

**FEDERAL AID
ANNUAL 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-33-6

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

PROJECT NR: 11.0

PERIOD: 1 July 2007 – 30 June 2008

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 08 work plan/budget request consistent with high priority management needs, federal activities, and state objectives.

Accomplishments: The SFY 2008 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 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 2006-07 hunting regulations.

Accomplishments: Alaska played an active role on the Pacific Flyway Council (Ron Clarke) and Study Committee (Tom Rothe). We participated in a business meeting in July 2007, a Study Committee work session in December 2007, and a spring business meeting in March 2008. Alaska chaired subcommittees on Cackling Geese, White-fronted Geese, Emperor Geese, Pacific Coast Trumpeter Swans, and Eastern Tundra Swans. The department continued important leadership roles in coordination 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 to develop more liberal harvests of abundant Pacific white-fronted geese and Aleutian geese.

ADF&G provided lead editorship of a revision to the Pacific Flyway Management Plan for Dusky Canada Geese (Council adopted March 2008), including several special interagency planning sessions with USFWS, USGS, US Forest Service, and state agencies of Oregon and Washington. The department also helped facilitate approval of the Eastern Tundra Swan Plan by all four flyway councils in July 2007, and led moderate progress to revise the 1992 plans for Western Arctic Snow Geese and Ross' Geese.

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. Complete a program evaluation and revision of the strategic plan.

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 complete a report on continental sea duck monitoring needs and options, complete a draft revision of the SDJV Strategic Plan, and coordinate development of the 2008 package of proposed projects and funding allocation recommendations. The Waterfowl Coordinator co-chaired the annual SDJV-CTT meeting in Seward, AK in October 2007 and regularly guided business with the Canadian co-chair and coordinators until the chairmanship rotated to USFWS in January 2008. The Assistant Director participated in the Management Board meeting in Portland, March 2008, where the board granted final approval of the continental monitoring report and adopted the revised Strategic Plan.

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 2007 and 2008. The Director and Coordinator interacted with the National Steering Committee to summarize and evaluate 2006 surveillance results and implement program adjustment for 2007 and 2008. Both provided liaison with other flyways and state wildlife agencies to improve coordination. From July to October 2007, ADF&G completed its target sampling of live ducks (950) and sandhill cranes (74), as well as 280 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. A wide variety of public information products (pamphlets,

presentations, websites) were updated 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 Lewis River Slough, Susitna Flats State Game Refuge. In July 2007, the Pacific Flyway Study Committee and Council, and USFWS completed plans to implement Adaptive Harvest Management for Western Mallards. During 2008 this will result in establishment of operational banding needs in Alaska and other states. The department collaborated with USFWS Region 7 to define how banding and harvest data are applied to regulatory prescriptions in Alaska and the Pacific Flyway states.

JOB/ACTIVITY 6: Evaluate results of 2006 HIP surveys of harvest in Alaska to assess accuracy; monitor 2007 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 operate 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 2008.

Accomplishments: The ADF&G Waterfowl Coordinator and Assistant Director Clarke continued work with the Service and rural subsistence regional representatives for the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-management Council, participating in meetings in September 2007; April and June 2008. 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 2008 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 Coordinator devoted considerable time in the assessment and review of the statewide harvest survey design, coordinating with Subsistence Division and working with the Harvest Survey

Committee to develop recommendations for an effective and economical program for 2009. The AMBCC approved the new survey design in June 2008.

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, 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 and Hunter Information and Training (HIT) updated and implemented programs on nontoxic shot and wounding loss in waterfowl hunting through a CD slide show, HIT handbook materials, hunter education classes, and community clinics. The Coordinator conducted a training session for hunters in Anchorage during August 2007 and consulted with other trained educators to plan clinics in rural communities and provide technical assistance to USFWS staff in Refuges, Ecological Services, and Endangered Species. The Coordinator worked USFWS Regional Office and Fairbanks Field Station, and the North Slope Borough Wildlife Department to address questions and concerns about continued use of lead shot, establish a regional hunter outreach plan, and develop a community clinic program for 2008-2009.

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 department and Service have not met with the AVCP Waterfowl Conservation Committee since March 2007, and the Y-K Delta Goose Management Plan remains in effect by continuing agreement. Discussions about potential changes to provisions about law enforcement policies and coordination have resulted in an impasse. Agency meetings with Refuges, Law Enforcement, Migratory Birds, and ADF&G have not produced viable recommendations for revisions to the Y-K Goose Plan. Pacific Flyway states are concerned that harvest strategies for cackling geese, black brant, and Pacific white-fronted geese need to be updated, and that the fundamental commitment to

the Y-K Plan should be maintained, but Alaska policy issues between USFWS and AVCP remain the bottleneck. In the meantime, the AMBCC has been a forum for some exchanges of views.

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: In 2006 and 2007, 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 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. All four flyway council adopted the revised plan in July 2007.

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 2007 (ESA Section 6 funding) and has concluded a 3-year satellite tracking project on birds that winter in Kodiak and breed in arctic Russia (HCP grant). Final reports have been drafted.

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 2007, we banded 1,039 ducks composed of 52% northern pintails, and 29% mallards.

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 2007 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 4,741 geese were counted on the survey, including an estimated 990 young. Production of young dusky Canada geese on the Copper River Delta in 2007 was 20.9%; similar to the 10-year and 37-year averages. ADF&G participated in the annual meeting with USFS, USFWS and USGS-BRD to review results of 2007 surveys and research on the breeding grounds and coordinate field activities for 2008.

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. Development of a survey remains a task for 2008-2012 in the revised dusky goose management plan.

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 June 2008, 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, 2006 and 2007 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. Fifty-nine radios (approx 75%) were heard at least once during tracking efforts in Alaska. Twenty-eight and 3 radios were detected on the Yukon Delta and Innoko NWRs, respectively, during the molting period. All but four were heard during prior surveys in the upper Cook Inlet basin indicating that a major segment of the population molted north of the Alaska Range.

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 2007, we banded 255 ducks composed of 60% northern pintails, and 27% mallards.

JOB/ACTIVITY 8: 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.

Additional Activities not in FY08 Work Plan:

JOB/ACTIVITY 1: Conduct population census of Canada geese on Middleton Island to document growth and its status as part of the dusky Canada goose population.

Accomplishments: We conducted a survey of Canada geese on Middleton Island from 24-27 June 2008. We counted 1,317 adult and 633 young Canada geese during 3 days of surveys. Average brood size was 3.31 goslings (SD = 1.47). We estimated that 249 broods were present; 3 less than our estimate in 2006. The number of adult geese observed was slightly lower than our 2 previous surveys. However, little change has occurred in the size of the breeding population during the last 10 years. We estimate that 38% of the Canada goose population on Middleton Island was composed of young in 2008 compared to 34%, 40%, 48%, 37%, 37% and 37% in 1996, 1997, 2000, 2002, 2004 and 2006, respectively. The consistently high productivity is undoubtedly related to the lack of mammalian predators on the island.

JOB/ACTIVITY 7: Capture and radio-mark Canada goose goslings on Middleton Island.

Accomplishments: Our surveys of Canada geese on Middleton Island over the past decade suggests that the adult population has stabilized at around 1,500 birds. Annual productivity for this island population, however, has been very high during this time period averaging about 40% young, suggesting that juveniles returning to Alaska have gone to locations other than back to Middleton Island, perhaps on the Copper River Delta, the primary breeding site for dusky Canada geese. In June-July 2008, we captured

Project No. 11.0 – Migratory Birds
FY08 Annual Performance Report

and radio-marked 65 Canada goose goslings on Middleton Island. Goslings were held in captivity until large enough to maintain a neck collar with a mounted VHF radio. Goslings will be monitored during the winter in Oregon and during the spring/summer in south central Alaska.

Prepared by: Thomas Rothe, Michael Petrula, and Daniel Rosenberg