

**FEDERAL AID
ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
PO Box 115526
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MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SURVEY AND INVENTORY

STATE: Alaska

GRANT AND SEGMENT NO. W-33-7

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

PROJECT NO. 11.0

PERIOD: 1 July 2008 – 30 June 2009

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

Accomplishments: The SFY 2009 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 2008-09 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 2008, a Study Committee work session in December 2008, and a spring business meeting in March 2009. 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 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 develop more liberal harvests of abundant Pacific white-fronted geese and Aleutian geese. We worked 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 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 participated in the Sea Duck Joint Venture (SDJV) Continental Technical Team (CTT): activities including completing a report on continental sea duck monitoring needs and options, completing a draft revision of the SDJV Strategic Plan, and reviewing the 2009 package of proposed projects and funding allocation recommendations. The Waterfowl Coordinator regularly guided business with the Canadian co-chair and coordinators until the chairmanship rotated to USFWS in January 2009.

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 2008. The Director and Coordinator interacted with the National Steering Committee to summarize and evaluate 2007 surveillance results and implement program adjustment for 2008 and 2009. Both provided liaison with other flyways and state wildlife agencies to improve coordination. From July to October 2008, ADF&G completed its target sampling of live ducks (870), as well as 409 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 2008, the Pacific Flyway Study Committee and Council, and USFWS completed plans to implement Adaptive Harvest Management for Western

Mallards. During 2009 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 2007 HIP surveys of harvest in Alaska to assess accuracy; monitor 2008 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 2009 and 2010.

Accomplishments: The ADF&G Waterfowl Coordinator and Assistant Directors Ron Clarke and Dale Rabe continued work with the Service and rural subsistence regional representatives for the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-management Council, participating in meetings in September 2008 (Clarke); April and June 2009 (Rabe). 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 2009 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 participated in the assessment and review of the statewide harvest survey design 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 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. The Waterfowl Program conducted a training session for hunters in rural communities on the Yukon Delta and North Slope during 2008 and 2009 and provided 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 2009-2010.

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: Assistant director Rabe met with the Pacific Flyway Council, USFWS Refuges, Law Enforcement, and Migratory Birds, and the AVCP Waterfowl Conservation Committee in April 2009 to finalize changes to provisions about law enforcement policies in the Y-K Delta Goose Management Plan. The Y-K Delta Goose Management Plan remains in effect by continuing agreement. 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.

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.

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 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 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.

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.

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 2008, we banded 521 ducks composed of 52% northern pintails, and 35% 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 2008 dusky Canada goose production survey was flown over the west Copper River Delta on July 14. 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 7,238 geese were counted on the survey, including an estimated 3,416 young. Production of young dusky Canada geese on the Copper River Delta in 2008 was 47.2%; the highest production since 1977. ADF&G participated in the

annual meeting with USFS, USFWS and USGS-BRD to review results of 2008 surveys and research on the breeding grounds and coordinate field activities for 2009.

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 2009-2012 in the revised dusky goose management plan.

JOB/ACTIVITY 3: Band and mark dusky Canada geese in late July 2008 as needed; if feasible, capture, band and radio-mark Canada geese from PWS.

Accomplishments: This activity was not conducted in 2008. 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 2008. Leg bands and neck-collars will be deployed in the future (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: From April through June 2009, 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 and 2008 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. Twenty-five radios (approx 49%) were heard at least once during tracking efforts in Alaska. Eleven and 4 radios were detected on the Yukon Delta and Innoko NWRs, respectively, during the molting period. Most 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 2008, we banded 181 ducks composed of 51% northern pintails, and 31% 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 FY09 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: Middleton Island Surveys are conducted every other year. The next survey is scheduled for 2010.

JOB/ACTIVITY 2: Capture and radio-mark Canada goose goslings on Middleton Island.

Accomplishments: ADF&G surveys of Canada geese on Middleton Island over the past decade suggest the adult population has stabilized at around 1,500 birds. Annual productivity for this island population has been very high during this time period averaging about 40% young, suggesting that juveniles are not returning to Middleton Island and may summer at other locations, perhaps on the Copper River Delta, the primary breeding site for dusky Canada geese. To address this question we captured and radio-marked 65 Canada goose goslings on Middleton Island in June-July 2008. Goslings were held in captivity until large enough to wear a neck collar with a mounted VHF radio, then released. Goslings were monitored during the winter (2008-2009) in Oregon and during the spring/summer 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.

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