

**FEDERAL AID ANNUAL
RESEARCH PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
PO Box 115526
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ANNUAL SURVEY AND INVENTORY

STATE: Alaska

GRANT AND SEGMENT NO. AKW-20

PROJECT NO. 35.0

PERIOD: July 1, 2013 – June 30, 2017

PROJECT LOCATION: Statewide

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

REPORT DESCRIPTION: This performance report describes small game program survey and inventory, research, management, and education activities for Fiscal Year 2017. Activities are listed by objective.

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 attend the Region 3 Board of Game (BOG) meeting during the 2016-17 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 2017-18 BOG cycle.

OBJECTIVE 2: Continue springtime abundance surveys for grouse, ptarmigan, and hare 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 5 ruffed, 2 sharp-tailed, and 2 sooty grouse, 19 willow, and 14 rock ptarmigan abundance survey locations were visited and surveys completed during spring 2017. Program staff continued to explore and develop new ruffed and

sharp-tailed grouse survey locations in Tok, Delta Junction, and Fairbanks during the spring of 2017.

OBJECTIVE 3: Continue statewide voluntary wing collections of hunter harvested grouse and ptarmigan to monitor harvest composition and hunter effort statewide.

JOB/ACTIVITY: A total of 884 wings were collected during regulatory year 2016. All 7 species of Alaskan grouse and ptarmigan were represented in the collection from 14 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 better 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, spring abundance surveys, and brood surveys using trained pointing dogs.

JOB/ACTIVITY: Since the inception of the program passionate volunteers have been recruited to assist with education programs (Becoming and Outdoors Women-BOW), completing spring breeding and summer brood surveys, and provide objective and sound field observations and hunter effort reports. In May 2017, 10 residents of the Kenai Peninsula continued their assistance (since May 2015) in completing 7 rock and willow ptarmigan spring breeding surveys. In July 2017, 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: The Small Game Program is in close contact with university and federal agency staff about potential research ideas, collaboration through graduate students, and financial support. Potential research ideas currently being discussed are 1) movement, mortality, and abundance estimation of Alaska hare in western Alaska, 2) a comparative study of reproductive ecology of rock ptarmigan at locations near Eagle Summit and along the Denali Highway.

OBJECTIVE 6: Complete the final season of a 3-year research project examining willow ptarmigan distribution and seasonal movement patterns.

JOB/ACTIVITY: In winter 2012, the small game program secured funding through the Alaska Energy Authority (AEA) 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 was completed in June 2016 and a final report was submitted to AEA in February 2017. The Small Game Program has supported this study with personnel resources, use of SOA vehicles, and capture equipment.

OBJECTIVE 7: Complete research on two popular rock ptarmigan populations (Unit 13B and 25C) to evaluate movement, mortality, and productivity.

JOB/ACTIVITY: 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. A final report for this study will be completed by December 2017. 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. Fieldwork will continue into 2018.

OBJECTIVE 8: Develop educational programs, seminars, handouts, and interactive material with ADF&G staff and non-governmental organizations on small game hunting and life history strategies of small game 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, radio, 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 FY17 the program interacted with nearly 5,000 members of the public through a variety of lectures, radio, and experiential learning environments.

OBJECTIVE 9: 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 December 2016, a comprehensive management report was completed and released in January 2017. This report documented the results from the statewide wing collections, springtime breeding and summer brood 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. *In Prep.* Alaska Small Game Summary 2017. Alaska Department of Fish and Game. 5pp.

Merizon, R.A., and C. J. Carroll. 2017. Status of Grouse, Ptarmigan, and Hare in Alaska, 2015-2016. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Wildlife Management Report ADF&G/DWC/WMR-2017-1, Palmer, Alaska.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

None.

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DATE: 14 August 2017