

**FEDERAL AID
ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
PO Box 115526
Juneau, AK 99811-5526

MIGRATORY GAME BIRD ANNUAL SURVEY AND INVENTORY

STATE: Alaska

GRANT AND SEGMENT NO. W-33-8

PROJECT NO. 11.0

PERIOD: July 1, 2009 – June 30, 2010

PROJECT LOCATION: Statewide (Regions 1, 2, 3, and 5)

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

REPORT DESCRIPTION: This performance report describes the Statewide Waterfowl Programs survey and inventory activities listed by geographical region.

Project Activities and Accomplishments

Project Location: Statewide

JOB/ACTIVITY 1: Develop ADF&G FY 10 work plan/budget request consistent with high priority management needs, federal activities, and state objectives.

Accomplishments: The SFY 2010 Waterfowl Program annual work plans and budgets were developed through analysis of migratory game bird status information, identification of management needs and problems, and assessment of the department's capabilities and role in addressing needs relative to programs by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Geological Survey-Biological Resources Division (USGS-BRD), and wildlife agencies of other states. The primary source of status information and process for determining the department's work plans was through the Pacific Flyway Council (PFC) and Study Committee (PFSC). The department actively participated in flyway communications, data exchanges, work sessions, and formal biannual meetings. Waterfowl Program staff also participated in many coordination meetings, technical discussions, and planning functions with USFWS Region 7, USGS-BRD Alaska Science Center, U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and University of Alaska to identify migratory bird issues and develop cooperative projects in Alaska.

JOB/ACTIVITY 2: Participate in meetings of the Pacific Flyway Council and Study Committee; complete revisions of high-priority management plans; review and recommend 2009-10 hunting regulations.

Accomplishments: Alaska played an active role on the Pacific Flyway Council (Dale Rabe) and Study Committee (Dan Rosenberg). We participated in a business meeting in July 2009, a Study Committee work session in December 2009, and a spring business meeting in March 2010. Alaska chaired subcommittees on Cackling Geese, White-fronted Geese, Taverner's, lesser, and Vancouver Canada Geese, Lesser snow and Ross'

Geese, Emperor Geese, and Eastern Tundra Swans. The Department continued important leadership roles in coordination of Pacific Flyway Council activities with the Alaska Migratory Bird Comanagement Council (AMBCC) and interagency surveillance for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in wild birds.

During this reporting period, ADF&G worked with Pacific Flyway coastal states, USFWS, and Alaska subsistence interests to maintain fall and winter harvest restrictions to promote cackling geese and Pacific Brant populations and to maintain more liberal harvests of abundant Pacific white-fronted geese and Aleutian geese. We implemented and administered a permit hunt for Dusky Canada Geese on the Copper River Delta and eastern Prince William Sound in response to population declines. We continued working with the USFWS, North Slope Borough and AMBCC to implement harvest regulations on the North Slope that met the needs of local residents while minimizing the incidental harvest of Steller's eiders and yellow-billed loons.

JOB/ACTIVITY 3: Participate in meetings of the Sea Duck Joint Venture (SDJV) Continental Technical Team; emphasize development of funding and partners to achieve work in the 2008 SDJV Strategic Plan; contribute to research planning, coordination of management projects, and fund allocation; continue development of a continental population monitoring program.

Accomplishments: The Waterfowl Coordinator's role as co-chair Sea Duck Joint Venture (SDJV) Continental Technical Team (CTT) ended due to the rotation schedule. In addition the program was short one position during the reporting period and our activities were limited to coordination and information exchange with other agencies on sea duck research and management and advising managers on the development of new survey designs to meet sea duck monitoring needs.

JOB/ACTIVITY 4: Participate in interagency efforts to detect HPAI H5N1 avian influenza if it arrives in Alaska, including: (1) implement and refine wild bird surveillance programs in the national and Pacific Flyway strategies, and the Alaska Interagency Sampling Protocol; (2) coordinate sample submissions to certified laboratories and registry of samples in the national database; (3) develop joint notification protocols and communication plans for release of information to affected agencies and the public; (4) develop cooperative response plans for discovery of positive tests or bird mortality events; and (5) collaboratively develop and deliver public information products on avian influenza, current situations, agency surveillance efforts, and precautionary hygiene for public contacts with wild birds.

Accomplishments: The Waterfowl Program Coordinator and Staff coordinated HPAI surveillance and response planning in 2009 with federal and state wildlife agencies to continue a program to detect the occurrence of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in wild migratory birds in Alaska and develop response plans. This is part of a national surveillance effort. From July to October 2009, ADF&G completed its target sampling of live ducks (1,120) in Interior Alaska (Minto Flats) and Southcentral Alaska (Susitna Flats) and hunter-harvested ducks (269) in Southcentral Alaska (Cook Inlet) and Southeast Alaska (Mendenhall Flats). We met our target goals except we were below

target for hunter-harvested birds on the Susitna Flats. This was due to low duck densities resulting in low hunter activity.

JOB/ACTIVITY 5: Band ducks at several sites to meet Pacific Flyway regional duck banding targets in conjunction with other staff, USFWS, and other banders.

Accomplishments: The Waterfowl Program continued its duck banding effort at Minto Flats State Game Refuge (see Regional–Interior), and Lewis River Slough, Susitna Flats State Game Refuge (see Regional–Southcentral). We established operational banding needs in Alaska and other states as part of the PFSC and PFC, and the USFWS Adaptive Harvest Management Models for western Mallards and northern pintails. This involved collaboration with USFWS Region 7 to define banding needs and apply banding and harvest data to regulatory prescriptions in Alaska and the Pacific Flyway states.

JOB/ACTIVITY 6: Evaluate results of 2008 HIP surveys to estimate harvest in Alaska and monitor 2009 enrollments for adequate hunter registration. In collaboration with USFWS, evaluate survey sampling design and harvest estimation methods, with an emphasis on development of effective surveys for harvest of sea ducks, brant, and sandhill cranes.

Accomplishments: Waterfowl Program staff collaborated with ADF&G Licensing Section and FWS to implement the Harvest Information Program (HIP) in Alaska. This included evaluation of survey design, contracting for production of HIP cards in state duck stamp vendor booklets, improving performance of state license vendors in submitting enrollment cards, and answering numerous inquiries from ADF&G staff, license vendors, and the public. We continued to compile HIP enrollment data and to assess trends in migratory bird harvest and hunter activity statewide. This was the first year hunter enrollment cards and duck stamps were distributed to licensed vendors in time for the spring subsistence season.

JOB/ACTIVITY 7: Attend meetings of the Alaska Migratory Bird Subsistence Co-management Council, regional committees, and public meetings statewide; provide technical information on bird populations and harvest and conservation issues; assist with implementation of the statewide subsistence harvest survey; collaborate with regional management committees and FWS to expand and improve subsistence harvest management strategies for spring 2010 and 2011.

Accomplishments: The ADF&G Waterfowl Coordinator and Deputy Director Dale Rabe continued work with the Service and rural subsistence regional representatives of the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-management Council, participating in meetings in September and October 2009 and April 2010. Department activities and accomplishments include: (1) serving on the AMBCC Technical Committee and Harvest Survey Committee to provide data on population status and trends and design and interpret harvest survey data, (2) assisting with development of 2010 federal subsistence regulations and technical analyses of proposals; (3) presenting information on the status and trends of migratory bird populations and harvest in Alaska to the AMBCC; (4) providing guidance and assistance in an effort to develop a fall subsistence hunt; and (5) serving as primary liaison between the AMBCC and Pacific Flyway Council. The Coordinator also

participated in the assessment and review of the statewide harvest survey and coordinated with Subsistence Division staff in this process.

JOB/ACTIVITY 8: Plan and produce public information products on migratory bird resources, conservation issues, and agency management and research programs. This includes maintaining Waterfowl Program and headquarters websites; producing brochures, posters, slide shows, and special publications; and cooperating with the ADF&G Education and Watchable Wildlife Programs to incorporate migratory game bird information. Participate in continuing cooperative shotgun proficiency and non-toxic shot education programs with USFWS and Hunter Education, including development of annual interagency plans, training instructors, conducting seminars and clinics, and delivery of information products. Expand on sea duck information and education initiatives with USFWS, conservation groups, and hunters.

Accomplishments: 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. Program staff maintains, reviews, and updates department web pages on migratory birds including research projects, endangered species information, and information on migratory bird hunting and regulations. The Waterfowl Coordinator edited and revised the hunter regulations brochure. Waterfowl Coordinator and staff transmitted technical information on management and research projects to the Pacific Flyway, at state and federal coordination meetings, and scientific conferences.

The Waterfowl Program funded a training session for hunters in rural communities on the North Slope during 2009 and provided technical assistance to USFWS staff. The program worked with the USFWS and North Slope Borough Wildlife Department to address concerns about continued use of lead shot and the impacts to Steller's and spectacled eiders through a regional hunter outreach plan and a community education clinic. In collaboration with area staff in Cordova we developed educational materials for a dusky Canada goose registration permit hunt. The coordinator made a presentation to the Alaska Board of Game on the status of sea ducks in Kachemak Bay in response to a regulatory proposal.

Regional - Northern and Western:

JOB/ACTIVITY 1: Participate in meetings and coordination of annual activities of the Y-K Delta Goose Management Plan with AVCP, USFWS, and Pacific Flyway Council.

Accomplishments: The Y-K Delta Goose Management Plan has expired and is up for renewal. It remains in effect by continuing agreement. The Pacific Flyway Council (Deputy Director Rabe), USFWS Refuges, Law Enforcement, and Migratory Birds, and the AVCP Waterfowl Conservation Committee met in April 2009 to finalize changes to provisions about law enforcement policies in the Plan. However, Oregon has refused to sign the updated plan until population objectives and harvest strategies for Cackling Canada Geese can be resolved. The Waterfowl coordinator is in negotiations with western states, the USFWS, and the Waterfowl Conservation Committee of the

Association of Village Council Presidents to reach a consensus and develop a revised Plan. The Department is committed to maintaining a Y-K Delta Goose Management Plan that supports populations necessary for subsistence hunting.

JOB/ACTIVITY 2: Meet and communicate with Y-K Delta, Bristol Bay and other interest groups to implement management strategies in Pacific Flyway population management plans.

Accomplishments: ADF&G, USFWS, and representatives from Oregon and Washington continued to coordinate management concerns about cackling geese and brant survey methodologies, population objectives, and harvest strategies through AMBCC and PFSC and PFC process. In conjunction with area staff, program staff manages and reports on results of Tundra Swan permit hunts in GMU 17, 18, 22, and 23.

JOB/ACTIVITY 3: Meet and communicate with interest groups in North Slope and northwest regions to coordinate and implement multi-flyway management plans for Eastern Population Tundra Swans and Midcontinent White-fronted Geese.

Accomplishments: These Management Plans have been completed and the waterfowl coordinator has been monitoring their implementation through communication with interest groups in this region and the Pacific Flyway Study Committee.

JOB/ACTIVITY 4: Participate on the Spectacled/Steller's Eider Endangered Species Recovery Teams; assist in implementation of Recovery Plans; cooperatively develop annual work priorities.

Accomplishments: As a member of the Recovery Teams, the Waterfowl Program Coordinator has worked with the Steller's and spectacled eider teams to update annual work plans and funding priorities, review survey data, and design research projects to address information needs. ADF&G received funding for a Coastal Impact Assessment Program grant to conduct a multi-year satellite telemetry study on the movements of the listed population of Steller's eiders and is working cooperatively with the North Slope Borough to implement this project.

Regional - Interior

JOB/ACTIVITY 1: Work with Central and Mississippi Flyway states to implement the revised Management Plan for Mid-continent White-fronted Geese; monitor annual status of diminished Interior/ Northwest Alaska breeders and review analysis of survival and harvest patterns throughout their range with USFWS and USGS-BRD.

Accomplishments: The Waterfowl Coordinator participated in annual biological reviews of information gathered on midcontinent white-fronted geese in interior Alaska. Information was exchanged and efforts coordinated to review population status and harvest for this population in the Central and Mississippi Flyways, and in Canada. The Waterfowl Coordinator has been in negotiations with Central Flyway representatives and

the USFWS to determine the need for another revision of the Midcontinent White-fronted Goose management Plan.

JOB/ACTIVITY 2: Band ducks at Minto Flats State Game Refuge to meet Pacific Flyway regional duck banding targets, in conjunction with other ADF&G staff and USFWS. Expand captures to meet HPAI sampling goals.

Accomplishments: 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 northern pintails. Avian influenza sampling and support funding allowed a major expansion of banding operations. During our trapping efforts on Minto Flats in August 2009, we banded 1020 ducks composed of 49% northern pintails, 26% mallards, and 23% American green-winged teal.

Regional – Southcentral:

JOB/ACTIVITY 1A: Conduct an aerial survey to produce an estimate of dusky Canada goose production on Copper River Delta (CRD).

Accomplishments: The July 2009 dusky Canada goose production survey was flown over the west Copper River Delta on July 15. The survey aircraft was a Robinson R44 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 7,017 geese were estimated on the survey including an estimated 2,590 young. Production of young dusky Canada geese on the Copper River Delta in 2009 was 36.9%; lower than the high count observed in 2008 (47.2% young), but much higher than the 10-year and 39-year average. The Pacific Flyway Dusky Canada Goose management plan objective of achieving annual production of 20% young (measured as the most recent 10-year average) was met in 2008 (23.1% young) and 2009 (25.4% young). ADF&G participated in the annual meeting with USFS, USFWS and USGS-BRD to review results of 2009 surveys and research on the breeding grounds and coordinate field activities for 2010.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1B: Conduct a ground survey to estimate the “dusky” Canada goose population on Middleton Island.

Accomplishments: The June 2010 dusky Canada goose survey on Middleton Island was conducted from June 22-24 by 5 observers. We counted 1,249 adults and estimated good production. This was similar to our prior survey in 2008 when we counted 1,317 adults.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1C: Capture and radio-mark Canada goose goslings on Middleton Island.

Accomplishments: To assess juvenile return rates to Middleton Island, we captured and radio-marked 65 Canada goose goslings on Middleton Island in June-July, 2008. Goslings were monitored during the winter (2008-2009) in Oregon and during the spring/summer of 2009 in south central Alaska. Only 3 of 65 radio-marked birds were reported in Oregon during the winter. Seven collars were recovered (3 associated with

carcasses) and 17 collars were detected in mortality mode on Middleton during June 2009. This suggests that mortality and possibly slipped collars occurred before migration, and combined, accounted for the large proportion of collars not making it to wintering areas in Oregon. Regardless, a large proportion (51%) of collars remains unaccounted for on traditional wintering areas in Oregon and potential summer range in Alaska. Either significant mortality occurred during migration or goslings from Middleton dispersed to locations outside search areas.

JOB/ACTIVITY 2: Evaluate survey methods to produce indices for Canada geese in Prince William Sound.

Accomplishments: In May 2010 we conducted searches for nesting geese throughout western Prince William Sound. We met our objective of locating nests over a broad portion of the study area and collecting genetic material from nest bowls for comparison with geese on the Copper River Delta and Middleton Island. We determined we would be able to capture and mark a sample of geese in Prince William Sound to further refine methods to develop a population index.

JOB/ACTIVITY 3: Band and mark dusky Canada geese in late July as needed; if feasible, capture, band and radio-mark Canada geese from PWS.

Accomplishments: This activity was not conducted in 2009. The Pacific Flyway has transitioned from an indirect population estimate, based on marked birds observed in winter, to a direct breeding ground survey. Thus, banding and neck collar marking were not deemed necessary in 2009. Leg bands and neck-collars will be deployed in 2010.

JOB/ACTIVITY 4: Conduct aerial surveys to locate VHF-marked Tule white-fronted geese during the breeding and molting season, and enumerate Tule geese on the principal molting area in Kahiltna Valley and on Cook Inlet coastal marshes.

Accomplishments: On May 26 and again on June 26, 2010, aerial surveys for VHF radio-collared Tule geese were flown in upper Cook Inlet. Radio collars were deployed by CA and OR state agencies during September in 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009 on Summer Lake Wildlife Area, OR. The primary search areas included those traditionally used by breeding Tule geese along the Susitna River drainages and coastal locations extending from Redoubt Bay east to the Knik River. Twenty-eight of 39 radios were located during the first flight, primarily on the Susitna Flats and 10 of 39 on the second flight. As in past years we expect most birds had moved further north by the second flight.

JOB/ACTIVITY 5: Band ducks at Susitna Flats State Game Refuge and contact hunters in Cook Inlet marshes to obtain avian influenza samples that meet goals.

Accomplishments: 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 northern pintails. During our trapping efforts on Susitna Flats in August 2009, we banded 198 ducks composed of 49% northern pintails,

26% mallards, and 23% American green-winged teal. In addition we collected samples from 181 hunter harvested birds in Cook Inlet (42% mallards, 18% pintails, and 11% green-winged teal).

JOB/ACTIVITY 8: Assist Region II with inventories of waterfowl and sandhill cranes on Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge and to address urban waterfowl management issues.

Accomplishments: Surveys of urban geese were not conducted during this reporting period. The number of Canada geese breeding and molting in Anchorage has declined significantly, indicating that management goals to increase airport safety and reduce nuisance problems have been met. Annual monitoring is not warranted, but periodic surveys will be useful in future years. Staff advised and supported the efforts of a citizens group to monitor geese and sandhill cranes on the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge.

Additional Activities not in SFY10 Annual Work Plan:

JOB/ACTIVITY 1: Coordinate with the Pacific Flyway Dusky Canada Goose subcommittee, PFC, Area staff, U.S. Forest Service, local advisory committees, Oregon Farm Bureau, and Ducks Unlimited, Inc, and local advisory committees to implement management strategies in Dusky Canada Goose Pacific Flyway Management Plan.

Accomplishments: Implement new Canada goose hunting regulations for the GMU 6 on the Copper River Delta and eastern Prince William Sound; develop a Predator Management Strategy for the Copper River Delta; Assist with the development of a Focal Species Action Plan for dusky Canada geese; and assist in the development of new nesting islands for dusky Canada geese on the Copper River Delta.

Prepared by: Daniel Rosenberg and Michael Petrula.