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

STATE: Alaska **GRANT AND SEGMENT NR:** W-33-3
PROJECT NR: 11.0

WORK LOCATION: Statewide

PERIOD: 1 July 2004–30 June 2005

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

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

PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Statewide:

1. Develop ADF&G FY 05 work plan/budget request consistent with high priority management needs, federal activities, and state objectives.
2. Participate in meetings of the Pacific Flyway Council and Study Committee; complete revisions of high-priority management plans; review and recommend 2004–05 hunting regulations.
3. Participate in meetings of the Sea Duck Joint Venture (SDJV); serve as U.S. co-chair of the Continental Technical Team; emphasize development of funding and partners to achieve work in the SDJV Strategic Plan; contribute to research planning, coordination of management projects, and preparation for a 2005 program evaluation.
4. Band ducks at several sites to meet Pacific Flyway regional duck banding targets, in conjunction with other staff, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and other banders.
5. Evaluate results of 2003 Harvest Information Program (HIP) surveys of harvest in Alaska to assess accuracy; monitor 2004 enrollments for adequate registration of hunters; with FWS evaluate survey sampling design and harvest estimation methods, with emphasis on development of effective surveys for harvest of sea ducks, brant, and sandhill cranes.
6. Attend meetings of the Alaska Migratory Bird Subsistence Co-management Council, regional committees, and public meetings statewide; cooperatively improve operating guidelines for the system; provide technical information on bird populations, harvest and conservation issues; assist with implementation of the statewide harvest survey; collaborate with regional management committees and statewide Council to expand and improve subsistence harvest management strategies for spring 2005.

7. 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 Web sites; 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 FWS and Hunter Education, including development of annual interagency plans, training instructors and conducting seminars and clinics, and information products. Expand on sea duck information and education initiatives with FWS, conservation groups, and hunters.

Accomplishments: (numbers correspond with activity numbers)

1. The state FY 2005 Waterfowl Program annual work plans and budgets were developed 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 FWS, 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 FWS Region 7, USGS-BRD Alaska Science Center, U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and University of Alaska to identify migratory birds issues and develop cooperative projects in Alaska.

2. Alaska played an active role on the Pacific Flyway Council (Matt Robus) and Study Committee (Tom Rothe). We participated in a business meeting in July 2004, a Study Committee work session in January 2005, and a spring business meeting in March 2005. Alaska chaired subcommittees on Pacific brant and Pacific Flyway lesser sandhill cranes.

   During this reporting period, ADF&G worked with Pacific Flyway coastal states, FWS, and Alaska subsistence interests to develop harvest restrictions for cackling geese and Pacific brant; both populations are below objective level and have declined in recent years. The flyway process served as a focal point to ensure that data gathering tasks were adequately implemented and harvest reductions were coordinated with hunter groups, and to craft specific restrictions for each state.

   ADF&G is a key agency in developing revisions to the Pacific Flyway Management Plans for Tule white-fronted geese (draft in prep.), and Pacific coast trumpeter swans (draft in progress), and western Arctic snow geese (first draft). ADF&G is the lead editor in revision of the plan for Aleutian geese (near-final draft completed between March and June). In addition, ADF&G served as Pacific Flyway liaison to complete the inter-flyway Management Plan for Midcontinent White-fronted Geese (see Interior below), and begin an inter-flyway review of the Midcontinent Sandhill Crane Plan.

3. The Waterfowl Coordinator represented the Pacific Flyway and served as U.S. co-chair of the SDJV Continental Technical Team (CTT): managed CTT assignments to begin

development of a report on continental sea duck monitoring needs and options; coordinated development of the 2005 package of proposed projects and funding allocation recommendations (November 2004). Worked with Management Board chairs to plan SDJV work plans and meeting schedules and summarize project funding and partnership data for 2000–2004.

4. The Waterfowl Program continued its duck banding effort only at Minto State Game Refuge (see Regional – Interior). To date, the Pacific Flyway Study Committee and FWS have not made adequate progress in completing the Western Mallard Model or determining feasibility of a continental Pintail Model. Until the models are adopted and geographic banding targets are determined, we will continue a maintenance level of banding.

5. Waterfowl Program staff collaborated with ADF&G Licensing Section and FWS to implement the Harvest Information Program (HIP) in Alaska, including coordination with FWS Harvest Surveys (Laurel, Md.) on 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 from 1998 to 2003 to assess migratory bird hunter activity statewide.

6. The ADF&G waterfowl coordinator and headquarters staff continued work with the Service and Alaska Native representatives for the Alaska Migratory Bird Comanagement Council (AMBCC). Department activities and accomplishments include: (1) serving on the AMBCC Technical Committee, Harvest Survey Committee, Emperor Goose Plan Committee, and Outreach Committee; (2) annually assisting with development of regulatory issues, regulation proposals, and preparation of technical analyses; (3) presenting information on the status of migratory bird populations and harvest in Alaska (ADF&G contributed analyses of subsistence and recreational harvest data); and (4) serving as primary liaison between the AMBCC and Pacific Flyway Council.

7. In the area of public information products, the program frequently provided information to the public, other agencies, and conservation groups on a wide variety of topics concerning waterfowl biology, management, and hunting. Specifically, program staff maintains and updates department Web pages on migratory birds, including pages on satellite telemetry of scoters, harlequin ducks, and Steller's eiders and information on migratory bird hunting and regulations. Waterfowl staff transmitted technical information on management and research projects at the annual EVOS science conference, the North American Arctic Goose Conference (January 2005), and through production of research reports to EVOS, Sea Duck Joint Venture, and peer-reviewed journals.

   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) to plan nontoxic shot program products, including a standard CD slide show, HIT handbook materials, and community clinics. The coordinator conducted a training session for hunters in Anchorage during August 2004 and consulted with other trained educators to plan clinics in rural communities in 2004 and 2005.

Regional - Northern and Western:

1. Participate in meetings and coordination of annual activities of the Y-K Delta Goose Management Plan with Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), FWS, and Pacific Flyway Council.

2. Meet and communicate with Y-K Delta, Bristol Bay and other interest groups to develop revisions to the Pacific Flyway management plan for emperor geese.

3. Participate on the Spectacled/Steller's Eider Recovery Team; assist in implementation of recovery plans; cooperatively develop annual work priorities.

Accomplishments: (numbers correspond with activity numbers)

1. The waterfowl coordinator attended a meeting of the AVCP Waterfowl Conservation Committee in February of 2005. The AVCP committee was reorganized, so most of the meeting was to review updated information on goose and duck populations and discuss emerging conservation issues. Because of recent concerns about cackling geese, the meeting included representatives of the Oregon Farm Bureau (crop depredation concerns) and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

   ADF&G played a role in organizing an AVCP-Waterfowl Conservation Committee meeting in Salem, Oregon to formally review and renew the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Goose Management Plan and promote cooperative goose management among agricultural interests, sport hunters, and subsistence hunters. The plan was reviewed in detail, modified, and approved for 2005–2006.

2. ADF&G has been a principal participant in revising the 1994 management plan for emperor geese. This effort was reorganized under the AMBCC, and included representatives from the AVCP, Aleutian-Pribilofs, Bristol Bay, and Northwest Arctic regions. Good progress has been made to develop a draft for final review in late 2005.

3. The Waterfowl Program staff 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 expanded a Steller's eider survey project for Lower Cook Inlet (using ESA Section 6 grant E-4-1) and continued a second year of satellite tracking of birds wintering in Kodiak (using HCP grant E-5-HP).

Regional - Interior:

1. Work with Central and Mississippi Flyway states to revise the Management Plan for Mid-continent White-fronted Geese by July 2005; monitor annual status of diminished Interior/ Northwest Alaska breeders and review analysis of survival and harvest patterns throughout their range by FWS and USGS-BRD.

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 FWS.

Accomplishments: (numbers correspond with activity numbers)

1. The waterfowl coordinator participated in a biological review of information gathered on midcontinent white-fronted geese in Interior Alaska (September 2004). He also coordinated

exchanges of information on flyway planning processes and hunting regulations for this population with local FWS staff and the AMBCC. ADF&G took the lead in coordinating with Mississippi and Central Flyway technical representatives and Canadian agencies to develop a revised interflyway Management Plan for Midcontinent White-fronted Geese. Planning culminated in meeting in Austin, Tex. during early April where a semifinal draft was produced, including updated management tasks and harvest guidelines tied to population status. In July 2005, the Pacific, Central, and Mississippi Flyway Councils approved this plan.

2. The department has continued to work with Pacific Flyway states to plan and implement a flywaywide duck-banding program to support population modeling of western mallards and pintails. During our trapping efforts on Minto Flats in August 2004, we banded 1,532 ducks composed of 49% northern pintails, 30% green-winged teal and 21% mallards.

Regional – Southcentral:

1. Conduct an aerial survey to produce an estimate of dusky Canada goose production on Copper River Delta.
2. Evaluate survey methods to produce indices for Canada geese in Prince William Sound.
3. Band and mark 200–300 dusky Canada geese in late July 2004; as feasible, capture, band and radiomark Canada geese from Prince William Sound.
4. Conduct aerial surveys to enumerate Tule white-fronted geese on the principal molting area in Kahiltna Valley and on Cook Inlet coastal marshes.
5. Assist Region II with ground surveys to count urban Canada geese and annual production in Anchorage; develop the model-driven annual population estimate; lead a cooperative capture operation to mark a sample of urban geese for local and flyway studies.

Accomplishments: (numbers correspond with activity numbers)

1. The July 2004 dusky Canada goose production survey was flown over the west Copper River Delta on July 16. 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 5,678 geese were counted on the survey, including an estimated 1,186 young. Production of young dusky Canada geese on the Copper River Delta in 2004 (27.8%) was the second highest recorded since the late 1970s. ADF&G participated in the annual meeting with USFS, FWS and USGS-BRD to review results of 2004 surveys and research on the breeding grounds and coordinate field activities for 2005.
2. No progress was made on this task because of limited staff time and funding constraints. Dusky Canada geese are counted on Middleton Island in alternate years. A ground survey was conducted 20–22 June 2004. Our next count is scheduled for June 2006.
3. During the spring and summer 2004, dusky Canada geese were captured on nest sites on the Copper River Delta by USGS-BRD crews that have been conducting work on breeding

ecology. They marked 87 birds in 2004. ADF&G has scheduled a banding operation during the molt during July 2005 to ensure that the Pacific Flyway marking goal is met.

4. From April through July 2004, ADF&G staff flew aerial surveys for radiocollared Tule geese in upper Cook Inlet. Radio collars were deployed by California and Oregon state agencies during September in 2003 (n=18 radios) and 2004 (n=23 radios) on the Summer Lake Wildlife Area in Oregon. The primary search areas included those traditionally used by Tule geese along the Susitna River drainages and coastal locations extending from Redoubt Bay east to the Knik River. Additional flights were conducted north of the Alaska Range on the Innoko and Yukon Delta NWRs. Twenty-two radios (54%) were heard at least once during tracking efforts in Alaska. All radios deployed in 2003 and detected in Alaska in 2005 were also detected in 2004 (n=7). More radios (n=16) were heard during an intensive helicopter survey of the Susitna drainage in early June than other survey periods. During that survey, visuals were obtained on all detected birds. Five nests (one from a non-radioed bird) were located and 2 broods were observed. Nests from female 160.456 were located in 2004 and 2005.

   During the 6 July molt survey in the Susitna-Kahiltna drainages, 3 broods were located with a VHF parent (2,3,4 goslings). Two detached radios were located (bird fate unknown), and one radio was recovered from a kill/scavenge site. Only 10 Tule geese (no marked birds) were observed on the traditional molting lakes in the Upper Kahiltna River Valley.

   Six and 3 radios were detected on the Innoko and Yukon Delta NWRs, respectively, during (Innoko) or after (Y-K Delta) the molting period. All but one (159.331) were heard during prior surveys in the upper Cook Inlet basin, indicating that a segment of the population moved across the Alaska Range to molt, as was the case last year (2004). One bird (160.852) detected during the molt on the Innoko NWR in 2004 was detected on Muddy Lakes (Y-K Delta) in 2005. In 2004, 19 radios were heard on Muddy Lakes during July, but only 2 were heard in early August. Therefore, it is unclear whether Tules switch molting areas in some years, but it is likely that in 2005 molters at Muddy Lakes were not detected because they left the area and returned to the upper Cook Inlet Basin before the survey was conducted.

5. Waterfowl staff assisted with a July 2004 survey of Anchorage Canada geese. Subsequent surveys and banding were suspended because the urban population was at or below the target level established by the Anchorage Waterfowl Working Group. The goose reduction program has succeeded over the past 5 years.

Additional Federal Aid-funded work not described above that was accomplished on this project during this segment period: None

Stewardship Investment items purchased: None

Total Statewide Project Costs (in thousands):

State Share (25%)	Federal Share (75%)	Total
$69,769	$209,306	$279,075

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