

**FEDERAL AID ANNUAL  
RESEARCH PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME  
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION  
PO Box 115526  
Juneau, AK 99811-5526

**ANNUAL SURVEY AND INVENTORY**

**STATE:** Alaska

**GRANT AND SEGMENT NO.** W-33

**PROJECT NO.** 35.0

**PERIOD:** July 1, 2013 – June 30, 2016

**PROJECT LOCATION:** Statewide

**PROJECT TITLE:** Status, Public Use, and Management of Small Game Populations in Alaska

**REPORT DESCRIPTION:** This performance report describes small game program survey and inventory, research, management, and education activities for Fiscal Year 2014. Activities are listed by objective.

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**I. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED TOWARDS PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

All project objectives were addressed and work completed during this reporting period.

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Receive recommendations and assist ADF&G management staff in addressing local or regional small game issues.

**JOB/ACTIVITY:** A good relationship has been built between the small game program and area management biologists statewide. The program has developed research questions, management proposals, and educational materials based on these relationships to assist and ease existing staff workload. Program staff attended 1 Board of Game (BOG) meeting in winter 2014 to assist management staff with various small game related questions. Additionally, program staff met with local Advisory Committees (AC) to address small game concerns and provide relevant data to inform ACs interested in crafting small game proposals for the 2014-15 BOG cycle.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Design and implement springtime survey techniques that will provide more timely and useful abundance trend data for managers in select locations on and off the road system.

**JOB/ACTIVITY:** A total of 3 ruffed, and 2 sharp-tailed grouse, 18 willow, and 13 rock ptarmigan abundance surveys were completed during the spring or summer of 2014. Attempts were made to establish additional non-road accessible willow and rock ptarmigan survey locations during spring 2014; however due to continued heavy snow cover surveys could not be established. Beginning in May 2014, ADF&G and the

University of Alaska-Fairbanks (UAF) Cooperative Extension identified new sharp-tailed grouse survey locations near Delta Junction and Tok.

OBJECTIVE 3: Implement of harvest composition monitoring through wing and tail collections of grouse and ptarmigan and hunter effort statewide.

JOB/ACTIVITY: A total of 1,130 wings were collected during regulatory year 2013. All 7 species of Alaskan grouse and ptarmigan were represented in the collection from 17 of the 26 game management units (GMU). A program goal is to increase hunter awareness and participation in wing collections as it is a cost effective way to collect harvest composition data and understand which statewide grouse and ptarmigan populations are being exploited.

OBJECTIVE 4: Create and maintain an effective network of volunteers throughout the state to accomplish program goals that include fall harvest samples and hunter effort questionnaire.

JOB/ACTIVITY: Since the inception of the program passionate volunteers have been recruited to assist with education programs (Becoming and Outdoors Women-BOW), completing ruffed grouse drumming surveys, and provide objective and sound field and hunter effort reports. In May, the program began its second statewide small game hunter survey. The survey was mailed to 9,500 Alaska resident and non-resident license holders in an effort to better understand hunter effort, harvest, and use of Alaska's small game resources. Results from this survey will be available in fall of 2014.

OBJECTIVE 5: Promote the development of a research plan with universities in Alaska, federal agencies, and others when a need is recognized and funding is available.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1: Beginning in spring 2013, a rock ptarmigan study was initiated by the small game program to better understand their movement and distribution relative to road access in GMU 13B. This study was initiated as a result of a BOG proposal that prompted additional research before the BOG could make an informed decision regarding changes to current regulations in GMU 13B. The small game program has also established a strong relationship with professors at the UAF on other research efforts (Objective 6). Beginning in May 2014, the program also completed the first year of a research project examining rock ptarmigan breeding densities at eagle Summit. During the winter of 2014-15 the program plans to add a capture and radio collaring effort to further understand movement and distribution of this heavily hunted population.

OBJECTIVE 6: Begin a 3-year research project examining willow ptarmigan distribution and seasonal movement patterns. This will require the capture of live willow ptarmigan for which an Animal Care and Use Committee Plan will be approved prior to commencing field work.

JOB/ACTIVITY: In winter 2012, the small game program secured funding through the Alaska Energy Authority to support research in cooperation with UAF on the distribution and movements of willow ptarmigan near the proposed Watana hydroelectric facility. In January 2013, a graduate student (UAF) took the lead on this study and in spring 2013, over 40 willow ptarmigan were captured and radio collared. During spring 2014, another 60 birds were captured and collared. This project will continue for 1 additional field

season. The Small Game Program (Project No. XX) has supported this study with personnel resources and periodic use of capture equipment.

OBJECTIVE 7: Develop educational programs, seminars, and interactive material with ADF&G staff and non-governmental organizations on small game hunting and life history for the public.

JOB/ACTIVITY: This project has supported numerous efforts to provide educational material to the public including the creation of videos displaying how we capture rock and willow ptarmigan, a new grouse and ptarmigan poster, funding the reprinting of the grouse and ptarmigan handbook, and creating small game hunter kiosks at the Anchorage, Palmer, Fairbanks, and Juneau offices.

This project has also provided numerous public presentations on Alaska small game and hunting techniques to sportsman shows, school groups, Wildlife Wednesday series at the Alaska Zoo, and to various venues with the public. It also supported the Becoming and Outdoors Woman (BOW) program with staff, funds, and materials. In September 2013, the first annual Beyond BOW Small Game Hunting event was created by the project.

OBJECTIVE 8: Complete an annual small game report that documents current status of studied populations, management issues, research studies, and future goals.

JOB/ACTIVITY: This report was completed in August 2014 and reviews and documents all of the results from the statewide wing collections, springtime abundance surveys, recent BOG action, and other management concerns.

## **II. SIGNIFICANT DEVIATIONS AND/OR ADDITIONAL FEDERAL AID-FUNDED WORK NOT DESCRIBED ABOVE THAT WAS ACCOMPLISHED ON THIS PROJECT DURING THIS SEGMENT PERIOD**

None.

## **III. PUBLICATIONS**

Merizon, R. A. 2013. Status of grouse, ptarmigan, and hare in Alaska, 2013. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Wildlife Management Report, ADF&G/DWC/WMR-2013-3. Palmer, Alaska.

Carroll, C. J., and R. A. Merizon. 2014. Status of grouse, ptarmigan, and hare in Alaska, 2014. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Wildlife Management Report, ADF&G/DWC/WMR-2014-1. Palmer, Alaska.

## **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT**

None.

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**DATE:** 5 September 2014