

# **Wolf Management Report and Plan, Game Management Units 25A, 25B, 25D, 26B, and 26C:**

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

**Jason R. Caikoski**





## Wolf Management Report and Plan, Game Management Units 25A, 25B, 25D, 26B, and 26C:

Report Period 1 July 2010–30 June 2015, and

Plan Period 1 July 2015–30 June 2020

**PREPARED BY:**

Jason R. Caikoski  
Wildlife Biologist II

**APPROVED BY:**

Doreen I. Parker McNeill  
Management Coordinator

**REVIEWED BY:**

Jackie J. Kephart  
Assistant Management Coordinator

Laura A. McCarthy  
Publications Specialist II

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Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Division of Wildlife Conservation  
PO Box 115526  
Juneau, AK 99811-5526



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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 area, 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 website.

This species management report and plan was reviewed and approved for publication by Doreen I. Parker McNeill, Region III Management Coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Conservation, Fairbanks.

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## Purpose of this Report

This report provides a record of survey and inventory management activities for wolves (*Canis lupus*) in Units 25A, 25B, 25D, 26B, and 26C (approximately 73,756 mi<sup>2</sup>) for the previous 5 regulatory years (RY; RY10–RY14) and plans for survey and inventory management activities in the 5 years following the end of that period (RY15–RY19). A regulatory year 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 (DWC) launched this 5-year report to more efficiently report on trends and describe potential changes in data collection activities over the next 5 years. It replaces the wolf management reports of survey and inventory activities that were previously produced every 3 years and supersedes the 1976 draft Alaska wildlife management plans (ADF&G 1976).

## I. RY10–RY14 Management Report

### Management Area

Unit 25D consists of the upper Yukon River Valley also known as the Yukon Flats. Major drainages within the unit include the main stem of the upper Yukon, Hodzana, Hadweenzik, lower Chandalar, Christian, lower Birch, and lower Porcupine river drainages. Unit 25B is situated to the east of Unit 25D and includes the upper Porcupine, Black, Kandik, and Nation river drainages. Unit 25A consists of the south slope of the Brooks Range from the Canada border, west to include all of the Chandalar river drainage. Other large drainages within the unit include the Sheenjek and Coleen rivers. Units 26B and 26C consist of the north slope of the Brooks Range and coastal plain from the Canada border, west to the Itkillik river drainage.

### Summary of Status, Trend, Management Activities, and History of Wolves in Units 25A, 25B, 25D, 26B, and 26C

Wolves are present throughout this management area, utilizing boreal forest, the Brooks Range mountains, and Arctic slope tundra habitats. Primary prey are moose (*Alces alces*), caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*), and Dall sheep (*Ovis dalli*). Wolves are generally less abundant compared to other parts of Alaska because resident populations of prey such as moose occur at low abundance in most areas and large migratory caribou herds may only be seasonably available to wolves.

The aerial track–reconnaissance method (Stephenson 1978; Gasaway et al. 1983) has been the primary method for estimating wolf density across the management area. Estimates of wolf density have been rarely conducted in Units 26B and 26C. The most recent survey in Unit 26B occurred in 2003 when wolf density was estimated at 4.8 wolves/1,000 mi<sup>2</sup> (1.9 wolves/1,000 km<sup>2</sup>; Caikoski 2009). Unit 26C has not been surveyed since the 1980s, but Garner and Reynolds (1986) reported a density of 5.7–8.3 wolves/1,000 mi<sup>2</sup> (2.2–3.2 wolves/1,000 km<sup>2</sup>) at that time. Population density estimates for portions of Unit 25D and 25B occurred in 1983,

1984, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2006, and 2009. Methods, survey areas, and results for those surveys are described by Nowlin (1985), Stephenson (2006) and Caikoski (2009, 2012a). However, the most recent survey, which occurred in 2009, resulted in a density estimate of 11.4–13.9 wolves/1,000 mi<sup>2</sup> (4.4–5.3/1,000 km<sup>2</sup>; Caikoski 2012a).

Sources and extent of natural mortality have been largely unstudied across the reporting area. However, small packs, small litters, and low pup survival are characteristic of wolf populations in areas where prey are relatively scarce (Mech et al. 1998). Intraspecific strife (Adams et al. 2008) is probably the major cause of natural mortality among adult wolves in northeastern Alaska. Along coastal areas in Units 26B and 26C, rabies provides an additional source of natural mortality (Zarnke and Ballard 1987).

During 2008–2011, ADF&G conducted an intensive management feasibility assessment to evaluate the efficacy of implementing an intensive management plan to reduce predation on moose in western Unit 25D. A part of the feasibility assessment included evaluating whether an increase in wolf harvest to temporarily reduce wolf density in Unit 25D and improve moose survival rates were achievable and sustainable. The results of the feasibility assessment concluded that public-based efforts to reduce wolf abundance to levels sufficient to improve moose survival was not currently possible. As a result, current management direction is to monitor wolf harvest and provide for maximum opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping wolves. Caikoski (2012b) provides a more comprehensive description of the results of the feasibility assessment.

## **Management Direction**

### **GOAL**

G1. Provide sustained opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping wolves.

### **MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES**

There are no management objectives for Unit 25A, 25B, 25D, 26B, and 26C.

### **MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES**

#### 1. Population Status and Trend

None.

#### 2. Mortality–Harvest Monitoring and Regulations

ACTIVITY 2. Review annual harvest.

We will monitor wolf numbers and population characteristics through incidental sightings, hunter and trapper interviews, and evaluation of sealing documents.



### *Data Needs*

Harvest of wolves in Units 25A, 25B, 25D, 26B, and 26C are low; therefore, we currently need only to monitor reported harvest to assess achievement of our goal for sustained opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping wolves.

### *Methods*

We used harvest database queries through ADF&G's Wildlife Information Network (WinfoNet) to construct summaries of reported harvest from fur sealing records.

### *Results*

Total reported harvest for RY10–RY14 are as follows: Unit 25A averaged 26 wolves/year (range 13–35); Unit 25B averaged 5 wolves/year (range 2–7); Unit 25D averaged 19 wolves/year (range 11–32); Unit 26B averaged 21 wolves/year (range 9–36); and Unit 26C averaged 4 wolves/year (range 0–9). The goal of sustained opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping wolves has been maintained.

### *Alaska Board of Game Actions and Emergency Orders*

No regulation changes were adopted during RY10–RY14.

### *Recommendations for Activity 2*

Continue to monitor reported harvest.

### 3. Habitat Assessment–Enhancement

None.

## **NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS**

### Data Recording and Archiving

Harvest data will be stored on an internal database housed on a server (<http://winfonet.alaska.gov/index.cfm>). Electronic copies of data and reports will be stored in the WinfoNet – Data Archive. Project Title: Wolf Management Program Units 25ABD, 26BC. Project ID: GMU 25ABD, 26BC Wolves. Primary Region: Region III.

### Agreements

None.

### Permitting

None.

## **Conclusions and Management Recommendations**

We achieved our management goal to provide a sustained opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping wolves. With low harvest of wolves and difficult access, we recommend continuing with the approach of monitoring annual reported harvest and being attentive to public concerns.

## **II. Project Review and RY15–RY19 Plan**

### **Review of Management Direction**

#### **MANAGEMENT DIRECTION**

There are no changes in the management direction. We will continue to monitor annual harvest and listen to public concerns, should any arise.

#### **GOALS**

No changes from the report section.

#### **CODIFIED OBJECTIVES**

##### Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Uses

None.

##### Intensive Management

None.

#### **MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES**

No changes from the report section.

#### **REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES**

##### 1. Population Status and Trend

None.

##### 2. Mortality–Harvest Monitoring

No changes from the report section.

##### 3. Habitat Assessment–Enhancement

None.

## NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

None.

### Data Recording and Archiving

Sealing data are recorded and archived through ADF&G's Wildlife Information Network (WinfoNet) database housed on a server (<http://winfonet.alaska.gov/index.cfm>) and through this report.

### Agreements

None.

### Permitting

None.

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