

**Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Division of Wildlife Conservation**

**Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration
Annual Performance Report
Survey-Inventory Activities
1 July 1996 - 30 June 1997**

Fire and Forest Management Planning for Wildlife Habitat

Dale Haggstrom



Ken Whitten

**Grant W-24-5
Study 20.0
September 1997**

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This is a progress report. Information may be refined at a later date.
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PERFORMANCE REPORT

STATE: Alaska

Statewide/Region III

GRANT NO.: W-24-5

STUDY NO.: 20.0

PROJECT TITLE: Fire and Forest Management Planning for Wildlife Habitat

AUTHOR: Dale Haggstrom

PERIOD: 1 July 1996-30 June 1997

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- 1 Work with state and federal agencies and the private sector to plan and coordinate wildland fire and forest management efforts to maintain or improve habitat for wildlife.
- 2 Encourage limited suppression efforts in remote areas to permit wildland fire to resume its natural role of perpetuating diverse, productive ecosystems.
- 3 Encourage prescribed burning and other appropriate forestry practices in developed areas to offset the negative ecological effects of increased suppression of natural fires.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING THE PROJECT SEGMENT PERIOD

Statewide

ADF&G continued to participate in the Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group (AWFCG) and the Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (MAC Group). The AWFCG is the interagency group that coordinates fire planning, education, prevention, training and research in Alaska. The MAC Group is the interagency group that coordinates regional or statewide changes in fire strategies during the fire season such as bans on open burning, conversion of Modified Action areas to Limited Action, and deviations from fire plan strategies due to unusual circumstances.

As a member of the AWFCG, we helped interview and select an Incident Commander for the Alaska Type I Team. We also proposed numerous changes to the Alaska Consolidated Fire Management Plan.

ADF&G was represented at the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry (DOF), Fall Fire Review in Fairbanks on October 2-3 and the Interagency Fall Fire Review at the Alaska Fire Service on Ft. Wainwright on October 16-17. At the DOF meeting we briefed fire personnel on the Fuel Hazard Reduction Strategy that ADF&G initiated through the AWFCG. Prescribed burning and mechanical treatment of fire-prone vegetation near communities will benefit hunters and other recreationists by enhancing wildlife habitat conditions and improving access.

Dale Haggstrom completed the Advanced Wildland Fire Behavior course presented at the Alaska Fire Service on October 5-11, 1996, by instructors from the Environmental Training Centre in Hinton, Alberta. The purpose for this course was to develop an understanding of the Canadian Forest Fire Danger Rating

System (CFFDRS) and its Fire Behavior Prediction System. This system has been used in Alaska since the late 1980s as a basis for making fire management decisions.

We joined with DOF to guide visiting scientists and fire managers from several other countries on a field trip to the Rosie Creek burn near Fairbanks on June 5, 1997. This field trip was part of Wildland Fire Exchange '97, hosted by the Bureau of Land Management/Alaska Fire Service (BLM/AFS).

We discussed fire effects with participants in the Prescribed Fire For Burn Bosses (RX90) class during a field trip to one of our habitat improvement projects. The class wrote a prescribed fire plan for a portion of this project.

Region III

We continued to work with the DOF and the AFS to evaluate suppression decisions for individual fires adversely affecting ADF&G interests and to seek improved communication and cooperation between suppression staff and ADF&G area biologists. We also continued to work with ADF&G area biologists to facilitate fire-related projects and help resolve problems or concerns.

ADF&G continued to work with the Golden Valley Electrical Association, BLM, and ADNR to encourage location of the planned new electrical intertie from Healy to Fairbanks where it would have minimal effect on fire and habitat management efforts on the Tanana Flats. We opposed proposals that would cross the undeveloped central portions of the Tanana Flats and presented arguments for consolidating new developments such as the Intertie in the general vicinity of the Parks Highway, current power transmission line, and Alaska Railroad.

PROGRESS MEETING PROJECT OBJECTIVES

ADF&G participation in the AWFCG and MAC Group continues to be an effective way to influence land and fire management decisions and policies in favor of wildlife values. We should continue our involvement on these interagency groups.

For the most part, implementation of the Alaska Fire Management Plan has successfully achieved the objective of allowing most wildland fires to burn in the vast, undeveloped and sparsely inhabited reaches of Interior Alaska. This will ensure that forest systems remain diverse, productive, and capable of sustaining diverse and abundant wildlife populations. The remaining obstacles to fully achieving this objective are lagging efforts to update the protection levels accorded various lands to more accurately reflect the values-at-risk, recurring political pressures to increase suppression responses during periods with high fire levels, and hesitancy by some to provide flexibility, especially in Modified Protection areas, to tailor initial attack responses to field situations. When provisions of the plan are implemented too rigidly, opportunities for burning are unnecessarily lost. Each time more suppression effort than is warranted is applied to protect the values-at-risk, suppression activities unnecessarily compromise important ecological functions and increase the probability of less manageable, more expensive, and potentially more damaging fires.

Several Region III management biologists continued to encounter frustrations in dealing with fire managers in their areas. As usual, staff frustrations were mostly due to decisions to suppress fire starts in the Modified Protection areas when there may have been opportunities to allow burning on some fronts without compromising protection needs. This issue is being addressed by reassessing assigned protection levels under the Alaska Fire Management Plan, attempting to reach consensus at the AWFCG level on how to

manage fires in the Modified Protection areas, and improving communications between fire managers and our staff.

The Fuel Hazard Reduction Strategy has received considerable support among fire and land management professionals. However, efforts to acquire the funding necessary for DOF to begin implementing this strategy were not successful during 1996. Without additional funding, preventive efforts to protect developments narrowly focus on more traditional activities, such as fire prevention education and homeowner initiatives to create defensible space around structures. Our strategy is designed to keep fire out of the communities and, consequently, increase our latitude to manage fires on adjacent lands. At the same time, the prescribed burning and mechanical manipulation of forest fuel adjacent to communities will improve its value as wildlife habitat and provide many benefits for members of the communities in terms of jobs, commodities, and recreational opportunities.

Due to lack of progress and extensive commitment of staff time, ADF&G chose not to be actively involved in the planning process to revise the Tanana Valley State Forest Management Plan during this reporting period. DOF reports the various working groups have nearly completed their efforts to prepare alternatives for the planning team. When DOF convenes the planning team during fall 1997 to discuss the issues and recommended solutions, ADF&G will rejoin this planning effort.

SEGMENT PERIOD PROJECT COSTS

	<u>Personnel</u>	<u>Operating</u>	<u>Total</u>
Planned	52.2	2.0	54.2
Actual	54.4	1.5	55.9
Difference	-2.2	0.5	-1.7

Explanation: Mandatory salary/benefit cost increases were underestimated, and travel costs were less than expected.

Submitted by:

Dale A. Haggstrom
Wildlife Biologist II

This map of Alaska displays 26 numbered regions and major cities. The regions are labeled as follows: 18 (Bristol Bay), 22E (Kotzebue), 22D, 22B, 22C, 22A, 23, 24 (Bettles), 26A, 26B, 26C, 25A, 25D, 25B, 20F, 20B (Fairbanks), 20C, 20A, 20D, 20E, 21D, 21B, 21A, 21E, 19D, 19C, 19A, 19B, 17B, 9B, 9A, 15C, 15B, 16A, 16B, 14A, 14B, 13E, 13B, 13C, 13A, 13D, 12, 11, 10, 8, 7, 6D, 6C, 6A, 5B, 5A, 4, 3, 2, 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D, 1E, 1F, 1G, 1H, 1I, 1J, 1K, 1L, 1M, 1N, 1O, 1P, 1Q, 1R, 1S, 1T, 1U, 1V, 1W, 1X, 1Y, 1Z. Major cities labeled include Barrow, Kotzebue, Bettles, Fairbanks, Anchorage, Bethel, Dillingham, Kodiak, Sitka, Petersburg, and Ketchikan. The map also shows Bristol Bay, the Gulf of Alaska, and insets for the Aleutian Islands and the Hawaiian Islands.

The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program consists of funds from a 10% to 11% manufacturer's excise tax collected from the sales of handguns, sporting rifles, shotguns, ammunition, and archery equipment. The Federal Aid program allots funds back to states through a formula based on each state's geographic area and number of paid hunting license holders. Alaska receives a maximum 5% of revenues collected each year. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game uses federal aid funds to help restore, conserve, and manage wild birds and mammals to benefit the public. These funds are also used to educate hunters to develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes for responsible hunting. Seventy-five percent of the funds for this report are from Federal Aid.



Ken Whitten

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