

THE DIVISION OF GAME IN THE
ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME

On January 1, 1960, the Alaska Game Commission's Regulatory Announcement 59, "Regulations Relating to Game and Fur Animals, Birds, and Game Fishes in Alaska, 1959-60; effective for the period July 1, 1959 to June 30, 1960" became obsolete at six months of age. Replacing this lengthily-titled federal document came "Game Regulatory Announcement No. 1" of the year-old State of Alaska. Big and bold on the cover was the simple new title, "ALASKA GAME REGULATIONS 1960."

To produce this new resource-use document and the biological knowledge upon which to base the seasons, bag limits and other regulations it contained, a state agency had a few months before leaped out of more-or-less mandatory knee breeches into long pants. This year, that agency is disbursing about \$1,000,000, eighty per cent of it in the constant unearthing of new biological knowledge on which to base the regulations and the game production improvements of tomorrow.

What is this public agency which spends a million dollars of sportsmen's money annually? What is the money spent on? Why?

The agency is the Division of Game, one of seven branches of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, which in turn is one of twelve cabinet-level departments of the state government. The Division of Game began just nine years ago, as the Division of Predator Investigation and Control in the Alaska Department of Fisheries. This became the Division of Fur and Game in 1957, coexisting for a short time with its predecessor; in 1958 the "Fur and" was dropped, convicted of redundancy.

It has long been established that the states are the "owners" of game within their borders, with power to adopt such laws and regulations as are necessary to protect the public's beneficial interest. In Alaska, management of the birds and mammals according to the sustained yield principle, as required by the State Constitution, is the responsibility of the Division of Game, acting under direction of the Commissioner and Board of Fish & Game. Other units within the Department are responsible for management of sport and commercial fisheries, for enforcement, public information and education, and other essential services.

Headed by a Director, the Division of Game currently consists of three Regional Game Supervisors (at Ketchikan, Fairbanks, and Anchorage) and some 25 other biologists, plus a small supporting staff. "Overhead" and certain service costs (accounting and engineering, for example) are shared with other Divisions or paid for directly, through transfer of funds.

The three regional game supervisors are responsible for translating research findings into management recommendations, (including requests for changes in the game regulations) for most "public relations" functions, and for general supervision of the program in their respective areas. With few exceptions, all of the other game biologists spend the

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vast majority of their time on field research. They're well qualified to do this work: over three-fourths of them (including the regional supervisors) have Master of Science degrees, and two men have the PhD.

College degrees--even advanced degrees--and a three-quarter-million-dollar annual research budget mean little in themselves. What counts is results. So let's take a look at a few.

The 1959 big game hunting regulations--the last federal regulations--listed seasons of

1. Three months and 10 days on deer
2. Slightly more than two months maximum on moose
3. A maximum of less than a month on sheep.

In contrast, the 1963 State regulations provided a full 5-month season on deer, over four months on moose in many areas, and two months on sheep in the Brooks Range. Seasons on other species were comparably more liberal. Bag limits were changed, too: there was a two-ram limit on sheep in the Brooks Range and a two-moose limit in the middle Yukon, and cow moose were legal game in all but a few areas. Many other changes also helped to vastly increase the hunter's opportunity to bag a winter's meat supply or a worthwhile trophy. Although no precise figures are available on pre-statehood game harvests, it's likely that in some cases (moose, for instance) more than twice as many animals are being taken today. And current research makes it clear that such increases are not being taken at the expense of the future: they're simply the result of more knowledge and better utilization and management of game populations.

The research which provides the essential basis for management is entirely financed by sportsmen. Hunting license income is used by the State to obtain Federal Pittman-Robertson funds, which come from an 11 per cent excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition. These "P-R" funds are apportioned to the states in accordance with a formula based on comparative license sales and land area. Alaska, because of its size, would currently be drawing the maximum amount available, except that there isn't enough State money to provide the necessary 25 per cent matching funds. Not all license money is used for matching purposes, because some activities--enforcement and public relations, for example--cannot be financed with Pittman-Robertson funds, under the terms of the federal aid act. Currently, the Division of Game is using about \$200,000 of the available \$420,000 for "matching" purposes.

Among the Divisions's biologists, official activities are generally relegated to one of two classes: "Research" and "Management." The two forms of activity are not as distinct as might at first appear: one biologist might term pre-transplant habitat analysis "research" while another would call it "management." Similarly, hunter interviews, checking stations, mail hunter-success surveys, and many other activities might be classified more on the basis of the classifier's opinions than on any other factor. Generally, though, it's agreed that education and information work, game transplants, habitat manipulation, and such things as presenting and explaining regulatory proposals to the Board of Fish and Game are "management," while range and plant studies, population analysis, disease and parasite investigations, food habits studies, and other such activities are "research." Transplants and habitat alteration are often classed under the sub-management heading of "Development."

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Research and Development projects, in the Division of Game, are often lumped together and referred to as "Federal Aid" or "P-R" activities, for this work is almost all done with matching funds. Overseeing the entire program is the Federal Aid Coordinator, who is responsible for guiding all research and development work as well as seeing to it that all Federal Aid requirements are met. Outlines of the work to be done, including such details as man-days to be spent on each project, equipment needed, objectives, cost, and timing of the work must be submitted to and approved by the federal government. Research reports are required annually.

Current PS&E's (as the planning documents are called, for Plans, Specifications, and Estimates) list 10 major jobs, covering transplants and investigations projects on moose, caribou, deer, bear, waterfowl, upland game birds, sheep, walrus, and sea otter: smaller projects will provide needed information on all the other big game and marine mammal species in Alaska, as well as the more important furbearers and small game animals. Also listed in the PS&E's are projects being conducted by graduate students at the University of Alaska: the Division of Game supplies \$20,000 annually toward the operation of the Alaska Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit there.

Project Leaders are assigned to each of the major research and development jobs and to logical combinations of the smaller projects (radiation, insecticide, disease, and parasite studies, for example).

One of the major results of most research work is the proposing of regulation changes to the Board of Fish and Game. The Board, composed of 10 Alaskans appointed by the Governor, makes its annual decisions on the basis of the Division's research findings, proposals submitted by the public, and a month of public comment on all proposals submitted, as required by the Administrative Procedures Act. Game seasons and bag limits for the July 1-June 30 regulatory year are set in April, except for beaver seasons and bag limits which are set in November or December.

In the future, research results will be used more and more in another way also: as the basis for development work, particularly habitat manipulation. In the other states, where hunting pressure is sufficient to have a noticeable effect on the annual production of some game populations, money is now being spent on such things as range clearing and reseeding, building of ponds for waterfowl, and planting of wildlife food plants. Such projects are ordinarily expensive, and would presently be uneconomical in Alaska where the problem is often not too much hunting but too little. When the time does come for such development projects, though, Alaska's backlog of research data will enable us to make sure the money spent on them is spent wisely.

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