

Dusky Goose Predator Management

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The dusky Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis occidentalis*) nests primarily on the Copper River Delta (CRD), Alaska, and winters in the Pacific Northwest. Predation on the breeding grounds increased as earthquake uplift and long-term succession changed former marsh habitat into large areas of shrub and tree cover favorable to predators. Low recruitment caused by nest and gosling predation was primarily responsible for long-term population decline. On the wintering grounds harvest restrictions on dusky geese limit managers' ability to control population size and costly crop depredation of other Canada goose subspecies. As a result, Alaska managers have come under pressure to assess predator management to date and recommend control options on the breeding grounds.

Since 1987 ADFG has increasingly liberalized harvest regulations for dusky predators. Hunting and trapping have limited the population sizes of brown bears and wolves on the west CRD, and probably mink and coyotes along the highway corridor. Bald eagles are now the primary predator of duskies, responsible for more than 70% of observed nest depredations, compared to approximately 13% for brown bears and 5% for canids. Eagles and mink are the primary gosling predators. With no regulatory authority over eagles, and given record-high dusky productivity during the last three years, ADFG proposes the following limited actions: (1) maintain Egg Island as a coyote-free, brood-rearing area; (2) promote the harvesting of mink and coyotes by trappers to help conserve duskies; and (3) control mink by spring trapping if deemed necessary and feasible.



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