

Wildlife Restoration OPERATING GRANT FINAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

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

Alaska Department of Fish and Game Wildlife Restoration Grant

GRANT NUMBER: AKW-B-R1-2020 Amendment #1 SFY2021

PROJECT NUMBER: 13.0

PROJECT TITLE: Elk S&I Program: Region I's Elk Population and Factors Influencing Their Populations

PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE: July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021

REPORT DUE DATE: August 24, 2021

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Richard Nelson

COOPERATORS: None



I. PROGRESS ON PROJECT OBJECTIVES DURING PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE

Strategy: Research, Survey, Data Collection and Analysis

Objective 1: Conduct 2 investigations by 06-30-2021

ACTIVITY 1A: Population size, status, and trend. Assess the size and status of each population to determine the 5-year trend.

Objective 1 by Area

Region I, Unit 3

- Monitor elk population size and distribution using the observations of state and federal biologists and anecdotal information provided by hunters.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Regional management staff maintained contacts with hunters, commercial fishermen, aircraft pilots, members of the public, and agency biologists to monitor distribution of elk in southern Region I. An introduced population of elk is known to inhabit Etolin and Zarembo islands in Unit 3. Although reports of elk sightings or sign in other areas including Prince of Wales, Wrangell, and Kupreanof islands are relatively common, we have no direct evidence (photos, tracks, scats, etc.) that elk occur outside of Etolin and Zarembo islands.

Units 1A, 1B, 2 and a portion of Unit 3

- Monitor for the presence of elk in southern Southeast Alaska outside the Etolin-Zarembo island complex through contact with deer, elk, and bear hunters.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: During the reporting period we did not confirm any sightings of elk outside the Etolin-Zarembo Island hunt area. This unit-specific objective generally repeats the previous objective and should be eliminated from or consolidated in future Project Statements.

Unit 3

- Conduct alpine abundance and composition surveys on Etolin Island using fixed wing or helicopter on an annual basis.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: No surveys for Etolin Island elk were flown during the reporting period due to poor survey conditions, primarily low clouds and rain. Elk surveys are flown in mid-summer when elk are visible in alpine and sub-alpine habitat on Etolin Island. Aerial surveys remain the only way to monitor the minimum number of elk on Etolin Island and we plan to continue flying them.

ACTIVITY 1B: Mortality/Harvest Monitoring. Assess the number of elk harvested by hunters and other sources of mortality that might have an impact on each population.

Regionwide

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: All elk hunts in Region I require successful hunters to report to the Petersburg ADF&G office within five days of a kill. Petersburg management staff collected hunting and harvest information from hunters, commercial fishermen, and others. Collected and analyzed biological data including incisors for aging and photos of antlers.

Object 2: Develop/Revise 1 plan by June 30, 2021

Activity 2A: Elk Management with Public Participation and Outreach. Manage elk with an emphasis on engaging the public in management goals and objectives through public meetings, working groups, educational materials, and inventive programs.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Regional management biologists regularly participated in public regulatory processes by providing data and guidance to Fish and Game Advisory Committees and members of the public to help develop proposals to the Alaska Board of Game, by providing data and commenting on proposals created by the federal subsistence Regional Advisory Council, and by providing presentations and comments to proposals to the Alaska Board of Game.

II. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON PROJECT TO DATE.

During this reporting period Region I management staff only monitored hunter effort and harvest of elk from Etolin Island and anecdotal accounts of elk elsewhere in southern Region I. Despite

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being very challenging, the Etolin Island elk hunt remains very popular with all three draw hunts fully subscribed. The low harvest reflects the difficulty of hunting elk in this environment and perhaps the small population size. Region I managers estimate the population at 250-350 elk and believe harvest remains sustainable. Elk hunting on Zarembo Island has been closed since 2008 due to apparent low numbers of elk.

Table 1. Summary of elk harvest by GMU for Southeast Alaska, regulatory years 2016 – 2020. Elk were only reported harvested in GMU 3. A regulatory year begins on July 1 of that year and extends through June 30 of the following year.

GMU	Regulatory Year					5-Year Average
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
3Z	5	9	7	7	5	7

The Elk Species Management Report and Plan (SMRP) reporting on the period RY2013 – RY2018 and planning for the period RY2019 – RY2024 was completed and will be published before the next reporting period.

III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS.

None.

IV. PUBLICATIONS

None.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

Recommendations for this project are detailed in the RY2013 – RY2018 Elk Species Management Report and Plan (SMRP), in press.

Prepared by: Frank Robbins, Petersburg Area Biologist

Date: August 2021