

**ANNUAL SURVEY AND INVENTORY**

**STATE:** Alaska

**GRANT AND SEGMENT NO.** W-33-11

**PROJECT NO.:** 14.0 Wolf

**PERIOD:** 1 July 2012 – 30 June 2013

**PROJECT LOCATION:** Statewide: Activities in Regions I, II, III, IV and V

**PROJECT TITLE:** The Status of Alaska Wolves and Factors Influencing Their Populations

**REPORT DESCRIPTION:** This performance report describes wolf survey and inventory activities. Activities are listed by region and game management unit.

---

**Region I—Southeast Alaska**

**Regionwide Activities**

**ACTIVITY 1:** Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on wolf management.

Information and data on wolf harvest and wolf populations was used in the spring 2013 Board of Game meeting.

**ACTIVITY 2:** Collect biological data when wolf pelts are presented for sealing.

Area staff, other ADF&G staff, Alaska Wildlife Troopers, and designated sealing agents sealed wolf pelts during the regulatory year. About 189 wolf pelts were sealed from the region. During sealing, we acquire information on pelt size, sex, and color.

**ACTIVITY 3:** Obtain an age structure of the wolves harvested through examination of foreleg bones attached to pelts presented for sealing.

We no longer require the foreleg during sealing so no data has been collected under this activity.

**ACTIVITY 4:** Contact reliable observers to obtain general information about the status and trends of wolf populations, including the use of an annual trapper survey.

This work was done throughout the region as opportunities permitted.

## **Activities by Unit**

### **Unit 1C**

ACTIVITY 1: Monitor wolves at Gustavus through the use of downloadable GPS radio collars.

Attempts were made to collar additional wolves without success.

### **Unit 2**

ACTIVITY 1: Collect information on wolves presented for sealing, and solicit anecdotal information about wolf populations.

This was accomplished during the reporting period.

ACTIVITY 2: Closely monitor wolf harvest during season through information gathered during sealing process.

The wolf harvest is monitored in season through sealing, and this recorded harvest is compared against the allowable harvest of 60 wolves.

**Submitted by:** Neil L. Barten, Region I Management Coordinator

## **Region II—Southcentral Alaska**

### **Region II**

#### **Regionwide:**

ACTIVITY: Collect harvest data when wolf pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters.

All wolves taken in Region II were presented to staff for specimen collection (if necessary) and sealing. Wolves taken in other parts of the state were often sealed in region II offices. See area specific activities for additional information.

ACTIVITY: Monitor the wolf harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires, and contact with trappers and hunters.

These are standard activities accomplished in each office. See Area specific activities.

ACTIVITY: Conduct aerial surveys to estimate wolf population densities, pack sizes and distribution.

Surveys were completed on the Kenai Peninsula during this period. See the activities under GMU 7 and 15.

ACTIVITY: Develop population estimates using the “Sample Unit Probability Estimator” (SUPE) technique in select areas.

No surveys of this type were completed during this period due in part to poor weather conditions and other higher priorities.

ACTIVITY: Examine pelts presented for sealing for the presence of louse infestation.

All wolf pelts presented to ADF&G and appointed sealers were examined for the presence of lice. Wolves infected with lice currently exist only in the Kenai Peninsula within Region II.

ACTIVITY : Draft a triennial wolf management report.

Wolf management report was prepared and submitted for publication in 2012. Area staff continued to collect information for publication of next management report in 2015.

ACTIVITY : Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on wolf management.

Staff routinely interact with federal staff and discuss management of wolves relative to the respective regulatory systems. Staff attended the state Board of Game meeting during this reporting period.

### **Activities by Unit:**

#### **Unit 6**

ACTIVITY : Three wolves (2 males and 1 female) were harvested in Unit 6 during the reporting period.

ACTIVITY : Recorded observations of wolves during moose surveys. No wolves were recorded during the 2013 moose survey which was aborted due to deteriorating snow conditions. No other wolf packs were reported or observed.

#### **Units 7&15**

ACTIVITY: Forty-eight wolves were taken by trappers and hunters during the reporting period in Game Management Units (GMUs) 7 and 15. Six wolves were taken in GMU 7 and 15, 5 and 22 in subunits 15A, 15B, and 15C, respectively. An increase was seen in the number of wolves taken by firearms, likely a reflection of an increased interest in predator calling.

ACTIVITY : Aerial surveys were conducted in GMUs 15A (February) and 15C (March). 15A surveys yielded an estimate of 45-50 wolves and 15C surveys yielded an estimate of 35-40 wolves.

ACTIVITY : Subjective examination of hides indicate pelt condition appears to have improved in the past few years but lice are still present on most hides examined.

#### **Unit 14C**

ACTIVITY : No wolves were reported for the second year in a row from Unit 14C.

ACTIVITY : No wolves were taken in GMU 14C therefore no wolf pelts were examined for louse infestation.

**Submitted by: Gino Del Frate, Management Coordinator, Region II**

**6 September 2013**

### **Region III—Interior Alaska**

#### **Regionwide Activities**

ACTIVITY 1: Monitor the wolf harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires, and contact with trappers and hunters.

Monitored preliminary harvest of 492 wolves through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires and contacts with trappers and hunters.

ACTIVITY 2: Collect harvest information when wolf pelts presented for sealing by trappers and hunters and analyze harvest data.

Collected harvest data when 492 wolf pelts were presented for sealing by trappers and hunters and analyzed harvest data.

ACTIVITY 3: Provide wolf management information to State and Federal regulatory processes.

Provided information to 15 State fish and game advisory committees, the Alaska Board of Game, and 2 Federal regional advisory councils.

#### **Activities by Unit**

##### **Unit 19**

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys.

Planned but did not conduct a wolf population estimation survey due to lack of personnel time.

##### **Unit 20A, 20B, 25C, 20F, and 25C**

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys.

Conducted wolf population estimate in northern portion (8909 km<sup>2</sup>) of Unit 20A (preliminary estimate of 155 wolves or 17 wolves/1,000 km<sup>2</sup>).

**Unit 20D**

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys.

Conducted a spring 2011 partial wolf survey, estimating 35–60 wolves.

**Unit 20E**

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys

Conducted aerial wolf survey to help establish a wolf population estimate.

**Units 21B, 21C, 21D**

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys.

Did not conduct surveys due to inadequate survey conditions.

ACTIVITY 2: Encourage participation in the statewide trapper questionnaire when wolf trappers present pelts for sealing.

Did not encourage participation in questionnaire due to inadequate personnel support.

**Unit 24**

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys.

Conducted wolf population estimation survey and counted 36-37 wolves in a portion of Unit 24B.

ACTIVITY 2: Encourage participation in the statewide trapper questionnaire when wolf trappers present pelts for sealing.

Conducted 10-15 trapper interviews.

**Units 25D, 25B, 26B, 26C**

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial wolf population estimation surveys.

Did not conduct survey due to inadequate survey conditions.

**Submitted by:** Roy A. Nowlin, Region III Management Coordinator

**Region IV—Southcentral and Southwest Alaska**

**Project Location:** Game Management Units 9, 10, 11, 13, 14A, 14B, 16, and 17

**Regionwide Activities:**

ACTIVITY 1: Prepare triennial wolf management reports.

The next triennial wolf management reports are due in 2015.

ACTIVITY 2 AND 3: Collect harvest data when wolf pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters, and monitor the wolf harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires, and contact with trappers and hunters.

*Unit 9:* 142 wolves harvested.

*Unit 10:* 1 wolves harvested.

*Unit 11:* 11 wolves harvested.

*Unit 13:* 54 wolves harvested.

*Unit 14A:* 3 wolves harvested.

*Unit 14B:* 0 wolves harvested.

*Unit 16:* 2 wolves harvested.

*Unit 17:* 28 wolves harvested

ACTIVITY 4: Develop population estimates using the “Sample Unit Probability Estimator” (SUPE) technique in select areas.

No SUPE surveys were conducted; however a minimum count of wolves in Unit 16B was completed in March 2013. Based on survey results the minimum wolf population in Unit 16B was 26 to 39 wolves.

ACTIVITY 5: Examine pelts presented for sealing for the presence of louse infestation.

Pelts were examined and no evidence of louse was found in Region IV.

**Submitted by:** Lem Butler, Region IV Management Coordinator

**Date:** 15 August, 2013

## **Region V—Western and Northern Alaska**

### **Regionwide:**

ACTIVITY 1: Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on wolf management.

Area management staff reviewed State and Federal regulatory proposals, attended regulatory process meetings, and presented wolf information to the State Board of Game, State Fish and Game Advisory Committees, Federal Subsistence Board, and Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils.

ACTIVITY 2: Maintain the ability in all units to monitor harvests by collecting data through the wolf sealing process.

The area offices in Barrow, Bethel, Kotzebue and Nome maintained designated fur sealers in villages in each Game Management Unit to collect harvest information through sealing certificates. Staff supported 29 fur sealers in Unit 18, 17 in Unit 22, 9 in Unit 23, and 6 in Unit 26A.

ACTIVITY 3: Distribute the annual statewide trapper questionnaire to obtain harvest and population assessment information.

Staff supported this activity by distributing furbearer information and summarizing trapper responses and observations in Game Management Unit reports.

ACTIVITY 4: Use public communication and education to obtain better harvest data through increased observance of sealing requirements.

Staff discussed sealing and harvest reporting with trappers/hunters, and the public. During public meetings we explained the importance of harvest reports and encouraged trappers to report their harvest.

**Activities by Unit:**

**Unit 18:**

ACTIVITY 1: Monitor wolf harvests through the fur sealing program, fur acquisition reports, interviews with village residents, and annual hunter/trapper questionnaires.

We monitored Unit 18 wolf harvests using fur sealing data for the RY12 trapping season. Harvest figures are preliminary, but include at least 14 wolves.

ACTIVITY 2: Assess population status and trends utilizing sealing records, and observations by staff and the public.

Sealing data, as well as observations by staff and public, indicate that the Unit 18 wolf harvest was low for this reporting period. Winter weather, specifically snow conditions that are favorable for travel by snowmachine, plays a major role in harvest. The winter of RY12 was an above average snow year. The wolf population was very low south and East of the Kuskokwim river in Unit 18. Wolf number on the Yukon River within GMU 18 appeared to be average to lower than normal levels. This was corroborated by hunter/trapper interviews, observations by staff and the public, and opportunistic track sightings made during aerial survey work for other species.

ACTIVITY 3: Provide public education regarding wolves through the media, during public meetings, and other opportunities.

We discussed wolf numbers, regulations and management at all Advisory Committee meetings and with numerous trappers and hunters during this reporting period.

**Unit 22:**

ACTIVITY 1: Monitor wolf harvest through the fur sealing program, annual hunter/trapper questionnaires and Community-based Harvest Assessments conducted annually in selected villages, and through interviews with trapper/hunters.

Preliminary sealing certificates report 24 wolves were sealed during the RY12 in Unit 22: 5 in Unit 22A, 11 in Unit 22B, 2 in Unit 22C, 3 in Unit 22D, and 3 in 22E. Sex composition of harvest was 16 males, 6 females, and 2 unknown. Alaska residents harvested 88% (n=21) of the wolves and nonresident h 12% (n=3). Snowmachine was the main transportation (88%) for harvesting of wolf.

ACTIVITY 2: Assess population status and trends utilizing track surveys, sealing records, hunter/trapper interviews and questionnaires, Community-based Harvest Assessments and observations by staff and the public.

Wolf distribution and abundance varies from year to year, depending on location and abundance of caribou. During this reporting period the Western Arctic caribou herd was

distributed in the northern portions of the Unalakleet River drainage, north of Shaktoolik in Unit 22A, northern Unit 22D, and eastern Unit 22B.

Department staff and members of the public have reported wolf sightings outside of the City of Nome and throughout Unit 22C. Unit 22 respondents to trapper questionnaires have indicated the abundance of wolves appear to be increasing

**ACTIVITY 3:** Work with reindeer herders to evaluate methods for reducing adverse interactions between wolves and reindeer while conserving wolves.

Nome staff participated in the annual Reindeer Herders Association meeting and addressed the herders' concerns about wildlife issues. Herders have been concerned with increasing wolf numbers and their potential effect on the remaining diminished reindeer herds. Wolf harvest trends and sighting information in Unit 22 were also reported to the herders.

**ACTIVITY 5:** Record wolf sightings during wildlife surveys as an indicator of wolf population trends

Observers participating in aerial moose surveys in Units 22C and 22B Remainder during spring 2013 recorded signs of wolves within the search units. The department will continue to make observations on wolf and track sightings within Unit 22 during survey and census work for other species.

### **Units 23 and 26A:**

**ACTIVITY 1:** Monitor wolf harvest through the fur sealing program, annual hunter/trapper questionnaires and Community-based Harvest Assessments conducted annually in selected villages, and through interviews with trapper/hunters.

*Unit 23:* Preliminary sealing certificates indicated that 102 wolves were sealed in RY12, of which 61 were males, 39 were female. Eighty-five hunter/trappers reported method of take as firearm, 9 reported using traps, and 1 used snares. Snowmachines were indicated as transportation method for 77wolves whereas 17 were taken by airplane. Of the 102 wolves harvested, 69 were gray, 8 were white, and 20 were black. Twelve were taken by nonresidents, 15 by non-local residents, and the remaining 75 by area residents.

*Unit 26A:* Sealing certificates indicated that 19 wolves were sealed in RY12. Eleven were males and 8 were females. Eighteen were ground shot and 1 was trapped. Snowmachines (snogos) were used as transportation for 17 and aircraft for 2. Seventeen wolves were gray and 2 were black. Seventeen wolves were taken by 9 residents of Unit 26A and 2 wolves were taken by 2 nonresidents.

**ACTIVITY 2:** Conduct aerial surveys in selected portions of Unit 26A during late winter to assess population status.

We conducted a Minimum Count style wolf survey 2-4 April 2013 in a 17,800 km<sup>2</sup> wolf count area in the southeastern part of Unit 26A. We found 9 packs that ranged from 2 - 9 wolves and saw 2 individuals for a total of 42 wolves and a density of 2.4 wolves/ 1000 km<sup>2</sup>. We also found the tracks of 4 more packs but did not see the wolves. These packs ranged from 2-5 wolves and totaled 9-12 wolves. The total number of wolves seen plus the ones tracked but not seen was 51-54 wolves, resulting in a density of 2.9- 3.0 wolves/ 1000 km<sup>2</sup>.



ACTIVITY 3: Record wolf sightings during moose censuses in Unit 26A as an indicator of wolf population trends. .

During the April 2013 Unit 26A spring moose trend area count we counted 15 wolves. This calculated to 2.5 wolves per hour during the 6.1 hours that we surveyed moose. In 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 we counted 3.10, 1.66, 0.45, and 2.4 wolves per hour, respectively. It appears that, after 2 years of a declining trend, the wolf density increased and remained stable in 2012 and 2013.

**Submitted by:** Peter Bente, Survey and Inventory Coordinator, Region V

**Date:** 1 September 2013