

**Wildlife Restoration OPERATING GRANT
FINAL 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-23

PROJECT NUMBER : 24.0

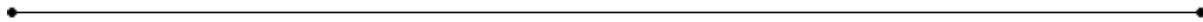
PROJECT TITLE: Fire Management Planning for Wildlife Habitat

PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE: July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018

REPORT DUE DATE: Sept 28, 2018

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Susanne U. Rodman

COOPERATORS: Thomas F. Paragi



I. PROGRESS ON PROJECT OBJECTIVES DURING PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE

OBJECTIVE 1: Represent the department in fire planning and coordination venues.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Sue Rodman in Anchorage served as the primary representative on AWFCG, and served as liaison to the Wildland Fire Prevention and Education Committee. Rodman attended monthly telephonic meetings and quarterly in-person meetings. She also attended the AWFCG Fall Fire Review and Spring Operations meetings in Fairbanks. Sue provided a review of ADF&G's interests in the season's wildland fires, plans for habitat enhancement projects in the next year, and provides a reminder on compliance with Alaska Fish Passage and Water Withdrawal reporting during fire operations. Further, she participated in the ADNR Division of Forestry Fall Fire Review in Palmer. She was unable to attend the Spring Operations meeting in Palmer due to the hiring schedule of a new wildlife biologist to the program she leads. Rodman annually reviews the updates to the Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan and Annual Operating Plan.

Tom Paragi in Fairbanks served as the alternate representative on AWFCG and on the Fire Research committee, primarily by phone and email. Paragi and Rodman coordinate on Interior fire issues. Paragi presented an updated analysis of fire cycle by physiographic regions of Alaska at the February 2018 meeting in Fairbanks of the Fire Effects Task Group.

Paragi and Rodman attended the interagency spring fire planning meeting and Alaska Fire Science Consortium meetings in Fairbanks in March. They presented the DWC Director's Public Stewardship Award to Kato Howard of the BLM Alaska Fires Service for several decades of assisting ADF&G with planning and executing prescribed fires and conducting fire research.

Mike Taras, Education Associate in Region III Fairbanks, serves as the agency lead on the Wildland Fire Prevention and Education Committee. Miles Spathelf, GIS Analyst in Anchorage, serves as the agency lead on the Fire GIS committee.

OBJECTIVE 2: Participate in fire management decisions to benefit wildlife.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

The fire season in Alaska was relatively slow during this performance period. Tom Paragi did provide wildlife information to State Forestry in August 2017 regarding Fire 320 – Iniakuk Lake, which burned over 32,000 acres. While this exchange was focused primarily on fire history and impacts of that fire on wildlife habitat, ADF&G had limited opportunity to contribute to fire management decisions regarding wildlife. In a June fire near Tok in 2018, the black spruce cover type would have benefitted from fire with respect to enhancing moose habitat. Considering private land allotments within state ownership, active fire suppression measures were taken. This is a case where the local biologist is interested in communicating to local landowners about the benefits of fire and discussing how a change in the fire management options from Full to Limited may serve their interests. This is one area of several around the state to track for potential shift of option for the coming year.

OBJECTIVE 3: Develop and promote department policies and positions relative to fire management.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

The Division of Forestry held two workshops, Delta and Soldotna, for their area office staff and ADF&G biologists to coordinate on annual reviews of the AIWFMP fire management options. The process was delineated and a set of locations was identified for future review; staff agreed to meet annually to continue the evaluation of areas where wildlife habitat was declining and allowing fire to burn was an option under appropriate conditions. Staff from both agencies in addition to fire management staff from the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge identified several geographic areas that met the criteria to change the fire management option to Limited. This process is related to Objective 2; however, revisiting this concept was new for the state agencies with respect to having the joint workshops and discussing process.

In fall 2017 Paragi asked area biologists in the road system portion of Region III to identify priority areas for fire and provide biological data on rationale for allowing wildland fire in 3 areas of state land in Full suppression. He then worked with Division of Forestry staff in the Fairbanks and Delta areas, as the protecting agency for these state area offices, to draft language for a non-standard response, which allows wildland fire to

reduce hazardous fuels and enhance habitat in specified areas under specified fire conditions and situations by monitoring or containment actions. The areas were on the Tanana Flats (including some Nenana-based Toghoththele Corporation lands), the uplands between Shaw Creek and Salcha River (including the Tanana Valley State Forest), and uplands on both sides of the eastern portion of the Elliott Highway west of the Dalton Highway junction (including some BLM lands).

The Toghoththele CEO was favorable on the Tanana Flats request during an initial meeting with DWC and DOF staff, but in a subsequent meeting the board of directors decided to retain their lands in Full, so that change was not feasible because of intermingled land status. The Salcha-Shaw language was signed by the DWC Deputy Director on 21 May 2018. After initial communication by phone and email, we met with Alaska Fire Service staff, also a protecting agency, about the Elliott Highway request at the spring interagency meeting, but insufficient progress was made before the 2018 fire season.

Habitat Division staff attended a meeting specific to the Mat-Su area where several areas were identified for changing the fire management options to Limited; allowing fire to burn where habitat is limiting for moose. Additionally, discussions included ADF&G Special Areas where habitat management is a priority and fire plays an important role in maintaining available and high quality forage.

ADF&G coordinated with the National Park Service to review fire management options in the Dude Creek Critical Habitat Area adjacent to Glacier Bay National Park. NPS was updating the Fire Management Plan for this park. The use of fire in this area would support sandhill crane habitat as shrubification is gradually taking over the sedge-marsh complex needed by cranes. Their final plan is expected for review in fall 2018.

Rodman coordinated with the Alaska Fire Service to update the Handy Dandy (reference guide for firefighters). In the next revision to occur for 2019, the water withdrawal and fish passage requirements will be included in this guide. Otherwise, Rodman annually shares these requirements with fire management staff at the Spring Operations meeting in Fairbanks. Rodman also communicates with the Habitat Division to facilitate communications and compliance with these regulations during the fire season.

Rodman provided comments on the Ft. Greely Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) for fire and vegetation management.

OBJECTIVE 4: Support and participate in the development and implementation of state and interagency fire management principles, operating plans, and strategies.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Rodman reviewed the annual update to the Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan for 2018.

As a member of the Kenai Peninsula All Lands All Hands Interagency Group, Rodman contributed to the revision of the 5-year action plan. In doing so, she referenced the

AIWFMP, the Cohesive Strategy, and NWCG operational guides. This effort is a collaboration of a subset of the membership to ALAH. This action plan focuses on mitigating the hazard of wildland fire near communities while emphasizing the ecological role of fire to support ecosystem function, wildlife diversity, and habitat for many species.

In Rodman's work on companion habitat enhancement grants, she writes portions of the prescribed burn plans that also include the guidance from AIWFMP, Cohesive Strategy, and are based on NWCG templates. She coordinates with staff biologists to ensure that burn plan objectives are consistent with wildlife habitat needs for that location.

OBJECTIVE 5: Contribute to the advancement of fire science in Alaska and address information needs regarding fire ecology, fire behavior, and the relationship to fire and wildlife.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Rodman serves on the Advisory Board of the Alaska Fire Science Consortium and attended the annual meeting telephonically. Further, discussions on fire ecology and wildlife response occur at the spring and fall interagency fire reviews and operational meetings during the Consortium's workshops.

In planning for several habitat enhancement projects, Rodman participates in the literature reviews and discussions to ensure that the treatments will result in benefits to wildlife with respect to vegetation, timing, and wildlife benefits intended.

OBJECTIVE 6: Foster communication and technology transfer between agencies, private entities and the public on the science and ecology of wildland and prescribed fire.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

As the liaison to the AWFCG Wildland Fire Education and Prevention Committee, Rodman supported the development of the Campfire Safety brochure. Further, ADFG staff members developed a WSFR kiosk in Tok to describe how fire interacts with the local spruce and hardwood forests to enhance wildlife habitat. This poster is reportable on AKW-5 but describes forest succession and the wildlife associated with early seral boreal forests. Press coverage during the Delta Junction Bison Range prescribed burn helped convey the project details to local residents.

In supporting the September 2017 Aspen workshop between Fairbanks, Delta, and Tok, Rodman collaborated with Paragi and other colleagues across agencies and UAF to encourage science exchange with respect to fire, ecology, and wildlife response. A [summary of this workshop](#) is posted on the Northwest Office page of the Society of American Foresters.

OBJECTIVE 7: Develop and support planning and implementation of fire management practices, hazardous fuel management, and prescribed fire.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Rodman prepared requests for cultural resources reviews on the Alphabet Hills and East Fork prescribed fires planned for 2020 and 2019, respectively. In so doing, she communicated with the Office of History and Archeology, as well as the USFWS Archeologist, and the BLM Archeologist to determine lead agency roles and ensure collaborative efforts in evaluating these projects.

Rodman supports the planning and implementation of prescribed fires with agency colleagues. ADF&G and Division of Forestry burned portions of the Delta Junction Bison Range again in 2018.

Rodman coordinated with staff from the Kenai NWR to develop objectives and talking points for the planned 2019 East Fork prescribed fire. This direct habitat enhancement project will serve multiple purposes including a fuel break, benefit to forest management with respect to the recent spruce bark beetle outbreak, and returning fire's ecological role to the area.

Rodman coordinated with the BLM's Glennallen Field Office and Alaska Fire Service staff to prepare for the 2020 Alphabet Hills prescribed fire. BLM staff must prepare the Environmental Impact Statement as this project impacts the Gulkana Wild and Scenic River Corridor. Further, fire behavior analysis is to be supported from BLM in writing of the burn plan.

OBJECTIVE 8: Maintain expertise on fire management issues.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Rodman attended the class RX-410 Smoke Management in March 2018 to improve our capacity to manage smoke during prescribed fire events, and to support fire management decisions to benefit wildlife habitat.

Rodman uses literature reviews and technical articles to support burn plan writing and design of treatments for projects. She also attends the two workshops of the Alaska Fire Science Consortium each spring and fall.

OBJECTIVE 9: Prepare an annual budget, work plan, and documents needed to satisfy federal Aid and other reporting requirements.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Paragi assisted Rodman with drafting the Federal Aid performance report and reviewed program needs for FY17 budget preparation. They also revised the Project Statement for this project for FY2018-22. Rodman developed the FY18 and 19 budgets and completed the FY18 performance report with assistance from Paragi.

OBJECTIVE 10: Identify potential and appropriate funding sources and staff to support interagency fire management projects.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Rodman is coordinating with federal agencies to develop cooperative agreements that will allow staff from both agencies to provide skills and expertise to one another. This will enable staff to gain experience from others and participate in diverse projects while learning new skills to apply to ADF&G projects.

A new wildlife biologist was hired to the team; Mary Jo Hill began her work for ADF&G in March 2018. She supported planning and implementation of the Delta Junction prescribed burns, and is advancing the fire monitoring plans for both Alphabet Hills and East Fork through collaboration with staff from the BLM and USFWS.

II. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON PROJECT TO DATE.

Many objectives in this grant are on-going over the years and some progress can be made each year on communication with the protection agencies (USFS, State Forestry, and BLM-AFS) with respect to fire management option changes, non-standard responses, and long term policy changes regarding the use of wildfire and prescribed fire. We anticipate movement on fire management option changes to occur in the coming years as we designate geographic areas of focus. Also, we continue to develop the concept of creating a wildland fire use module to conduct fire management and prescribed fires in areas where allowing a wildfire to burn is meaningful with respect to infrastructure, communities, and wildlife habitat enhancement.

III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS.

Not Applicable

IV. PUBLICATIONS

Not applicable

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

This project is expected to continue annually; this is the beginning of a new 5-year period of performance. Committees and processes are ongoing in the interagency fire community. As federal policies are developed nationally, down-scaling at the state level continues to refine local programmatic operations and procedures.

Prepared by: Susanne U. Rodman

Date: August 28, 2018