

**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-33-4

PROJECT NR: 11.0

WORK LOCATION: Statewide

PERIOD: 1 July 2005–30 June 2006

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 06 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 2005–06 hunting regulations.
3. Participate in meetings of the Sea Duck Joint Venture; 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 2004 Harvest Information Program (HIP) surveys of harvest in Alaska to assess accuracy; monitor 2005 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 2006.

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 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 nontoxic shot education programs with FWS and Hunter Education, including developing annual interagency plans, training instructors and conducting seminars and clinics, and providing information products. Expand on sea duck information and education initiatives with FWS, conservation groups, and hunters.

Accomplishments: (numbers correspond with activity numbers)

1. The SFY 2006 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 2005, a Study Committee work session in December 2005, and a spring business meeting in March 2006. Alaska chaired subcommittees on Dusky Canada Geese and Eastern Tundra Swan, played a leadership role in drafting "*Surveillance for Early Detection of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1 in Wild Migratory Birds: A Strategy for the Pacific Flyway*" and helped organize state and federal sampling and response networks for HPAI.

During this reporting period, ADF&G worked with Pacific Flyway coastal states, FWS, and Alaska subsistence interests to develop fall and winter sport 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: Pacific Coast Trumpeter Swans (final draft to Council in March 2006); ADF&G is the lead editor for Aleutian Geese (final draft to Council in March 2006); Tule White-

fronted Geese (draft in prep.); Western Arctic Snow Geese (first draft); and ADF&G is leading a revision of the plan for the Dusky Canada Goose. In addition, ADF&G served as Pacific Flyway liaison to complete the inter-flyway Management Plans for Midcontinent White-fronted Geese (approved in July 2005; see Interior below), and the Midcontinent Sandhill Crane Plan (approved March 2006).

3. 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 begin development of a report on continental sea duck monitoring needs and options; and coordinated development of the 2006 package of proposed projects and funding allocation recommendations (November 2005). Worked with Management Board chairs to plan SDJV work plans and meeting schedules and summarize project funding and partnership data for 2000–2005. The Director and Waterfowl Coordinator contributed to the organization and conduct of the annual SDJV meeting and the 2nd North American Sea Duck Conference in Annapolis, MD during November 4–11, 2005. In addition, the Coordinator worked with CTT and Board delegates to participate in a continental evaluation of the SDJV in September 2005.
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 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 through 2005 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, completion of work by the 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 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 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 2nd North American Sea Duck Conference (November 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 revised CD slide show, HIT handbook materials, and community clinics. The Coordinator conducted a training session for hunters in Anchorage during August 2005 and consulted with other trained educators to plan clinics in rural communities in 2005 and 2006. The Coordinator worked with leaders from five Y-K Delta coastal villages and FWS staff to develop and implement a nontoxic shot education program funded by a Private Lands Stewardship Grant, including advice and information on program planning, organizing and conducting a training session in Bethel for village educators (June 2006), and planning materials and logistics for clinics in each village.

Regional - Northern and Western:

1. Participate in meetings and coordination of annual activities of the Y-K Delta Goose Management Plan with 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 2006 to provide a briefing on avian influenza and plans for upcoming surveillance in Alaska. The AVCP-WCC also received briefings on the status of cackling geese and black brant, actions taken by Pacific Flyway states, and activities of the Alaska Migratory Bird Comanagement Council (AMBCC).
2. ADF&G has been a principal participant in revising the 1994 management plan for emperor geese. This effort, reorganized under the AMBCC with representatives from the AVCP, Aleutian-Pribilofs, Bristol Bay, and Northwest Arctic regions, completed a consensus draft revision and forwarded it to the AMBCC and Pacific Flyway in March 2006. The plan was submitted for Pacific Flyway Council endorsement.
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 (ESA Section 6 funding) and continued a third year of satellite tracking of birds that winter in Kodiak and breed in arctic Russia (HCP grant).

Regional - Interior:

1. Work with Central and Mississippi Flyway states to revise the Management Plan for Mid-continent White-fronted Geese by late 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 contributed to and facilitated a revision of the Management Plan for Midcontinent White-fronted Geese, with Mississippi and Central Flyway technical representatives, FWS, and Canadian agencies. In July 2005, the Pacific, Central, and Mississippi Flyway Councils approved this plan. The Coordinator also participated in a biological review of information gathered on midcontinent white-fronted geese in Interior Alaska (September 2005) and coordinated exchanges of information on modifying 2005 hunting regulations for this population.
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 2005, we banded 1038 ducks composed of 78% northern pintails, 10% green-winged teal and 12% mallards.

Regional – Southcentral:

1. Conduct an aerial survey to produce an estimate of dusky Canada goose production on Copper River Delta (CRD).
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 2005; as feasible, capture, band and radiomark Canada geese from PWS.
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.
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 2005 dusky Canada goose production survey was flown over the west Copper River Delta on July 17. 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 5364 geese were counted on the survey, including an estimated 632 young. Production of young dusky Canada geese on the Copper River Delta in 2006 (11.8%) was much lower than the 10-year and 35-year averages. ADF&G participated in the annual meeting with USFS, FWS and USGS-BRD to review results of 2005 surveys and research on the breeding grounds and to coordinate field activities for 2006.

We conducted a ground survey of Canada geese on Middleton Island during June 22–24, 2006 to monitor growth of this island group and periodically determine its status as part of the dusky Canada goose population. A total of 1453 adults and 713 young were recorded. Average brood size for the 252 broods present was 3.5 goslings. The number of adult geese has remained relatively constant during the last 5 years, while the proportion of young has remained relatively high (>34%). The consistently high productivity is undoubtedly related to the lack of mammalian predators on the island.

2. No progress was made on this task because we have not found a feasible method to count or mark these forest-nesting birds. A winter aerial count of geese was to be done in Prince William Sound, in conjunction with an oystercatcher survey, but was canceled.
3. On July 17–18, 2005, banding drives of molting dusky Canada geese were conducted on the west Copper River Delta. Approximately 600 neck collars were deployed on geese to ensure that the Pacific Flyway marking goal is met.
4. From April through July 2006, aerial surveys for VHF radiocollared Tule geese were flown in upper Cook Inlet. Radio collars were deployed by California and Oregon state agencies during September in 2004 and 2005 on Summer Lake Wildlife Area, OR. 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. Thirty-six radios (71%) were heard at least once during tracking efforts in Alaska. Eleven and 13 radios were detected on the Yukon Delta and Innoko NWRs, respectively, during the molting period. All but one was 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 (2005).
5. Department activities to monitor urban Canada geese in Anchorage have generally concluded. The breeding population has declined to the level established by the Anchorage Waterfowl Working Group; breeding and production surveys have been suspended; and no annual population estimates are produced. Waterfowl staff continue to track observations and recoveries of banded and marked birds, as well as coordinate with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife on management of these birds.

Additional Federal Aid-funded work not described above that was accomplished on this project during this segment Period

Since August of 2005, the Division of Wildlife Conservation Director and Waterfowl Coordinator have been engaged in extensive and intensive planning and coordination of surveillance for Asian H5N1 avian influenza (AI) in wild birds. Until special federal funding was provided in July 2006, all high-priority AI activities were carried out with Federal Aid funds. ADF&G activities are generally summarized as:

- Alaska (ADF&G) was the only state brought into the national USDA and USDOJ planning process in summer 2005, and thus played a major role in designing and drafting the national wild bird surveillance plan.
- ADF&G facilitated the engagement of state wildlife agencies by contacting the four flyway councils, briefing AFWA and individual agencies, and providing drafting outlines for flyway-level surveillance plans.
- ADF&G helped organize and conduct a January 2006 workshop of national and local experts to design the Alaska AI surveillance program for wild birds; by February, an interagency steering committee and subcommittees completed the Alaska sampling protocol.
- ADF&G played a leadership role in developing the Pacific Flyway AI surveillance and response strategy by March 2006.
- Since April 2006, ADF&G has participated in the State of Alaska pandemic influenza preparedness program: providing presentations and public information on avian flu; participating in community workshops statewide by providing AI information in context with pandemic messages; organizing among state departments to coordinate AI and pandemic planning (ADF&G is lead on wild birds); cooperatively generating print and Web-based public information; and developing state response plans for detection of H5N1 in birds.
- ADF&G has played a leadership role with FWS to develop a statewide toll-free hotline system for public reports of sick or dead birds; a protocol for interagency response; and coordinated specimen recoveries on state lands for testing.
- The Director and Waterfowl Coordinator have continuously engaged in expanding state-federal coordination on AI surveillance, notification of test results, response plans, and public communications through the national steering committee, AFWA, National Flyway Council, Alaska Interagency Steering Committee, Alaska Emergency Avian Disease Outbreak Group (state agencies), Alaska Interagency AI Outreach Group, and the Pandemic Multi-agency Committee and Incident Management Team.
- During June 2006, Waterfowl staff planned and prepared for AI field sampling of wild birds in conjunction with duck banding at Minto Lakes and on Susitna Flats, and sampling of hunter-shot waterfowl in September.

Submitted by: Thomas C. Rothe, Michael J. Petrula, and Daniel H. Rosenberg

Total Statewide Project Costs (in thousands):

State Share (25%)	Federal Share (75%)	Total
\$76,111	\$228,334	\$304,445