

**FEDERAL AID ANNUAL
PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
PO Box 115526
Juneau, AK 99811-5526

**Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Wildlife Restoration Grant**

GRANT NUMBER: AKW-10 Wildlife Restoration FY2016

PROJECT NUMBER: 35.0

PROJECT TITLE: Status, Public Use, and Management of Small Game Populations in Alaska

PROJECT DURATION: July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016

REPORT DUE DATE: September 1, 2016

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rick Merizon

WORK LOCATION: Statewide

I. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED TOWARDS PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

All project objectives were addressed and work completed during this reporting period.

OBJECTIVE 1: Receive recommendations and assist ADF&G management staff in addressing local or regional small game issues.

JOB/ACTIVITY: A good relationship has been built between the small game program and area management biologists statewide. The program has developed research questions, management proposals, and educational materials based on these relationships to assist and ease existing staff workload. Program staff did not attend any Board of Game (BOG) meetings during the 2015-16 cycle. Additionally, program staff met with local Advisory Committees (AC) to address small game concerns and provide relevant data to inform ACs interested in crafting small game proposals for the 2016-17 BOG cycle.

OBJECTIVE 2: Design and implement springtime survey techniques that will provide more timely and useful abundance trend data for managers in select locations on and off the road system.

JOB/ACTIVITY: A total of 4 ruffed, 2 sharp-tailed, and 2 sooty grouse, 19 willow, and 14 rock ptarmigan abundance survey locations were visited and surveys completed during spring 2016. In spring 2016, program staff continued to explore and develop new ruffed and sharp-tailed grouse survey locations in Tok and Delta Junction.

AKW-10 35.0 Small Game S&I FY2016
Annual Performance Report

OBJECTIVE 3: Implement of harvest composition monitoring through wing and tail collections of grouse and ptarmigan and hunter effort statewide.

JOB/ACTIVITY: A total of 1,213 wings were collected during regulatory year 2015. All 7 species of Alaskan grouse and ptarmigan were represented in the collection from 17 of 26 game management units (GMU). A program goal is to increase hunter awareness and participation in wing collections as it is a cost effective way to collect harvest composition data and understand which statewide grouse and ptarmigan populations are being exploited.

OBJECTIVE 4: Create and maintain an effective network of volunteers throughout the state to accomplish program goals that include fall harvest samples and hunter effort questionnaire.

JOB/ACTIVITY: Since the inception of the program passionate volunteers have been recruited to assist with education programs (Becoming and Outdoors Women-BOW), completing ruffed grouse drumming surveys, and provide objective and sound field and hunter effort reports. In May 2016, 15 residents of the Kenai Peninsula continued their assistance (since May 2015) in completing 7 rock and willow ptarmigan spring breeding surveys. Also, beginning in July 2016, program staff created a statewide brood survey project through which volunteers were critical to its success. Over 12 dog handlers and their highly trained pointing dogs completed grouse and ptarmigan brood surveys in four locations across the state amassing several hundred hours of effort. Both of these volunteer based projects will continue annually and ideally expand so that the small game program can provide more comprehensive information to managers and the hunting public.

OBJECTIVE 5: Promote the development of a research plan with universities in Alaska, federal agencies, and others when a need is recognized and funding is available.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1: Beginning in spring 2013, a rock ptarmigan study was initiated by the small game program to better understand their movement and distribution relative to road access in GMU 13B. Beginning in May 2014, the program also initiated a research project examining rock ptarmigan breeding densities at Eagle Summit. This study was further expanded during spring / summer 2015 to include movement, mortality, and nest monitoring through the use of VHF radio necklace collars.

OBJECTIVE 6: Begin a 3-year research project examining willow ptarmigan distribution and seasonal movement patterns. This will require the capture of live willow ptarmigan for which an Animal Care and Use Committee Plan will be approved prior to commencing field work.

JOB/ACTIVITY: In winter 2012, the small game program secured funding through the Alaska Energy Authority to support research in cooperation with UAF on the distribution and movements of willow ptarmigan near the proposed Susitna River-Watana hydroelectric facility. Field work has been completed on this project and data analysis is currently ongoing. A final report detailing the results of this study is planned for release December 2016. The Small Game Program (Project No. XX) has supported this study with personnel resources, use of SOA vehicles, and capture equipment.

OBJECTIVE 7: Develop educational programs, seminars, and interactive material with ADF&G staff and non-governmental organizations on small game hunting and life history for the public.

JOB/ACTIVITY: This project has supported numerous efforts to provide educational material to the public including the creation of videos displaying how we capture rock and willow ptarmigan, a grouse and ptarmigan poster, funding the reprinting of the grouse and ptarmigan handbook, and creating small game hunter kiosks at the Anchorage, Palmer, Fairbanks, and Juneau offices.

This project has also provided numerous public presentations on Alaska small game and hunting techniques to sportsman shows, school groups, Wildlife Wednesday series, and to various venues with the public. It also actively supports the BOW program and Alaskans Afield in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and the Mat-Su valley. During FY16 the program interacted with nearly 600 members of the public through a variety of lectures and experiential learning environments.

OBJECTIVE 8: Complete an annual small game report that documents current status of studied populations, management issues, research studies, and future goals.

JOB/ACTIVITY: A season summary handout is completed annually for distribution to the hunting public through web-media, hunter kiosks in ADF&G offices, and direct e-mail from interested hunters. The small game program is trying to align more closely with other DWC projects and programs by completing an annual management report every 2-3 years. In fall 2016, a comprehensive management report will be completed for release by December 2016. This report will document the results from the statewide wing collections, springtime abundance surveys, recent BOG action, and other management concerns.

II. SIGNIFICANT DEVIATIONS AND/OR ADDITIONAL FEDERAL AID-FUNDED WORK NOT DESCRIBED ABOVE THAT WAS ACCOMPLISHED ON THIS PROJECT DURING THIS SEGMENT PERIOD

None.

III. PUBLICATIONS

Merizon, R.A., and C. J. Carroll. 2016. Alaska Small Game Summary 2016. Alaska Department of Fish and Game. 5pp.

Merizon, R.A., and C. J. Carroll. *In Prep.* Status of Grouse, Ptarmigan, and Hare in Alaska, 2015-2016. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Wildlife Management Report ADF&G/DWC/WMR-2016-XX, Palmer, Alaska.

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