

**FEDERAL AID
ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
PO Box 25526
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**MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS
ANNUAL SURVEY AND INVENTORY
PERFORMANCE REPORT**

STATE: Alaska

GRANT AND SEGMENT NR.: W-27-5

PROJECT NR.: 11.0

WORK LOCATION: Statewide

PERIOD: 1 July 2001–30 June 2002

PROJECT TITLE: Status, Trends, and Public Use of Migratory Game Birds in Alaska

REPORT DESCRIPTION: This statewide performance report includes migratory game birds survey and inventory activities. Statewide activities are listed before specific activities by region.

**The Status of Alaska Migratory Gamebirds and
Factors Influencing Their Populations**

Project Objectives

- Conduct assessments of annual status, production, and harvest information on migratory bird populations in Alaska from a variety of data sources. Evaluate concerns, coordinate with other agencies, and develop ADF&G work plan/budget requests.
- Coordination on the Pacific Flyway Council (PFC) and Study Committee (PFSC); information exchange, update population management plans, develop research needs; coordinate conservation programs between flyways and at national and international levels; develop harvest strategies, review and recommend 2001-02 hunting regulations, comment on federal harvest management programs.
- Collaborate with coastal state agencies, federal agencies, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations to implement the Sea Duck Joint Venture (SDJV) under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Complete synthesis of population status reports; complete the draft strategic plan; identify priority issues and action items with the Management Board.
- Meet Pacific Flyway regional duck banding targets by collaborating with a cooperative network of USFWS, ADF&G, and other banders.

- Improve implementation of the national Harvest Information Program (HIP) in Alaska for optimal registration of hunters, adequate sampling, and survey design by USFWS, and acceptable estimates of migratory bird harvest.
- Cooperate with USFWS and other interests to promote the work of the statewide Alaska Migratory Bird Subsistence Co-management Council (AMBCC); support establishment and functions of regional committees, implement linkages to flyway councils; continue development of spring and summer subsistence regulations in Alaska.
- Effectively disseminate public information on migratory bird resources, conservation issues, and agency management and research programs. Continue participation in Hunter Education shotgun proficiency and interagency non-toxic shot programs.

Work Accomplished During the Project Segment Period: We developed Waterfowl Program annual work plans and budgets through analysis of migratory game bird status information, identification of management problems, and assessment of the department's capabilities and role in addressing needs relative to programs by USFWS, U.S. Geological Survey-Biological Resources Division (USGS-BRD), and other state wildlife agencies. The primary source of status information and process for determining the department's work plans is through the Pacific Flyway Council and Study Committee. The department actively participates in ongoing flyway communications, data exchanges, work sessions, and formal biannual meetings. Waterfowl Program staff also participate in many coordination meetings, technical discussions, and planning functions with USFWS Region 7, USGS-BRD Alaska Science Center, U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to identify migratory birds issues and develop cooperative projects in Alaska.

The following list includes the primary ADF&G activities and accomplishments at the flyway national and international levels during this reporting period.

1. Alaska served as chairs of the Pacific Flyway Council (Matt Robus) and Study Committee (Tom Rothe) through September 30, 2001. This involved managing communications and business of the flyway and conducting the July Study Committee and Council meetings in Juneau. In addition, Matt Robus and Tom Rothe represented the Pacific Flyway at meetings of the National Flyway Council and FWS Service Regulations Committee in August. Attended PFSC meetings in January and March of 2002.
2. Lead role in revision of the Pacific Flyway Management Plan for the Western Population of Tundra Swans (adopted July 2001); key role in revision of the PFC management plan for Pacific Brant and submitting a final draft to PFC in March; participated in revisions of PFC plans for Pacific and Tule white-fronted geese, including a special interagency planning workshop in May 2002.
3. Led the Pacific Flyway discussions and development of recommended changes to the USFWS Canvasback Harvest Strategy, including coordination among technical committees of all flyways. Contributed to Pacific Flyway recommendations on the FWS EIS on overabundant resident Canada geese; Environmental Assessment for swan hunting; and drafting of the PFC Trumpeter Swan Implementation Plan (TSIP). Continued development

of a Tule white-fronted goose monitoring plan with coastal states, USFWS and USGS-BRD researchers. Drafted and marshaled revised bylaws on finances and the 2003 budget for the PFC and PFSC.

4. Participation in North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) programs. The Waterfowl Coordinator represented the Pacific Flyway and served as U.S. co-chair of the Sea Duck Joint Venture (SDJV) Continental Technical Team (CTT): managed CTT assignments to develop science needs documents for 7 initiatives; coordinated development of the 2002 package of endorsed projects and funding allocation recommendations; and worked with Management Board chairs to plan SDJV work plans and meeting schedules. Chaired a CTT meeting in November 2000 and attended the Management Board meeting in April 2001. In addition, the Coordinator has worked with Habitat Division, USFWS, and non-governmental organizations to develop a strategic plan for inclusion of most of Alaska in the Pacific Coast Joint Venture (PCJV). A state steering committee met several times to outline the plan and produce sections. Program staff has taken the lead on relating waterbird population objectives to habitat goals. Ideally, the Alaska PCJV plan will complement Pacific Flyway management plans and help integrate wetland acquisition and conservation initiatives.
5. Participation in IUCN/Wetlands International, coordinating North American information for the Threatened Waterfowl Specialist Group.

Harvest Information Program

Waterfowl Program staff collaborated with ADF&G Licensing Section and FWS to improve the Harvest Information Program (HIP) in Alaska for the 2001 and 2002 hunting season. Specific tasks included coordination with FWS Harvest Surveys (Laurel, MD) to ensure that HIP forms, internet response systems, and data entry protocols were accurate and consistent with federal regulations and program needs; contracting for production of HIP cards in state duck stamp vendor booklets; improving performance of state license vendors in submitting enrollment cards; answering numerous inquiries from ADF&G staff, license vendors, and the public; and monitoring hunter enrollment data acquisition. Program staff worked with FWS to improve the harvest survey design for Alaska sea duck, crane, and brant hunters. Analysis of HIP enrollment data from 1998–2000 produced important new information on migratory bird hunter activity and community origins of hunters.

Implementation of Bird Treaty Amendments

During this reporting period, the ADF&G Waterfowl Coordinator and headquarters staff worked with the Service and Alaska Native representatives to participate on and support the Alaska Migratory Bird Comanagement Council (AMBCC). Department activities and accomplishments included: (1) active participation in AMBCC meetings in October 2001—primarily to produce guidelines to regional committees for development of 2003 spring hunting regulation proposals; February 2002—attended and presented to meetings of Bering Straits (Nome) and AVCP (Bethel) regional committees; April and May 2002—two AMBCC meetings to finalize 2003 spring and summer hunting regulation proposals (2) development and presentation of PowerPoint shows on the status of migratory bird populations and harvest in Alaska (ADF&G contributed analyses of subsistence and recreational harvest data); (3) participated on the ad hoc

harvest survey committee, primarily in a December 2001 workshop on development of a statewide harvest survey program; and (4) ADF&G presentations at meetings of Pacific Flyway Council and other groups to advise on AMBCC involvement in the flyway system and national regulatory regime.

Public Information

In the area of public information products, the program frequently provided answers to questions and technical information to the public, other agencies and conservation groups on a wide variety of topics concerning waterfowl biology, management and hunting. Specifically, program staff maintained and improved the Waterfowl Program web site, expanding pages on satellite telemetry of scoters (EVOS project) and sandhill cranes, and expanding information on migratory bird hunting and regulations. Produced the annual 2001 Migratory Bird Hunting Regulations Summary and provided documents for public access on ADF&G websites. Waterfowl staff transmitted technical information on management and research projects at EVOS science conferences, Pacific Flyway Symposium (March 2002) and the Alaska Bird Conference (March 2002).

Since 1989, ADF&G has supported a statewide clearinghouse for advice and information on lead poisoning in waterfowl and effective use of nontoxic shot. The Waterfowl Coordinator worked with Hunter Information and Training (HIT) on the Steel Shot Steering Committee with FWS to annually plan nontoxic shot program funding, products and community clinics, and maintain a team of trained agency educators. The Coordinator worked with HIT staff to organize and lead an August 2001 training session for FWS Refuge, Law Enforcement, and Regional Office staff; the session covered extensive technical material necessary to conduct nontoxic shot seminars, instruction and safety planning for field exercises on hunter skills, and shooting instruction skills.

Project Location: Regional – Northern and Western Alaska

Project Objectives

- Restore cackling Canada geese to 250,000; emperor geese to 80,000 and maintain other waterfowl populations through the Y-K Delta Goose Management Plan (YKDGMP) and Pacific Flyway Council.
- Revise Pacific Flyway management plans; integrate involvement of North Slope and Y-K Delta interest groups in the brant plan; begin revision of Pacific Flyway plans for Pacific and Tule white-fronted geese.
- Monitor progress on the Spectacled Eider and Steller's Eider Recovery Plans and annually advise on work plans; evaluate status changes for Russia and Y-K Delta population segments; extend non-toxic shot education and enforcement in coastal villages.

Work Accomplished During the Project Segment Period: A coordination meeting was held with the Association of Village Council Presidents' Waterfowl Conservation Committee (WCC) and FWS in February to review the Y-K Delta Goose Management Plan, and co-management

process to develop subsistence regulations. The WCC: (1) reaffirmed the YKDGMP with partners in Washington, Oregon, and California; (2) concurred with revisions to Pacific brant population objectives and harvest thresholds; and (3) discussed aspects of spring hunting regulations that were of concern.

ADF&G participated as a member of the Spectacled and Steller's Eider Recovery Team. During the performance period, recovery team meetings focused on the status and priority of eider recovery projects, coordination among agencies and industry-sponsored research, and development of a draft Steller's eider recovery plan.

Project Location: Regional – Interior Alaska

Project Objectives

- Implement the Management Plan for Mid-continent White-fronted Geese with Central and Mississippi Flyway states, develop a range-wide harvest strategy and continue investigation of diminished Interior/Northwest Alaska white-fronts and potential conservation actions.
- Annually band a large sample of ducks on Minto Flats State Game Refuge as part of the Pacific Flyway Duck Banding Program. Regional targets are 1000 mallards and pintails.

Work Accomplished During the Project Segment Period: The department maintained frequent contacts with Mississippi and Central Flyway Technical Committees on issues related to management of mid-continent white-fronted geese. ADF&G reviewed survey and research reports on the status of birds in Interior Alaska, and coordinated with staff of Migratory Bird Management and Koyukuk NWR to evaluate concerns. Harvest levels and regulations in Alberta and Texas were monitored for changes that could affect Interior Alaska birds. Staff participated in a research review for Alaska projects and an outreach workshop that evaluated the utility and content of information that should be provided in Interior Alaska or more broadly.

The department has continued to work with Pacific Flyway states to plan and implement a flyway-wide duck-banding program to support population modeling of western mallards and pintails. During August 2001, despite inclement weather and high water levels in Interior Alaska, our duck banding effort on Minto Flats was successful. An average number of ducks were banded in 2001 (n = 1367) composed of 50% northern pintails, 33% mallards and 17% green-winged teal. The proportion of hatch-year birds banded (31%) was the highest reported in the last 5 years, indicating improved productivity by dabbling ducks nesting in Interior Alaska.

Project Location: Regional – Southcentral Alaska

Project Objectives

- Maintain dusky Canada geese to prevent ESA listing; maintain goals of 20,000 birds and annual production of >20% young; implement actions in the Pacific Flyway management plan.
- Produce annual survey estimates of dusky goose production on Copper River Delta (CRD); numbers of Canada geese and production on Middleton Island; evaluate survey methods for geese in Prince William Sound (PWS).
- Maintain a marked sample of dusky geese on CRD for population estimation in winter.
- Assist ADF&G Region 2 in producing estimates of urban Canada geese and production in Anchorage; collaborate with USFWS and Municipality to manage and remove surplus geese.
- Monitor Tule white-fronted geese summering in Upper Cook Inlet and Kahiltna Valley and implement marking as necessary to facilitate a mark-recapture estimate during fall.
- Develop distribution, abundance and trend data for sea ducks wintering in Kachemak Bay.
- Continue to mark and track lesser sandhill cranes from Cook Inlet to migration and wintering areas with satellite telemetry.

Work Accomplished During the Project Segment Period

Dusky Canada Goose Monitoring

We conducted a survey of Canada geese on Middleton Island from June 27-29, 2002. The effort is directed at documenting the growth of this island group and periodically determining its status as part of the dusky Canada goose population. Survey methodology was similar to surveys conducted in 1996, 1997 and 2000. The number of adult geese observed varied slightly (<288 geese) among the last four surveys (range 1,168-1,456) indicating little change in the size of the breeding population. The estimated number of young ranged from 752 to 1,227 goslings. We estimate that 41% of the Canada goose population on Middleton Island was composed of young in 2002, compared to 34%, 40% and 48% in 1996, 1997 and 2000, respectively.

The 2001 dusky Canada goose production survey was flown over the west Copper River Delta on July 26. The survey aircraft was a Robinson R22 helicopter with pilot and one observer. Weather conditions were favorable. Survey coverage was similar to previous years over the west delta, from Copper River islands to Point Whiteshed, and Egg Island. A total of 3,165 geese were counted on the survey, including an estimated 804 young. Production of young dusky Canada geese on the Copper River Delta in 2001 (25.4%) was the highest recorded since 1977.

Urban Canada Geese in Anchorage

The Waterfowl Program provided technical assistance to Region II and cooperating agencies to conduct Anchorage goose surveys in 2000, 2001 and 2002, as well as manage banding operations. Program biologists analyzed survey data, applied the mark-recapture models, and generated a population estimate of 1,508 geese in 2002. Waterfowl staff will continue to coordinate with and assist the Anchorage Waterfowl Working Group in gathering management

data and implement strategies to maintain the goose population near the recommended population level of 2,000 geese.

Tule White-fronted Goose Monitoring

ADF&G collaborated with California, Oregon, USGS-BRD and FWS to evaluate potential monitoring projects that could provide a reliable population index for Tules. As part of updating flyway management procedures, interim direct counts and mark-recapture surveys will be done in winter. In late June, ADF&G flew a helicopter survey of Susitna and Kahiltna Valley molting areas to keep track of the presumed majority of the breeding population. Only one flock of 60 Tules was located, raising questions about whether they were present and secretive, or had moved to a new molting area. Waterfowl Program staff actively consulted with Habitat Division and Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Oil and Gas, to develop protection measures for breeding and molting Tules in a proposed gas licensing area in the Kahiltna Valley.

Sea Duck Surveys in Kachemak Bay

For the fourth consecutive year, a March waterfowl survey was conducted in Kachemak Bay in an effort to monitor long-term trends of wintering sea ducks. We estimated that 22,123 ducks occupied Kachemak Bay in 2002; 21,552 in 2001; 17,281 in 2000; and 27,013 ducks in 1999. Most ducks (60-80%) were observed in the shoreline stratum (<200m of shore). Ducks observed in the offshore stratum (>200m from shore) were most abundant in the <20m deep bathymetric substratum. Goldeneyes, mallards, and white-winged scoters comprised the largest proportion of the total duck estimate. We attribute most of the annual variation in our estimates to the large geographic scope of the survey, the diversity of 14 primary species in the bay, and different weather conditions during the annual survey periods.

Sandhill Crane Telemetry Project

During the fall of 1999, the department developed a concept plan to mark sandhill cranes in Cook Inlet with satellite transmitters to document their movements on state game refuges and during fall migration to wintering areas. In 2000, we were successful in tracking three cranes during fall migration; two returned the next spring. To increase our sample size and validate previous data, nine additional satellite transmitters were deployed on sandhill cranes in upper Cook Inlet in April and July 2001. We were able to successfully track six cranes during the fall and subsequent spring migration. To broaden the scope of the study and investigate affinities between upper Cook Inlet and Bristol Bay cranes, we will deploy seven satellite transmitters on cranes captured on the Nushagak Peninsula in August 2002. A summary of this study, maps of crane movements and educational links to other crane projects are posted on our website:

[HTTP://WWW.STATE.AK.US/ADFG/WILDLIFE/DUCK/CRANE/CRANE.HTM](http://www.state.ak.us/adfg/wildlife/duck/crane/crane.htm)

Other activities funded by federal aid on this project: None

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Statewide Project Costs (in thousands):

State Share = \$ 62.6 Federal Share = \$ 187.9 Total Costs = \$ 250.5