is currently ongoing and results are not available.

Unit 26A: Sealing certificates indicated that 28 wolves were sealed in RY15. Fourteen were males, 12 were females, and two were unknown sex. Twenty seven were ground shot and 1 was trapped. Snowmachines (snogos) were used as transportation for all 28 wolves. Twenty seven wolves were gray and 1 was white. All 28 wolves were taken by 6 residents of Unit 26A.

Community-based Harvest Survey were completed by Division of Subsistence in Barrow and other villages of the North Slope in Unit 26A. Data analysis is currently ongoing and results are not available.

Conduct aerial surveys in selected portions of Units 23 and 26A during late winter to assess population status.

A wolf survey in Unit 26A was not attempted because very low populations were documented in RY13 and RY14.

Record wolf sightings during moose censuses in Unit 26A as an indicator of wolf population trends.

During the April 2016 Unit 26A spring moose trend area count we observed 6 wolves. In 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016 we counted 3.10, 1.66, 0.45, 2.4, 2.5, 0.3, 0.8, and 1.0 wolves per hour, respectively. It appears that wolf numbers have increased slightly since 2014.

Submitted by: Tony Gorn, Region V Management Coordinator