

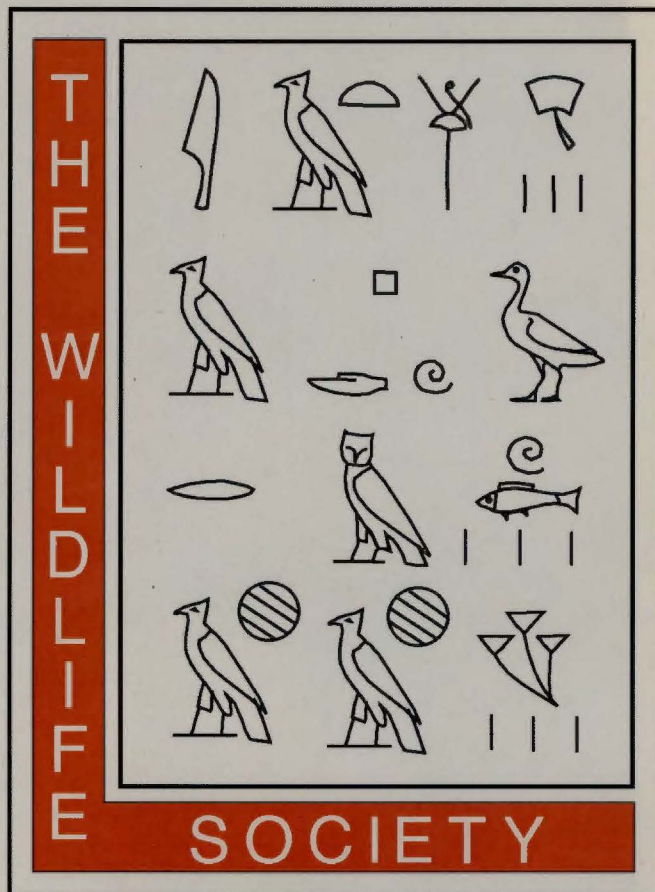
(42) MCNEIL RIVER BROWN BEARS: USING LONGITUDINAL DATA TO EXAMINE DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

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Abstract: The primary management purpose for McNeil River State Game Sanctuary (MRS GS) is to protect and maintain the seasonal population of brown bears (*Ursus arctos*) that uses the area. Until recently there were no formalized guidelines for quantifying acceptable population levels or specifying management actions to take to address changes. Although salmon runs at MRS GS are heavily utilized by bears as well as subject to commercial fishing, there has never been a specific allocation of salmon for bears. Managing on escapement basis alone without monitoring the ursine population and its use of this resource may have implications well beyond the commercial fishery. Annual observations at MRS GS suggest that bear use of the area has declined over the last decade, after increasing in the late 1970s and through most of the 1980s. As part of a study in which I examined chum salmon consumption by bears at MRS GS, bears were observed, identified, and classified (gender, age class) during summers from 1976 through 2003. The total number of bears using MRS GS has doubled in 28 years, although ratios of different classes have changed. In particular, the ratio of adult females to adult males has declined 14% over the period of these observations. I discuss changes in the different classes of bears and their implications for MRS GS management.

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