

**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: 24.0

PROJECT TITLE: Fire Management Planning for Wildlife Habitat

PROJECT DURATION: 1 July 2015 – 30 June 2016

REPORT DUE DATE: 28 SEPTEMBER 2016

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: TOM PARAGI

WORK LOCATION: Statewide

Project Activities and Accomplishments

ACTIVITY 1: Represent the department on the Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group (AWFCG) and related Committees and Task Groups.

Accomplishments: Sue Rodman in Anchorage serves as the department representative to the AWFCG and is the coordinating group liaison to the Wildland Fire Prevention and Education Committee. Tom Paragi in Fairbanks serves as the alternate representative on AWFCG and on the Fire Research and geographic information system (GIS) committees, primarily by phone and email. Paragi and Rodman coordinate on Interior fire issues. Additionally, Mike Taras in Fairbanks serves as the agency lead on the Wildland Fire Prevention and Education Committee. The Fire Research committee conducted its annual fall review of research proposals to the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP; federal funding) and wrote endorsement letters for selected proposals. For the calendar year when Rodman served as chair of the AWFCG, she wrote endorsement letters to the JFSP Board of Governors for those proposals.

ACTIVITY 2: Participate in the two annual fall fire reviews sponsored by the AWFCG and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry (DOF), respectively.

Accomplishments: Rodman attended the state agency fire review near Fairbanks in October 2015. This state session highlighted the opportunities presented to ADF&G with respect to incorporating habitat enhancement projects into fire management strategies. Discussion included securing plans to move forward with several ADF&G habitat projects (Delta, Kenai, and Sutton), and continuing review of fire management options for habitat needs as they change over time.

Rodman chaired the interagency fall fire review in Fairbanks at the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center near Fairbanks in October 2015. Key discussions for that meeting that were managed over the next few months included changes to the Red Flag Warning criteria, revision of the Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan (AIWFMP), successional planning for fire management positions and the Incident Management Team, burn restriction information to the public, and an update of the the Alaska Multi-Agency Coordinating Group guide. Also, the GIS committee was tasked with correctly delineating Alaska Native corporation lands regarding the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act; this was to be coordinated through the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Although Rodman was assigned to attend the spring state agency fire planning meeting in Fairbanks in March, state travel restrictions did not allow her participation there. Rodman was able to secure limited travel approval to participate in the spring Agency Administrator / Fire Management Officer meeting in Fairbanks, along with the AWFCG meeting during the same time, to confirm interagency coordination for the summer fire season.

ACTIVITY 3: Annually evaluate and comment on the selection of fire management options (Critical, Full, Modified, and Limited) under the Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan and recommend changes.

Accomplishments: ADF&G staff had a request to change options in Game Management Unit 16 for the 2016 fire season; Norm McDonald (Fire Management Officer, State Forestry) completed that request to convert an area near Kashwitna Creek from Full to Limited.

ACTIVITY 4: Meet with federal, state and local level administrators to discuss fire-related policies, procedures or issues. Review and comment on state and federal fire-related policies and procedures. Develop and promote department policies and positions relative to fire management

Accomplishments: Agencies reviewed the AIWFMP in fall 2015. Rodman submitted comments to the Alaska Fire Service coordinator for this plan's revision on behalf of ADF&G, as reviewed by Paragi and other staff. Further, Rodman participated in several interagency teleconferences reviewing the plan's changes as drafts were produced through the winter 2016. She secured the signature of ADF&G Commissioner Cotten on the 2016 AIWFMP for publication. She also participated in teleconferences to review changes to the interagency Annual Operating Plan and secured updated language for water withdrawals and non-anadromous stream crossings on behalf of the ADF&G Division of Habitat.

Rodman and Paragi continued planning of wildland fire management and prescribed fire to maintain or enhance forage for free-ranging plains bison and moose near Delta Junction. Two main issues were identified: a habitat management plan for bison (for which ADF&G would have the lead role) is required by the Bureau of Land Management to justify operational involvement in prescribed fire, and using the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for the greater Delta area as a conduit for public engagement on use of fire to manage habitat. There may be an opportunity to coordinate with State Forestry on updating the CWPP in its next iteration. Additionally, from, Rodman made updates to the initial draft of a prescribed burn plan by Paragi and coordinated with State Forestry staff to establish an ignition plan. Fuels monitoring and a possible interagency fire behavior study will be pursued in fall 2016.

Rodman coordinated with the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to continue preparing the Alphabet Hills prescribed fire with respect to moose habitat. BLM completed their archeological review, which allowed ADF&G to continue working on our tasks of completing the burn plan updates and in the fall of 2016, requesting the cultural resource request from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. State Forestry is a primary partner in this burn because the majority of the project area is on state land.

Rodman participated in the two biannual All Lands All Hands meeting on the Kenai Peninsula, October 2015 and February 2016. She met with the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Manager and Fire Management staff, along with State Forestry staff in fall 2015 to confirm the agency support for enhancing habitat in GMU 15A through the coordinated effort of the many agencies and local entities involved in mitigating the risk and hazard of wildland fire on the Kenai Peninsula. ADF&G involvement serves both fire management and wildlife habitat enhancement. Interagency collaboration will provide the Refuge with opportunities to use prescribed and wildland fire in the future. This project is also being coordinated with Chugachmiut Inc.

Rodman and Region IV staff coordinated with DOF staff in Palmer in hopes of implementing the Little Granite Prescribed Fire in spring 2016. Due to lack of capacity at State Forestry, this project is again on hold until fall 2016.

Through the end of her chairmanship of the AWFCG (January 2016), Rodman participated in the monthly teleconferences of the national Coordinating Group Advisory Council. Policy issues are often addressed at these meetings and Rodman provides comments on behalf of AWFCG and the State as appropriate to the issues.

ACTIVITY 5: Facilitate department staff involvement in fire-related issues

Accomplishments: Paragi and Rodman assisted Delta Area staff with drafting a prescribed fire plan for field complexes that compose about 3% (3,000 acres) of the legislatively-designated Delta Junction Bison Range. The purpose is to reduce shrub and forest succession and encroachment in cleared portions and restore forbs and grasses as bison forage. Additionally, they wrote an interim letter to State Forestry, BLM and the Army requesting a non-standard response for wildland fires be considered on the full bison range until a prescribed fire plan is formalized; this allows a natural ignition to burn for resource objectives.

Rodman requested to the US Forest Service that a non-standard response be applied in the Dude Creek State Critical Habitat Area near Gustavus to benefit crane habitat.

Paragi & Rodman discussed fire operations with local staff in Fairbanks, Anchorage, Palmer and Soldotna. Rodman reviewed how to use the Integrated Fire Management tool online or via mobile device with the State Game Refuge and Sanctuaries staff so they could stay informed of fire activities. Rodman sent the annual spring email to supervisors and staff regarding fire management, how to change options, and contact information for suppression (protecting) agencies. Further, Rodman presented to the Division of Wildlife Conservation leadership on the opportunity to have staff participate in fire management through the Resource Ordering and Status System and Incident Qualification System as a way for ADF&G to engage in fire management. She also made a short presentation to Commissioner Cotten in this regard, securing

the approval to expand opportunities for department staff, provided they have allowable time, capacity, and supervisor support.

ACTIVITY 6: Identify and review appropriate literature to maintain expertise on fire management issues.

Accomplishments: Paragi continued periodic literature downloads on fire and forest ecology and management pertinent to Alaska ecosystems. Rodman continued reading literature on fire management with respect to community involvement and fire science. Rodman attended the Alaska Fire Science Consortium (AFSC) workshop in Fairbanks in October 2015. She also serves as a member of the AFSC and attended their board meeting via teleconference in February 2016. Rodman also attended the 2016 Alaska Society of American Foresters annual meeting at Sheep Creek where she participated in a discussion and field tour of the 2015 Sockeye Fire. She also conducted a limited field review of vegetation on selected state lands in the Sockeye Fire with Region IV staff to gain an understanding of 1st year growth response of browse after the fire for moose forage.

ACTIVITY 7: Prepare and disseminate information (e.g., news releases, guest editorials, brochures and video) on fire-related issues. Interact with broadcast media on fire-related issues.

Accomplishments: Rodman coordinated with Region III staff to write a news story for the Tok newspaper (Mukluk News) to discuss fire and moose habitat. On behalf of Region IV, Rodman attended the 20th Anniversary of the 1996 Miller's Reach Fire at Big Lake on June 11, 2016. She promoted the concept of fire's role on the landscape while maintaining defensible space and homeowner preparedness for residents living in the wildlands and at the urban interface. She discussed wildlife habitat with respect to forest succession and fire ecology. Rodman also provided an interview to KTVA in Anchorage for the AWFCG and fire management in January 2016.

ACTIVITY 8: Prepare an annual budget, work plan, and documents needed to satisfy Federal Aid and other reporting requirements.

Accomplishments: Paragi and Rodman drafted the Federal Aid performance report and reviewed program needs for FY17 budget preparation.

Submitted by: Doreen I. Parker-McNeill, Region III Management Coordinator

Date: July 19, 2016