

**FEDERAL AID
FINAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
PO Box 25526
Juneau, AK 99802-5526

MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SURVEY AND INVENTORY

STATE: Alaska

GRANT AND SEGMENT NR: W-33-5

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

PROJECT NR: 11.0

PERIOD: 1 July 2006 – 30 June 2007

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

Project Activities and Accomplishments

Project Location: Statewide

JOB/ACTIVITY 1: Develop ADFG FY 07 work plan/budget request consistent with high priority management needs, federal activities, and state objectives.

Accomplishments: The SFY 2007 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 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 birds 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 2006-07 hunting regulations.

Accomplishments: 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 2006, a Study Committee work session in December 2006, and a spring business meeting in March 2007. Alaska chaired subcommittees on Dusky Canada Geese, Pacific Coast Trumpeter Swans and Eastern Tundra Swans, and continued an important leadership role in updating the Pacific Flyway plan on 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 develop fall and winter harvest restrictions for cackling geese (below objective level) and liberalizations for abundant Pacific white-fronted geese and Aleutian geese.

ADF&G played an active role in revising several Pacific Flyway management plans: Pacific Coast Trumpeter Swans (approved July 2006); lead editor for Aleutian Geese (approved July 2006); lead editor for Dusky Canada Geese (Council Review draft March 2007); and Pacific Flyway liaison to complete the inter-flyway Management Plan for Eastern Population Tundra Swans (Council review draft June 2007; see Northern and Western below).

JOB/ACTIVITY 3: Participate in meetings of the Sea Duck Joint Venture and 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 funding allocation. Begin a program evaluation and revision of the strategic plan in 2006.

Accomplishments: 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; coordinated development of the 2007 package of proposed projects and funding allocation recommendations (December 2006). Worked with Management Board chairs to plan SDJV work plans and meeting schedules, and summarize project funding and partnership data. The Waterfowl Coordinator co-chaired the annual SDJV-CTT meeting in Vancouver, BC in late November 2006; the Coordinator and Director participated in the Management Board meeting in Portland, March 2007. Both meeting produced progress in revising the SDJV Strategic Plan scheduled for completion in 2008.

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: Several Department staff played major roles in the coordination of HPAI surveillance and response planning in 2006 and 2007. The Director and Coordinator interacted with the National Steering Committee to summarize and evaluate 2006 surveillance results and recommend program shifts for 2007. Both provided liaison with other flyways and state wildlife agencies to improve coordination. ADF&G completed its target sampling of live ducks (1,100) and sandhill cranes (58), as well as 450 hunter-harvested ducks in Cook Inlet and Mendenhall Flats. The Director, Coordinator, and department veterinarian collaborated with other state and federal agencies to improve response plans if HPAI is detected in Alaska wild birds. The Director and Coordinator also participated in the state's pandemic flu preparedness network to provide accurate information on avian influenza and support statewide and

community action plans in the event of a “bird flu” human disease outbreak. A wide variety of public information products (pamphlets, presentations, websites) was developed and maintained with wildlife and public health agencies.

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 State Game Refuge (see Regional – Interior), and established a second banding station at Lewis River Slough, Susitna Flats State Game Refuge. To date, the Pacific Flyway Study Committee and USFWS have not made adequate progress in completing the Western Mallard Model or determining levels of operational banding needed in Alaska. Until the models are adopted and geographic banding targets are determined, we will continue a maintenance level of banding.

JOB/ACTIVITY 6: Evaluate results of 2005 HIP surveys of harvest in Alaska to assess accuracy; monitor 2006 enrollments for adequate registration of hunters; with USFWS, evaluate survey sampling design and harvest estimation methods, with 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, 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 and to assess trends in migratory bird harvest and hunter activity statewide.

JOB/ACTIVITY 7: 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 2007.

Accomplishments: The ADF&G Waterfowl Coordinator and headquarters staff continued work with the Service and Alaska Native representatives for the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-management Council (AMBCC). Department activities and accomplishments include: (1) serving on the AMBCC Technical Committee, Harvest Survey Committee, and Outreach Committee; (2) assisting with development of regulatory issues, technical analyses of proposals, and endorsement of 2007 federal subsistence regulations; (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. The Director and Coordinator participated in AMBCC meetings in September 2006 and April 2007.

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 ADFG 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. 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 USFWS staff to develop and implement a non-toxic 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

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 Waterfowl Coordinator attended a meeting of the AVCP Waterfowl Conservation Committee in March 2007 to provide briefings on the status of cackling and emperor geese, and black brant; management programs and harvest regulations in Pacific Flyway states; and activities of the Alaska Migratory Bird Comanagement Council. The Y-K Delta Plan was not updated on schedule, pending resolution of some concerns about law enforcement policies and coordination needs. ADF&G participated in two special meetings in May and June to discuss plan revisions.

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 continued to coordinate current management concerns about cackling geese and brant with regional organizations, largely in the context of AMBCC meetings. Participation by AMBCC delegates in Pacific Flyway Council meetings enhanced discussions of management needs and strengthened working relations between the agencies and subsistence communities. AMBCC and its member partners are now involved in the revision of flyway management plans for coastal goose and swan populations.

JOB/ACTIVITY 3: Meet and communicate with interest groups in North Slope and northwest regions to begin a revision of an all-flyway management plan for Eastern Population Tundra Swans.

Accomplishments: The Waterfowl Coordinator represented the Pacific Flyway on the Ad Hoc EP Swan Committee, composed of all four flyways, USFWS, and Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS). The committee had an initial meeting in Minneapolis in October 2006 to outline key management plan revisions and integrate a prescriptive harvest strategy based on population status. The Coordinator and other members contributed updated technical data and revised sections of the plan, producing several review drafts during winter 2006 and spring 2007. A final draft was sent to all four councils in June 2007. The Coordinator played a lead role in compiling Alaska survey and harvest data, and coordinating with North Slope Borough and other parties during development of the revised plan.

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

Accomplishments: 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 continued a Steller's eider survey project for Lower Cook Inlet during fall 2006 (ESA Section 6 funding) and is concluding a 3-year satellite tracking project on birds that winter in Kodiak and breed in arctic Russia (HCP grant).

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 has participated in annual biological reviews of information gathered on midcontinent white-fronted geese in interior Alaska and coordinated exchanges of information on modifying hunting regulations for this population in the Central and Mississippi Flyways, and in Canada.

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 flywaywide duck-banding program to support population modeling of western mallards. Avian influenza sampling and support funding allowed a major expansion of banding operations. During our trapping efforts on Minto Flats in August 2006, we banded 1,000 ducks composed of 63% mallards, and 31% northern pintails.

Regional – Southcentral

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

Accomplishments: The 2006 dusky Canada goose production survey was flown over the west Copper River Delta on July 11. 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 6,261 geese were counted on the survey, including an estimated 1,446 young. Production of young dusky Canada geese on the Copper River Delta in 2006 was 23.1%; higher than the 10-year and 36-year averages. ADF&G participated in the annual meeting with USFS, USFWS and USGS-BRD to review results of 2006 surveys and research on the breeding grounds and coordinate field activities for 2007.

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

Accomplishments: 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 cancelled.

JOB/ACTIVITY 3: Band and mark dusky Canada geese in late July 2007 as needed; if feasible, capture, band and radio-mark Canada geese from PWS.

Accomplishments: This activity was not conducted in 2007. 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. A sample of leg-banded birds will be maintained in the future.

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: From April through July 2007, 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 2005 and 2006 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. Additional flights were conducted north of the Alaska Range on the Innoko and Yukon Delta NWRs. Thirty-seven radios (73%) were heard at least once during tracking efforts in Alaska. Twelve 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 major segment of the population moved across the Alaska Range to molt. Less than 50 molting Tule geese were located in the Susitna Valley during a late June helicopter survey.

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 flywaywide duck-banding program to support population modeling of western mallards. Funding to obtain avian influenza samples enabled ADF&G to re-establish a duck banding operation on Susitna Flats State Game Refuge (operated by USFWS in recent years). During our trapping efforts on Susitna Flats in August 2006, we banded 450 ducks composed of 50% northern pintails, and 29% mallards.

JOB/ACTIVITY 5: Assist Region II with ground surveys to count urban Canada geese and annual production in Anchorage; develop the model-driven annual population estimate.

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.

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