



News Release

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Kenai Peninsula Deer: Updates and Plans for the Future

(Soldotna) – In late September and early October 2025, the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) translocated 19 Sitka black-tailed deer (14 does and 5 bucks) from Sitkinak Island to the south end of the Kenai Peninsula near Port Chatham. Deer were held in a soft release pen for a short time and monitored while they recovered from sedation and then released.

“The goal of this is to provide hunting opportunity and food security for Alaskans,” said Doug Vincent-Lang, Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game.

To evaluate success, the translocated deer have been monitored daily since release through GPS collars for dispersal and survival. One doe swam to a nearby island and lived there for almost two months according to collar data. Most of the deer remained within five miles of each other during the last rutting season, increasing the chances of successful breeding. In June and early July, each of the three does alive at that time were located from a fixed-wing aircraft in hopes of spotting fawns with them. With their small size and cryptic coloration, fawns are difficult to see even in ideal conditions. No fawns were observed during the flights but may have been present and obscured by vegetation.

There have been 13 confirmed mortalities in the transplanted deer population including two drownings, one coyote predation event, one from non-infectious pneumonia, and one from hypothermia after the deer ended up in a creek with steep banks and was unable to get out. The most recent mortality occurred in late July; a deceased doe who had drowned was located by hikers. Weather conditions last winter were especially long

and harsh for much of Alaska, including the south end of the Kenai Peninsula. Nine of the 13 mortalities occurred between November and the end of April. As of July 28, there are two does and three bucks with active GPS collars on the Kenai Peninsula. One additional buck slipped his collar shortly after release and his status remains unknown.

The collars from deceased deer have been recovered by ADF&G biologists and, when possible, the carcasses have been necropsied. Some carcasses have been heavily scavenged even within 24–48 hours post-mortality, with scavenging signs primarily from birds (ravens and eagles), coyotes, wolverines, and one with some bear sign at the site. Eight deer were unable to be fully necropsied due to the amount of scavenging before the collars were recovered but were still investigated by biologists. When leg bones were present for examination, there were no signs of malnutrition based on the bone marrow. The exact cause of death for these animals remains unknown.

The department is planning to move an additional 15-20 deer this fall, primarily does, to supplement the remaining animals, using the same method of net gunning from helicopters. The introduction of even a small number of deer can be the start of a large population. The Kodiak Island deer population started in 1935 with a transplant of five does and four bucks, in addition to three does and two bucks from the earlier Long Island introduction. Legal deer hunting on Kodiak Island began in 1953. While it may be decades before the Kenai Peninsula deer population is robust enough to be harvested, progress is being made toward that goal.

There is currently no hunting season for deer on the Kenai Peninsula. Report any deer sightings to the Soldotna (907-262-9368) or Homer ADF&G office (907-235-1725).

To learn more about the history of game transplants in Alaska, visit:

https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/home/library/pdfs/wildlife/research_pdfs/game_transplants_alaska.pdf

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