

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

GRANT NUMBER: AKW-10 Wildlife Restoration FY2016

PROJECT NUMBER: 7.0

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

PERIOD: July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016

PROJECT LOCATION: Statewide

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

**The Status of Alaska Furbearers and Factors Influencing Their Populations In
Region I**

Region I (Units 1-5)

Region-wide:

Activity 1: Prepare triennial furbearer management reports.

Accomplishments: No triennial furbearer management report was published this year. DWC is changing to a five-year reporting schedule with brief annual reports.

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

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

Activity 3: Collect harvest data on beaver, marten, otter, lynx, fisher, coyote and wolverine when pelts are presented for sealing.

Accomplishments: Regional managers collected a variety of data on all furbearers for which sealing is required. There is no sealing requirement for coyotes.

Activity 4: Use the trapper questionnaire, interviews and other anecdotal information from reliable observers as a basis for determining the status of various furbearer populations.

Accomplishments: Regional managers engaged trappers and hunters to learn about their

observations of furbearer populations.

Activity 5: Monitor the furbearer harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires and contact with trappers and hunters.

Accomplishments: Regional managers monitored the furbearer harvest primarily through sealing data and conversations with trappers.

Activity 6: Collect female wolverine carcasses opportunistically for reproductive information.

Accomplishments: Carcasses collected in Unit 1C were sent to Petersburg for analysis.

Activities by Unit:

Unit 1C

Activity 1: Collect carcasses of fishers for sex, age, reproductive status and genetic material that are brought in for sealing to better assess the fisher population in the unit.

Accomplishments: We collected two fisher carcasses and will process them during the next reporting period. .

Activity 2: Mark 2-3 coyotes to investigate habitat selection, home range size, and den locations.

Accomplishments: No coyotes were marked during this report period.

Unit 3

Activity 1: Continue to monitor marten on Kuiu Island as a tool to help with management of this furbearer population.

Accomplishments: No activity. Kuiu Island is currently closed to marten trapping.

Submitted by: Tom Schumacher, Management Coordinator

The Status of Alaska Furbearers and Factors Influencing Their Populations In Region II

Regionwide:

ACTIVITY: Prepare a triennial regional furbearer management report.

Reports were finalized and submitted for publication in 2013. Area staff continue to collect information in preparation for drafting future reports. The department is transitioning to a 5-year report and plan. The next report will be published in 2018.

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

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

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

All furbearers that require sealing in Region II were presented to staff or appointed sealers for information and specimen collection and sealing. See area specific activities for additional information.

ACTIVITY : Monitor the furbearer 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.

Activities by Unit:

Unit 6

ACTIVITY 1: Collected harvest data for 70 marten, 81 beaver, 29 wolverine, 0 lynx, and 94 river otters. These harvests are low for marten and river otter, high for beaver and wolverine, and normal for lynx.

Units 7&15

ACTIVITY 1: Collect harvest data when pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters.

Preliminary harvest results are:

	7	Unit 15A	Unit 15B	Unit 15C	Total
Beaver	26	39	0	20	85
Marten	83	16	0	0	99
Wolverine	5	0	0	3	8
Otter	6	10	0	18	34
Lynx	0	5	1	0	6

The trapping season for lynx was closed in 2015-16 due to a low in the population cycle. The hunting season however was open, with a bag limit of 2 lynx.

ACTIVITY 2 : Conduct wolverine survey. No surveys were conducted due to poor survey conditions.

Unit 8

ACTIVITY 1: Collect morphological data and seal furbearer pelts presented for sealing by trappers and hunters.

ACTIVITY 2: Monitor the furbearer harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, and contact with trappers and hunters.

Otter – During the 2015–16 season, 32 trappers brought in 166 otters for sealing yielding an average harvest of 5.2 otters/trapper. The harvest was composed of 81 males (49%), 80 females (48%), and 5 of undetermined sex (3%). Most trappers were local residents (88%), and trapping was the most common method of take (96%). Boats were the most common mode of transportation used by otter trappers (55%), and December was the most productive month (49%) for harvest. Thirty-four otters (20%) were harvested along the Kodiak road system.

Beaver – During the 2015–16 season, 19 trappers brought in 62 beavers for sealing, yielding an average harvest of 3.3 beavers/trapper. Most trappers were local residents (95%), and trapping was the most common method of take (98%). ORV's were the most common method of transportation used by beaver trappers (40%), and the harvest primarily occurred during the month of December. Thirty beaver (48%) were harvested along the Kodiak road system.

Unit 14C

ACTIVITY 1: Furbearer harvest was monitored through field observations, fur sealing reports, and contact with trappers and hunters. See below:

Harvest:

Beaver: 32 harvested; 12 of those killed with depredation permits

Lynx: 0

River Otter: 3

Wolf: 0

Wolverine: 0

Marten: 4

Submitted by: Cynthia M. Wardlow

The Status of Alaska Furbearers and Factors Influencing Their Populations In Region III

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

1. Prepare triennial furbearer management reports.

Compiled information and data for 7 Furbearer Management Reports and Plans for Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26B, and 26C.

2. Use trapper questionnaires and interviews as a basis for determining the status of various furbearer populations.

To determine status of furbearer populations, we conducted interviews opportunistically with furbearer hunters and trappers in the field, and during sealing of wolves, lynx, wolverine, and river otter, and during marten carcass collections.

3. Monitor the furbearer harvest through field observations, sealing reports, trapper questionnaires and contact with trappers and hunters.

Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26B and 26C: Monitored the furbearer harvest through field observations, and contact with trappers in the field and during fur sealing reports and contact with trappers.

4. Collect harvest data when pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters and analyze harvest data.

Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26B and 26C: : Collected data when lynx, wolverine, river otter pelts are presented for sealing, including measurements and sex determination.

5. Provide furbearer information to state and federal regulatory processes.

Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26B and 26C: 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 brown bear management and to review and analyze regulation proposals for the Alaska Board of Game and the Federal Subsistence Board.

6. Conduct beaver cache surveys.

Beaver cache surveys in Units 19 and 20 were not conducted due to unsuitable weather.

7. Conduct a hare population trend survey.

Delta: Conducted a snowshoe hare population survey in conjunction with other small game over a week-long timespan in late April. Data from this survey are used to generate a population index for hares (important prey for furbearers).

The Status of Alaska Furbearers and Factors Influencing Their Populations In Region IV

Region wide Activities:

ACTIVITY 1: Collect furbearer harvest data when pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters, questionnaires and contact with trappers and hunters.

Unit	Beaver	Lynx	Marten	Otter	Wolverine
<i>Unit 9</i>	114	15	0 ^a	52	7

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<i>Unit 10^b</i>	-	-	-	0	0
<i>Unit 11</i>	9	16	N/A ^a	6	16
<i>Unit 13</i>	79	67	N/A ^a	34	85
<i>Unit 14A</i>	38	6	23	10	2
<i>Unit 14B</i>	50	0	35	8	4
<i>Unit 16^c</i>	39	1	577	35	20
<i>Unit 17</i>	80	8	N/A ^a	35	16

^aMarten sealing is not required in Units 9, 10, 11, 13, and 17.

^bBeaver, lynx, and marten do not occur in Unit 10

^cBeaver are no longer required to be sealed in Unit 16.

ACTIVITY 2: Monitor the furbearer harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires and contact with trappers and hunters.

The annual trapper questionnaire was not completed.

Activities by Unit:

Unit 13

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial and ground transects to determine status and trend of lynx populations.

No lynx surveys were flown in FY2016

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

The Status of Alaska Furbearers and Factors Influencing Their Populations In

Region V

Region wide Activities:

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

Area management staff reviewed State and Federal regulatory proposals, attended regulatory process meetings, and presented furbearer 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 furbearer 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.

Monitor harvests through the fur sealing program, fur acquisition reports, the annual hunter/trapper questionnaire, and Community-based Harvest Assessments conducted annually in selected villages.

Unit 18: We analyzed fur sealing data for the RY15 trapping season. These preliminary harvests reports are close to what we anticipated for harvest but final numbers should be a little higher for all species. For RY 15; 274 lynx, 361 river otter, and 11 wolverine were reported. The presence of a local fur buyer encourages trappers to not only participate in trapping and passing the knowledge of how to trap on to the next generation but also increase the number of people in getting their fur sealed. A below average number of fur sealed in RY15 trapping season was expected because of lower than average snow conditions, a prolonged down turn in the fur market, and decreased trapping effort.

Unit 22:

Furbearer harvest results by subunit are based on RY15-16 sealing certificates:

	22D	Unit 22A Unit 22E	Unit 22B Total	Unit 22C	Unit
Wolverine	3	12	5	5	
		8	33		
Otter		0	1	7	0
		0	8		
Lynx		9	4	0	3
		0	16		

Community-based Harvest Assessments completed in Unit 22 by Division of Subsistence show beaver, marten, and red fox are also harvested by Unit 22 communities.

Three wolverines were sent to the ADF&G Wildlife Health and Disease Surveillance Program in Fairbanks, AK to test for heartworm and rabies. Results will be reported when tests are completed.

Unit 23: The preliminary harvest reported on RY15 sealing certificates included 23 lynx (14 females, 8 males, 1 unknown); all were taken by Unit 23 residents. Two lynx were snared, and 19 were trapped, and 2 were shot. All 23 were taken using a snowmachine. Thirteen otters (7 males, 5 females, and 1 unknown) were taken during this regulatory year. Three otters were taken using a plane; all other otters were taken using a snowmachine. All were taken by Unit 23 residents. Two otters were shot, 10 were trapped, and 1 unknown. Thirty-seven wolverines were sealed (12 female and 25 males), 7 were taken by ground shooting, and 30 by

traps. For transportation, 5 were taken using an airplane, 2 were taken by foot, 2 were unknown, and 28 were taken using a snowmachine.

Unit 26A: We analyzed fur sealing data for the RY15 trapping season and reported harvests were no river otters, no lynx, and 34 wolverine (24 male, 10 female) taken by 6 local residents of Unit 26A. Twenty four wolverine were male and 10 were female; 25 were ground shot and 9 were trapped. Snow machines were used for transportation for all but 1 which was transported by plane and the only wolverine harvested by a non-resident. One wolverine was harvested in September, 2 in November, 5 in December, 13 in January, 4 in February, and 9 in March.

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

Throughout Region V we communicated with local trappers and hunters to improve harvest reporting through the fur sealing process; explained the importance of harvest reporting at public meetings in villages; prepared newspaper articles explaining the importance of sealing furs to obtain harvest data; and attended meetings hosted by local chapters of the Alaska Trappers Association.

Unit 22 organized a trap safety for pet owners class that was held in Nome for dog owners to learn how traps function and how to release a pet caught in a trap. Unit 22 staff traveled to Shishmaref to recruit a new fur sealing vendor and seal fur.

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

Unit 18: We observed furbearers and furbearer sign opportunistically during aerial and ground based work for other species; and continue to interview trappers, pilots, and others regarding furbearers. Muskrat numbers continue to remain low but increasing since the 2009-2010 winters. Lynx numbers are declining from record highs of 2011(n=665) due to decreased abundance of snowshoe hares, harvest for RY15 was 217. Wolverine harvest has declined slowly from the record high harvest in RY10 (n=64) with a harvest of 11 in RY15. River otter harvest has remained stable with a harvest in RY15 of 361. Harvest data is not gathered for beaver, marten and fox however numbers appear to be stable in abundance over the reporting period.

Unit 22: Sealing data reports suggest lynx numbers have declined in Unit 22A and 22B, likely because of decreased snowshoe hare numbers. The reported unit wide average annual harvest of lynx from RY09 to RY13 is 100 per year (range 83-137) versus 16 lynx harvested during this period, and the 25 lynx harvested in RY14-15. River otters are believed to be more common than harvest numbers would indicate. The unit wide average annual harvest of otters from RY09 to RY15 is 12 otters per year

(range 4-16). Wolverine numbers are unknown; however observations and anecdotal reports suggest wolverines are common throughout the unit and increasing in Units 22D and 22E. The unit wide average annual harvest of wolverines from RY09 to RY15 is 33 wolverines per year (range 26-40).

Unit 23: Furbearer populations appeared to be within the range of levels observed in previous years based on sealing records, opportunistic observations of furbearers, contacts with hunter and trappers, and community-based harvest assessments. Like last year, lynx population levels appear to be dropping, although their distribution has varied substantially among drainages in recent years. The reported unit wide average annual harvest of lynx from RY09 to RY12 is 141 per year (range 124-174) versus 23 lynx harvested during this period, and the 27 lynx harvested last period. The unit wide average annual harvest of otters from RY10 to RY15 is 8 otters per year (range 1-13). Wolverine numbers continue to appear to be low throughout Unit 23 during the reporting period however, with harvests similar to last year (RY14). The unit wide average annual harvest of wolverines from RY10 to RY15 is 32 wolverines per year (range 18-52).

Unit 26A: Opportunistic observations of wolverines on aerial surveys and interviews with local residents indicate that wolverines appear to be at high numbers. Arctic and red foxes are both in a period of medium population level. Coyotes are rare; river otter and lynx densities are very low.

Coordinate with the Statewide Trapper Questionnaire report and prepare unit summaries of furbearer population status and harvest.

Summaries of trapper harvest information and general population status for each game management unit are provided to support annual trapper questionnaire reports.

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

Furbearer information is available for discussion during Advisory Committee and Regional Advisory Council meetings. Beaver populations continue to be considered too high by many members of the public because their dams impede boat passage on creeks and waterways, as well as spawning salmon.

Work with community members in rural locations to keep fur sealing vendors active and up to date with new information.

In Unit 22, fur vendors were contacted to ensure their sealing supplies were adequate. Finding new fur sealers in communities have been on-going efforts to ensure sealing and reporting requirements are met. . Unit 22 staff traveled to Shishmaref to recruit a new fur sealing vendor and seal fur. Public service announcements were sent to communities at the end of the trapping season to remind hunters & trappers to visit their local sealer.

Submitted by: Tony Gorn, Region V Management Coordinator