

**FEDERAL AID
ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
PO Box 25526
Juneau, AK 99802-5526

**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
WILDLIFE RESTORATION GRANT**

GRANT NUMBER: AKW-4 Wildlife Restoration FY2015

PROJECT NUMBER: 30.0

PROJECT TITLE: Refuges and other Special Areas Management

PROJECT DURATION: 1 July 2014 – 30 June 2015

REPORT DUE DATE: 28 SEPTEMBER 2015

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Tom Schumacher RI, Joe Meehan RII, and Cathie Harms RIII

WORK LOCATION: Statewide

Region I

OBJECTIVE 1: Manage Special Areas in Southeast Alaska to protect and conserve wildlife populations and their habitats.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1a: Participate in and assist the public planning process initiated by ADF&G Division of Habitat for Dude Creek Critical Habitat Area (DCCHA).

Accomplishments: This planning process has been suspended, but we anticipate the process will be revived in FY2016. Region I staff will participate in an effort to update the draft management plan developed in 2012. Region I will also continue to cooperate with Habitat Division to finalize this plan.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1B: Attend public meetings in Juneau related to planning for development projects adjacent to the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge (MWSGR), participate as appropriate, and identify possible mitigation measures for the refuge and its wildlife.

Accomplishments: Region I management staff reviewed and commented on development projects potentially affecting refuge land and wildlife resource. Staff also cooperated with USDA Wildlife Services staff to help mitigate wildlife safety hazards at the Juneau International Airport.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1C: Conduct public education to ensure public use of lands is consistent with protection of wildlife populations and their habitats.

Accomplishments: Region I provides an on-line training program that refuge waterfowl hunters are required to complete prior to being issued a refuge hunting permit. When issuing permits management staff also discuss current refuge management issues and caution hunters to be considerate of adjacent landowners.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1D. Assist the public in being active and informed participants in the MWSGR and DCCHA planning processes and conservation strategies.

Accomplishments: Management staff answer inquiries about special areas management and work with the MWSGR Advisory Committee.

JOB/ACTIVITY 2A: Compile existing data on wildlife, habitat, and public use, monitor activities on the Dude Creek Critical Habitat Area (DCCHA), and collect new data as needed for input into the planning processes.

Accomplishments: Although the CHA was established to protect an important migratory stopover area for sandhill cranes, DWC's management activities in this area focus on moose. We monitored body condition, conducted annual browse surveys, and maintained about 20 collared moose. Data gathered informs management of a very popular moose hunt on the Gustavus forelands including the CHA. We also collected data on harvest of bears and furbearers. Collectively these efforts provide information on how the public and many wildlife species use the CHA and feed directly into the planning process.

Prepared by: Tom Schumacher, Region I Management Coordinator

Region III

Objective 1: Manage special areas in Interior Alaska to protect and conserve wildlife populations and their habitats.

Job/Activity a.: Conduct field projects, public education and other efforts to assure public use of lands is consistent with protection of wildlife populations and their habitats.

Accomplishments: Public education programs on the topics of wildlife conservation and habitat were conducted on Creamer's Refuge. During the 14 programs held more than 4,000 persons attended a variety of wildlife, habitat and conservation programs conducted by Refuge staff. Refuge staff conducted 30 hours of training sessions for community members assisting with wildlife and conservation programs. Refuge staff composed 12 interpretive articles printed in the Fairbanks newspaper on topics of refuge wildlife and conservation.

Job/Activity b.: Through internal review or participation in public and interagency planning processes, develop, review, and/or revise special area management plans and strategies to address current issues and problems.

Accomplishments: Provided info to Legislators during session as a bill was approved expanding Creamer's boundary to add >100 acres of land. Provided updated refuge maps to users.

Creamer's Staff met with staff of Fairbanks International Airport, University of Alaska Fairbanks Experimental Farm and Fort Wainwright to evaluate Cooperative Agreement responsibilities and Creamer's management. Assignments were clarified and we continue to work productively with other agencies.

Job/Activity c: Consult with other state departments and other agencies with responsibilities for permitting and land management to assure development and land use activities in special areas do not significantly impact wildlife and their habitats.

Accomplishments: Consulted with DNR during Refuge boundary change to ensure management continuity.

Objective 2: Conduct and support study of various species of wildlife and wildlife habitat typical to Interior Alaska to support local refuge management and planning.

Job/Activity a.: When possible and appropriate, develop and conduct studies to assist in management of refuges, address biological knowledge gaps, and improve management of wildlife and their habitats in Interior Alaska.

Accomplishments: Creamer's staff opened discussions with Fairbanks Area staff on potential habitat manipulation to benefit moose browse, but concerns regarding increasing numbers of moose near residential areas, ski trails, and local roadways resulted in lowering the priority for such projects.

Objective 3: Maintain and plan improvements to public access and other facilities and develop informational materials essential to conserving refuge resources and allowing multi-use access.

Job/Activity a: Maintain and plan improvements to public access to special areas as needed.

Accomplishments: Refuge public access and 2 miles of public trail facilities were maintained and repaired during the period. A parking lot (SHPO approved) was constructed on the north side of the Refuge.

Job/Activity b: Encourage public access to special areas by placing signs along access routes, creating brochures and maps, and through other educational programs.

Accomplishments: Refuge trail maps and brochures were updated and improved. Maps and brochures of the refuge were utilized in education programs serving 1,500 persons during the period.

Job/Activity c: Maintain facilities on special areas.

Accomplishments: Boardwalks and rail fences were repaired/replaced as needed due to seasonal damage.

Job/Activity d: Maintain public access for hunting and trapping.

Accomplishments: A parking lot (SHPO approved) was constructed on the north side of the Refuge. A Cooperative Agreement with Alaska Dog Musers Association allowed that organization to maintain trails used by hunters during winter hunting seasons.

Prepared by: Cathie Harms Region III Refuge Coordinator

Regions II and IV

Objective 1: Manage Special Areas in southcentral and southwestern Alaska to protect and conserve wildlife populations and their habitats.

OBJECTIVE 1A: Participate in a public and interagency planning process for creating or revising Special Area management plans.

Accomplishments: Coordinated planning efforts for department Special Areas management plans had previously been suspended while the department evaluated and revised the process for developing these plans. At the end of this reporting period, it was determined to resume the traditional process including the involvement of public stakeholders groups and agency planning teams.

Public meetings and presentations to various organizations were conducted to discuss management issues and habitat concerns associated with the Cottonwood Creek trail in the Palmer Hay Flats refuge.

OBJECTIVE 1B: Consult with other state departments and other agencies with responsibilities for permitting and land management to assure development and land use activities in Special Areas do not significantly impact wildlife and their habitats.

Accomplishments: Staff conducted many consultations with department permitting staff from the Habitat Division, which issued 148 Special Area Permits during this reporting period. Consultations with other entities have included discussions with developers and permitting authorities with the Municipality of Anchorage regarding development adjacent to the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge or within the refuge's watershed; oil and gas maintenance, exploration and extraction activities in Cook Inlet and potential impacts to eight Cook Inlet Special Areas.

Land acquisition efforts were coordinated with private land trust organizations for potential acquisitions in the Palmer Hay Flats, Anchorage Coastal, and Goose Bay state game refuges. Staff also worked with the Kachemak Moose Habitat, Inc. a local non-

profit organization that acts as a land trust to help protect and enhance moose habitat on the southern Kenai Peninsula. Staff also worked with the Quayasiq Walrus Commission on walrus management and habitat issues in Bristol Bay.

OBJECTIVE 1C: Conduct field projects, public education and other efforts to assure public use of lands is consistent with protection of wildlife populations and their habitats. This will be coordinated with other state departments, other agencies, and public organizations such as citizen support groups (e.g. Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats, Friends of the Anchorage Coastal Refuge, Friends of McNeil River, etc).

Accomplishments: Efforts continued to reduce impacts from an authorized ATV trail in the Cottonwood Creek area of the Palmer Hay Flats refuge and to prevent ATV use in unauthorized areas. Repairs were made to the portions of the trail that were hardened with GeoBlock materials. Additional regulatory signs were installed and/or replaced and additional trail markers were installed. A camper host was hired to provide information to visitors and serve as onsite department representative.

Trails in the Reflections Lake area of the Palmer Hay Flats refuge were maintained and a site host was hired to oversee the area, educate refuge users, and deter activities harmful to refuge resources.

Boundary marking continued at Palmer Hay Flats refuge, particularly along the Matanuska River floodplain where illegal off-road use of vehicles is impacting anadromous fish streams and wetland habitats.

Staff participated in educational programs addressing the Palmer Hay Flats and Anchorage Coastal refuges, and the McNeil River sanctuary. Staff visited the Redoubt Bay CHA to monitor heavy use by the public (approx 10,000 annual visits) and to survey potential user conflicts and resource impacts from boats and other use.

Objective 2: Maintain and enhance compatible public uses in special areas in southcentral and southwestern Alaska.

OBJECTIVE 2A: Work with user groups, individuals and other entities (e.g. retriever, hunting, hiking, boating and birding clubs) to encourage appropriate uses of Special Areas.

Accomplishments: Staff have continued to coordinate with refuge user groups (Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats Refuge, Wasilla Soil and Water Conservation District, area community councils, and others) to eliminate inappropriate use at refuge access points (garbage dumping, target shooting, off-road vehicle use, etc) in the Palmer Hay Flats refuge. Road, trail and parking lot improvements continued at Palmer Hay Flats (Reflections Lake, Cottonwood Creek and Rabbit Slough) and in the Goose Bay refuge.

Efforts have continued with federal, state, local, and nongovernmental entities to address access issues and illegal activities in the Goose Bay refuge.

Information was provided to members of the public inquiring about opportunities to enjoy refuge resources, access issues, laws and regulations, etc.

OBJECTIVE 2B: Create educational materials (signs, brochures, etc) to promote public use compatible with the purposes of the special areas.

Accomplishments: Continued participation with a multiagency and public group to create and promote a “water trail” in the Kachemak Bay CHA. Additional interpretive panels were installed on conservation lands adjacent to the Homer Airport Critical Habitat Area, and a panel was created for the Kachemak Bay CHA.

Weekly natural history walks were conducted at Potter Marsh in the Anchorage Coastal refuge.

Objective 3: Maintain and enhance public access to and within special areas in southcentral and southwestern Alaska.

OBJECTIVE 3A: Maintain and plan improvements to public access to special areas as needed.

Accomplishments: Staff continued to assess visitor facilities and needs within these refuges and have consulted with state and local agencies to address legal access issues. Major trail repairs and improvements continued at the Reflections Lake and Cottonwood Creek in the PHF refuge, and at the Goose Bay refuge access road. A new access trail was constructed at Potter Marsh in the Anchorage Coastal refuge.

Planning to improve trails within the Fox River Flats and Anchor River/Fritz Creek CHAs continued during this reporting period. Several exclusion plots were established to help assess the impacts from off-road vehicle use and to determine natural rehabilitation rates.

Working with community partners, an elevated wildlife viewing tower at Reflections Lake in the Palmer Hay Flats refuge was completed.

Materials removed from abandoned cabins in the Tugidak Island CHA were transported from the island and disposed in appropriate facilities.

OBJECTIVE 3B: Encourage public access to special areas by placing sign along access routes, creating brochures and maps, and through other educational programs.

Accomplishments: This is an ongoing effort. Various refuge directional signs were replaced when damaged or vandalized. Volunteer refuge hosts were stationed at several refuge access sites in the PHF refuge. Their duties including providing information to refuge users and alerting managers to issues of concern.

OBJECTIVE 3C: Work with neighboring landowners, and state/local agencies to assure legal public access to special areas is maintained or improved.

Accomplishments: Staff continued to coordinate with other agencies and private land owners to manage public access to lands along the eastern border of the Palmer Hay Flats refuge.

Regular consultations were made with staff from the Habitat Division in their review of state/local land disposals, easement and right-of-way vacations, and other actions to assure public access is maintained to these refuges.

Prepared by: Joe Meehan, Lands and Refuge Program Coordinator