

Wolf Management Report and Plan, Game Management Unit 14C:

Report Period 1 July 2010–30 June 2015, and
Plan Period 1 July 2015–30 June 2020

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Species management reports and plans provide information about species that are hunted or trapped and management actions, goals, recommendations for those species, and plans for data collection. Detailed information is prepared for each species every 5 years by the area management biologist for game management units in their areas, who also develops a plan for data collection and species management for the next 5 years. This type of report is not produced for species that are not managed for hunting or trapping or for areas where there is no current or anticipated activity. Unit reports are reviewed and approved for publication by regional management coordinators and are available to the public via the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's public website.

This species management report and plan was reviewed and approved for publication by Cynthia Wardlow, Management Coordinator for Region II for the Division of Wildlife Conservation.

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Purpose of this Report

This report provides a record of survey and inventory management activities for wolves in Unit 14C for the 5 regulatory years (RY) 2010–2014 and plans for survey and inventory management activities for the next 5 regulatory years, 2015–2019. A regulatory year (RY) begins 1 July and ends 30 June (e.g., RY10 = 1 July 2010–30 June 2011). This report is produced primarily to provide agency staff with data and analysis to help guide and record its own efforts but is also provided to the public to inform them of wildlife management activities. In 2016 the Alaska Department of Fish and Game’s (ADF&G) Division of Wildlife Conservation launched this 5-year report to more efficiently report on trends and describe potential changes in data collection activities. It replaces the wolf management reports of survey and inventory activities that were previously produced every 3 years. The next 5-year wolf management report is scheduled for publication in 2021.

I. RY10–RY14 Management Report

Management Area

Unit 14C covers approximately 1,912 mi² of Southcentral Alaska and is located primarily within the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA). The MOA is a mosaic of wildlife habitat and human development. While the MOA is Alaska’s most populous urban area, with substantial residential and industrial development, it is also characterized by large tracts of natural lands, including Chugach State Park, Chugach National Forest, the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge, and Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER, an 84,000-acre military base). Even the highly developed portions of the MOA support wildlife habitat in vegetated greenbelts, stream corridors, and large municipal parks.

Summary of Status, Trend, Management Activities, and History of Wolves in Unit 14C

Wolf numbers in Unit 14C were probably low to moderate in the 1950s and early 1960s, primarily due to predator control efforts by the federal government (Rausch 1967). As predator control ceased, wolves recovered during the 1970s. Excessive winter moose mortality, caused by deep snows during the winters of 1989–1990 and 1994–1995, helped sustain wolf packs in the area during the 1990s. The last aerial wolf survey conducted in Unit 14C was in 1995. This survey documented 4 packs using 14C; a fifth pack is believed to have formed shortly after the survey was flown (Sinnott 1996). Currently, it is estimated that there are still 4 or 5 packs using the area.

Since 1995, individual wolves in the vicinity of Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER), Eagle River, and Birchwood have displayed increasingly habituated and aggressive behavior toward humans and pets. Negative human–wolf encounters have increased since 2007 and since the winter of 2007–2008, several dogs have been killed or injured by wolves in this area. In May 2010, 2 female runners were pursued until forced to climb a tree by 2 wolves on Artillery Road on JBER. The runners were accompanied by a dog, but these 2 wolves reportedly ignored the dog and focused their attention on the humans. Although wolf attacks on humans are rare,

previous wolf attacks in Alaska by individual wolves which exhibited similar habituated and aggressive behaviors have occurred (McNay 2002, Butler et al, 2011).

Management Direction

EXISTING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PLANS

Direction for the management of Unit 14C wolves was outlined in the Southcentral wildlife management plan (ADF&G 1976). This direction has been reviewed and modified through public comments, staff recommendations, and Board of Game actions over the years. A record of these changes can be found in the division's management report series. The plan portion of this report contains the current management plan for wolves in Unit 14C.

In 2000, a wildlife plan called "Living with Wildlife in Anchorage: A Cooperative Planning Effort" was created in an attempt to outline common goals for Anchorage wildlife management. The planning effort was initiated and led by ADF&G, and involved a team from local, state, and federal agencies with wildlife responsibilities, as well as people from various wildlife-related interest groups and members of the public. This plan was intended to be used as a guide as Anchorage continued to be developed.

GOALS

- Provide an opportunity to view, photograph, and enjoy the presence of wolves in Unit 14C.
- Provide maximum opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping wolves.

CODIFIED OBJECTIVES

There are no codified objectives for wolves in Unit 14C.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Population Objective

- Maintain a healthy wolf population in Unit 14C.

Human-Use Objective

- Provide for both consumptive and nonconsumptive uses.

MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Population Status and Trend

ACTIVITY 1.1. Monitor pack behavior and numbers.

Data Needs

Wolves experience very little to no hunting/trapping pressure in Unit 14C, so there is very little chance that wolves in Unit 14C are at risk of being overharvested. However, given their opportunistic nature and proximity to people and domestic pets, there is a possibility that wolves can become acclimated to feeding on domestic pets and acting aggressively toward humans. Anytime a wild animal loses its fear of humans, particularly animals that live and hunt in packs, it is a cause for concern. Receiving reports on wolf-human interactions enables us to determine if packs or individuals are exhibiting behaviors that may turn into a public safety risk.

Methods

Given the lack of harvest in Unit 14C, we do not conduct surveys specifically for wolves. Most of our information is anecdotal and comes from staff reports while conducting field work (mostly aerial surveys) focused on other species, and from reports of sightings received from the public.

Results and Discussion

In RY10, reports from the public concerning aggressive and “following” behavior by wolves on JBER peaked and resulted in ADF&G action due to the significant threat to public safety (See *Other Mortality* below). After a portion of these wolves were removed no further incidents were documented during this reporting period.

Recommendations for Activity 1.1.

We recommend the continued documentation of public and staff reports on wolf location, pack size, and behavior.

2. Mortality-Harvest Monitoring and Regulations

ACTIVITY 2.1. Monitor harvest through sealing records.

Data Needs

Fursealing data is needed annually to assess trends in harvest, pack size, the location of harvest, and hunter/trapper effort.

Methods

Wolves harvested by trappers/hunters are required to be sealed by ADF&G or an ADF&G appointed sealer within 30 days of the close of the season.

Season and Bag Limit

Unit 14C Trapping

<u>Areas</u>	<u>Season Dates</u>	<u>Limit</u>
JBER Mgmt. Area	Closed to trapping by military regulation	
Eagle River Mgmt. Area	Closed to trapping	
Anchorage Mgmt. Area	Closed to trapping	
Eklutna Lake Mgmt. Area	Closed to trapping	
Anchorage Costal Wildlife Refuge	Closed to trapping	
Remainder of Chugach State Park	Closed to trapping	
Birchwood Mgmt. Area	10 Nov–last day of Feb	No limit
Remainder of 14C	10 Nov–last day of Feb	No limit

Unit 14C Hunting

<u>Areas</u>	<u>Season Dates</u>	<u>Limit</u>
Remainder (Outside of mgmt. areas)	10 Aug–30 Apr	5

Results and Discussion

Harvest by Hunters and Trappers

During this reporting period no wolves were harvested by hunters or trappers.

Other Mortality

Nine wolves were removed from JBER by ADF&G and JBER Conservation staff during the winter of 2010–2011. Wolves on JBER had exhibited increasingly aggressive behavior, first toward pets, then toward humans. This culminated in an incident in May 2010 during which 2 female runners were “treed” for 45 minutes by 2 wolves on Artillery Road. The wolves were considered a significant threat to public safety on the military installation and in surrounding residential areas. Therefore, during the winter of 2010–2011 ADF&G biologists, working in cooperation with military personnel, removed 9 wolves from JBER via trapping and ground-based shooting efforts. The operation was deemed to be successful, due to the removal of specific wolves thought to be involved in aggressive incidents and the reduction of wolf numbers in the area. Since this public safety operation, no incidents involving aggression toward humans and pets have been reported.

Alaska Board of Game Actions and Emergency Orders

No Board of Game changes were made during this reporting period.

Recommendations for Activity 2.1

We recommend the continued monitoring of sealing records.

3. Habitat Assessment-Enhancement

No habitat assessment-enhancement is being conducted or is needed in Unit 14C for wolves.

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

Conflicts between humans and wolves have increased in recent years, likely as a result of frequent encounters. The public safety action on JBER appears to have been successful in removing aggressive individuals and reducing conflicts. Due to the intersections of wolf habitat with residential and recreational areas in Unit 14C, however, it is possible that more wolves could become aggressive or habituated in the future. To prevent future problems, educational efforts to advise area residents of precautions to take to avoid encouraging aggressive or habituated behavior in wolves should be implemented.

Data Recording and Archiving

- 14C wolf harvest data are stored in WinfoNet, a Division of Wildlife Conservation's data system.
- Digital copies of the JBER public safety documents regarding wolves are stored in Anchorage at the following location
(O:)/DWC/common/Anch_Wildlife_Management/BGDIF/Wolves
- Hard copies of public wolf sightings are stored on wildlife reporting sheets in the Anchorage ADF&G office, in rooms B-2 and 2009.

Agreements

- None

Permitting

- None

Conclusions and Management Recommendations

Anecdotal reports of wolf sightings, along with healthy moose numbers, indicate that wolf populations are at sustainable levels in Unit 14C. No changes in seasons or bag limits are recommended. Given the difficulty in managing hunting and trapping within the populated portions of Unit 14C it would be difficult to open additional areas to the take of wolves, but it is

possible that a weapons restricted season could be opened on JBER. Considering the weapons restrictions on base, the most practical scenario may be a muzzleloader hunt in the portion of JBER north of Eagle River.

Unit 14C has very little harvest of wolves. The primary management needs are to monitor wolf populations, be responsive to public reports of aggression, and take steps to manage any problems that arise.

II. Project Review and RY15–RY19 Plan

Review of Management Direction

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

The existing management direction and goals appropriately direct management of wolves in Unit 14C. The management direction for Unit 14C ensures that wolves will persist as part of the natural ecosystem and ensures continued consumptive and nonconsumptive opportunities. There is no indication that the long-term sustainability of the wolf population or that statewide goals (ADF&G 2002) for human uses cannot be met. There are no area-specific issues in Unit 14C that require a departure from statewide goals for wolf management.

GOALS

No change.

CODIFIED OBJECTIVES

No change.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

No change.

Population Objective

- Maintain a healthy wolf population in Unit 14C.

Human Use Objective

- Provide for both consumptive and non-consumptive uses.

REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Population Status and Trend

ACTIVITY 1.1. Monitor pack behavior and numbers.

Data Needs

- No change.

Methods

- No change.

2. Mortality-Harvest Monitoring

ACTIVITY 2.1. Monitor harvest through sealing records.

Data Needs

- No change.

Methods

- No change.

3. Habitat Assessment-Enhancement

No change.

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

Data Recording and Archiving

- 14C wolf harvest data will be stored in WinfoNet.
- Digital copies of any public safety documents involving wolves will be stored in Anchorage at the following location:
O:/DWC/common/Anch_Wildlife_Management/BGDIF/Wolves
- Hard copies of public wolf sightings will be stored on wildlife reporting sheets in the Anchorage ADF&G office, in rooms B-2 and 2009.

Agreements

None

Permitting

None

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