

**FEDERAL AID
ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
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**WOLF
ANNUAL SURVEY AND INVENTORY**

STATE: Alaska

GRANT AND SEGMENT NO. W-33-12

PROJECT NO. 14.0

PERIOD: July 1, 2013 – June 30, 2014

PROJECT LOCATION: Statewide

PROJECT TITLE: The Status of Alaska Wolves and Factors Influencing their Population Status statewide.

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

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

Regionwide Activities

ACTIVITY 1: Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on wolf management.

Information and data on wolf harvest and wolf populations will be provided to the Alaska Board of Game and Regional Advisory Council at their next regularly scheduled meeting (winter 2015).

ACTIVITY 2: Collect biological data when wolf pelts are presented for sealing.

Area staff, other ADF&G staff, Alaska Wildlife Troopers, and designated sealing agents sealed wolf pelts during the regulatory year. About 189 wolf pelts were sealed from the region. During sealing, we acquire information on pelt size, sex, and color.

Unit 1B – 8 wolves

Unit 1C – 18 wolves

Unit 1D – 5 wolves

Unit 3 – 70 wolves

Unit 5 – 4 wolves

ACTIVITY 3: Obtain an age structure of the wolves harvested through examination of foreleg bones attached to pelts presented for sealing.

We no longer require the foreleg during sealing so no data has been collected under this activity.

ACTIVITY 4: Contact reliable observers to obtain general information about the status and trends of wolf populations, including the use of an annual trapper survey.

This work was done throughout the region as opportunities permitted.

Activities by Unit

Unit 1C

ACTIVITY 1: Monitor wolves at Gustavus through the use of downloadable GPS radio collars.

Attempts were made to collar additional wolves without success.

Unit 2

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

This was accomplished during the reporting period.

ACTIVITY 2: Closely monitor wolf harvest during season through information gathered during sealing process.

The wolf harvest is monitored in season through sealing, and this recorded harvest is compared against the allowable harvest of 60 wolves. During Regulatory year 2013, the wolf season was closed two weeks early by emergency order when 57 wolves were taken.

Activity 3: Capture and collar wolves as part of a study to determine population estimation techniques.

ADF&G and US Forest Service staffs are working to produce an efficient technique for estimating population levels of wolves in Unit 2. Hair snare mark recapture techniques are being refined and revised population estimates are being calculated.

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

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 only in the Kenai Peninsula within Region II.

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 in 2015.

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 during the next reporting period.

Activities by Unit:

Unit 6

ACTIVITY : Six wolves (3 males, 2 females and 1 unknown) were harvested in Unit 6 during the reporting period. Harvest by GMU was:

	GMU6A	GMU6B	GMU6C	GMU6D

Harvest	4	0	2	0
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ACTIVITY : Recorded observations of wolves during moose surveys. One pack of 6 wolves was recorded during the 2014 moose survey on the west side of the Copper River Delta.

Units 7&15

ACTIVITY: Eighteen wolves were taken by trappers and hunters during the reporting period in Game Management Units (GMU) 7 and 15. This is a 55% decline in harvest from the 5 year average. The harvest decrease was most likely due to low snow and poor trapping conditions which made hunting and trapping difficult with limited snowmachine access to much of the peninsula during the trapping season. Harvest by GMU was:

	GMU7	GMU15A	GMU15B	GMU15C
Harvest	2	5	3	8

Under Board of Game direction, predator control was initiated in a limited portion of subunit 15A the details of which are documented in the 2014 subunit 15A Predator Control Report. In June of 2014, a large wildfire (Funny River Fire) occurred in subunit 15B. During fire containment efforts, 5 abandoned wolf pups were discovered in GMU 15B in a den and later relocated to the Minnesota Zoo.

ACTIVITY : An aerial survey was attempted in subunit 15A. Weather inhibited the completion of this survey and surveys in other subunits. Results from the partial survey in 15A indicate similar numbers to the previous survey conducted in February 2013 of 45-50 wolves.

ACTIVITY : Subjective examination of hides indicate pelt condition appears to have improved in the past few years but lice are still present on most hides examined.

Unit 14C

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

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

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

Regionwide Activities

ACTIVITY 1: Monitor the wolf harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires, and contact with trappers and hunters.

Monitored preliminary harvest of 491 wolves through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires and contacts with trappers and hunters.

ACTIVITY 2: Collect harvest information when wolf pelts presented for sealing by trappers and hunters and analyze harvest data.

Collected harvest data when 491 wolf pelts were presented for sealing by trappers and hunters and analyzed harvest data.

ACTIVITY 3: Provide wolf management information to State and Federal regulatory processes.

Provided information to 15 State fish and game advisory committees, the Alaska Board of Game, and 2 Federal regional advisory councils.

ACTIVITY 4: Prepare wolf management reports.

Prepared preliminary data for triennial wolf management reports to be completed in 2015.

Activities by Unit

Unit 12

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys.

No aerial wolf population estimation survey was completed.

Unit 19

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys.

Planned but did not conduct a wolf population estimation survey due to lack of personnel time.

Unit 20A, 20B, 25C, 20F, and 25C

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys.

Failed to complete Unit 20A south portion of SUPE due to unsatisfactory snow conditions.

Unit 20D

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys.

The survey and population estimate was incomplete due to inadequate tracking conditions in parts of northern and southern Unit 20D.

Unit 20E

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys

Conducted aerial wolf survey to help establish a wolf population estimate.

Units 21B, 21C, 21D

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys.

Did not conduct surveys due to inadequate survey conditions.

ACTIVITY 2: Encourage participation in the statewide trapper questionnaire when wolf trappers present pelts for sealing.

Did not encourage participation in questionnaire due to inadequate personnel support.

Unit 24

ACTIVITY 1: Encourage participation in the statewide trapper questionnaire when wolf trappers present pelts for sealing.

Conducted 10-15 trapper interviews.

Units 25D, 25B, 26B, 26C

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys.

Did not conduct survey due to inadequate survey conditions.

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

Project Location: Game Management Units 9, 10, 11, 13, 14A, 14B, 16, and 17
Regionwide Activities:

ACTIVITY 1: Prepare triennial wolf management reports.

The next triennial wolf management reports are due in 2015.

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: 56 wolves harvested.

Unit 10: 6 wolves harvested.

Unit 11: 5 wolves harvested.

Unit 13: 102 wolves harvested.

Unit 14A: 3 wolves harvested.

Unit 14B: 0 wolves harvested.

Unit 16: 3 wolves harvested.

Unit 17: 18 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.

The Status of Alaska Wolves and Factors Influencing their Population Status in Region V

Regionwide:

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, fur acquisition reports, interviews with village residents, and annual hunter/trapper questionnaires.

We monitored Unit 18 wolf harvests using fur sealing data for the RY13 trapping season. Harvest figures are preliminary, but include at least 3 wolves. Regulations were changed to eliminate the fur acquisition report requirement, so no data from this source was monitored.

Assess population status and trends utilizing sealing records, track surveys, hunter/trapper interviews and questionnaires, 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 RY13 was unique in the number of days spent above freezing and the near record low snow accumulation. The wolf population was very low south and east of the Kuskokwim river in Unit 18 but with a small increases from the RY12 season. 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 2013 recorded wolf kills on both the Kuskokwim and Yukon rivers. In RY13 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 RY13. Observation of Mulchatna caribou being killed by wolves was observed by department staff and the public in RY13. With no recent population estimate for MCH 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.

Preliminary sealing certificates report 22 wolves were sealed during the RY13 in Unit 22: 2 in Unit 22A, 10 in Unit 22B, 9 in Unit 22D, and 1 in 22E. Sex composition of harvest was 20 males and 2 females. Thirteen (13) Alaska residents harvested 100% of the wolves. Snowmachine was the main mode of transportation (91%) 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 (track survey planned for late winter 2014).

Wolf distribution and abundance varies depending on location and abundance of caribou. During this reporting period the Western Arctic caribou herd was distributed north of Shaktoolik in Unit 22A, northern Unit 22D, and eastern Unit 22B. A track survey was

completed in the central portion of Unit 22A on 28-29 2014. One single wolf was observed and 12 tracks belonging to single, pairs, or packs greater than 2 wolves.

Department staff and members of the public have reported wolf sightings throughout Unit 22C and other subunits. Unit 22 respondents to trapper questionnaires have indicated the abundance of wolves appear to be increasing. The increasing observation of wolves in Unit 22 does not correlate with the relatively low reported harvest numbers.

Work with reindeer herders to evaluate methods for reducing adverse interactions between wolves and reindeer while conserving wolves.

Nome staff participated in the annual Reindeer Herders Association meeting and addressed the herders' concerns about wildlife issues. Herders have been concerned with increasing wolf numbers and their potential effect on the remaining reindeer herds. Wolf harvest trends and sighting information in Unit 22 were also reported to the herders.

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

Observers participating in the 2014 spring GSPE moose survey in Units 22D and 22E counted 11 and 3 wolves, respectively. Unit 22D calculated 0.18 wolves per hour which is a marginal increase from 0.05 wolves per hour observed in the 2011 GSPE moose survey. Unit 22E calculated 0.34 wolves per hour which is an increase from zero wolves per hour observed in the 2011 GSPE moose survey. Unit 22 will continue to make observations on wolf and track sightings within Unit 22 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 65 wolves were sealed in RY13, of which 41 were males, 23 were female. Fifty-six hunter/trappers reported method of take as firearm and 8 reported using traps. Snowmachines were indicated as transportation method for 51 wolves, 12 were taken by airplane, and 1 by boat. Of the 65 wolves harvested, 47 were gray, 4 were white, and 14 were black. Eight were taken by nonresidents, 6 by non-local residents, and the remaining 51 by area residents.

Unit 26A: Sealing certificates indicated that 18 wolves were sealed in RY13. Eleven were males and 7 were females. All eighteen were ground shot. Snowmachines (snogos) were used as transportation for 13 and aircraft for 5. Fifteen wolves were gray and 3 were black. Twelve wolves were taken by 8 residents of Unit 26A, 1 was taken by a nonlocal resident, and 5 wolves were taken by 5 nonresidents.

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 we had a successful wolf survey in 2013.

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

Project 14.0 – Wolf S&I
FY14 Annual Performance Report

During the April 2014 Unit 26A spring moose trend area count we counted 7 wolves. This calculated to 0.28 wolves per hour during the 25 hours that we surveyed moose. In 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 we counted 3.10, 1.66, 0.45, 2.4, and 2.5wolves per hour, respectively. It appears that wolf numbers dropped considerably in 2014.