

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

PROJECT NUMBER: 2.0

PROJECT TITLE: Region I Deer Management S&I program: Alaska's Deer Populations and Factors Influencing Their Status

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

REPORT DUE DATE: Submit to Coordinator August 23, 2021

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Richard Nelson

COOPERATORS: NONE

Authorities: 2 CFR 200.328
2 CFR 200.301
50 CFR 80.90

I. PROGRESS ON PROJECT OBJECTIVES DURING PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE

STRATEGY: RESEARCH, SURVEY, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

OBJECTIVE 1: Conduct 3 investigations by 06-03-2021.

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

Activity 1B: Mortality/Harvest Monitoring. Monitor hunter effort and assess the number of deer harvested by hunters and other sources of mortality that may influence the trend of each population.

Activity 1C: Habitat Assessment. Assess deer habitat and winter browse availability directly or indirectly in specified areas of Region I.

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

Regionwide

- Monitor broad trends in populations through annual spring pellet-group surveys in selected areas.
- Continue evaluating aerial alpine deer surveys as a method to estimate relative abundance and trend of deer populations.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Historically, biologists annually conducted pellet group surveys in 20 watersheds throughout Southeast Alaska. However, during this reporting period the corona virus pandemic and social distancing guidelines hampered travel for pellet group surveys. One survey was conducted on Pleasant Island in GMU 4 where deer may have been extirpated by wolves, but no deer pellet groups were detected on the island. No aerial alpine deer surveys were completed during this reporting period.

Activity 1B: Mortality/Harvest Monitoring. Monitor hunter effort and assess the number of deer harvested by hunters and other sources of mortality that may influence the trend of each population.

Regionwide

- Estimate hunter effort and harvest by analyzing data collected through mandatory harvest ticket reports.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Annual regionwide deer hunter effort and harvest information were collected through required deer harvest ticket reports, entered into the statewide deer harvest database, and summarized by Region I. Hunter effort and harvest data were multiplied by a proportional expansion factor unique to each community to account for hunters who failed to submit reports. The expanded data reflect total estimated hunter effort and harvest for each year.

Table 1. Annual deer harvest by GMU for Southeast Alaska, regulatory years 2016–2020. A regulatory year begins on July 1 and extends through June 30 of the following year.

| GMU | Regulatory Year | | | | | Average |
|-------|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | |
| 01A | 417 | 566 | 652 | 846 | 856 | 667 |
| 01B | 116 | 112 | 106 | 83 | 103 | 104 |
| 01C | 330 | 295 | 233 | 257 | 346 | 292 |
| 02Z | 3,534 | 2,433 | 2,079 | 1,953 | 1850 | 2370 |
| 03Z | 778 | 618 | 601 | 863 | 784 | 729 |
| 04Z | 7,192 | 5,258 | 5,219 | 5,969 | 5058 | 5739 |
| 05A | 21 | 13 | 15 | 17 | 18 | 17 |
| Total | 12,388 | 9,295 | 8,905 | 9,988 | 9,015 | 9918 |

Regionwide

- Monitor for occurrence of diseases and parasites among deer populations.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: To monitor for occurrence of diseases and parasites as well as other general information about deer populations and hunting management staff communicated formally and informally with hunters in each game management unit and maintained contact with the broader hunting community through interactions with Fish and Game Advisory Committees and local hunting organizations. No unusual occurrences of widespread diseases or parasites were reported.

Unit 4

- Conduct spring mortality and body condition surveys in key areas as warranted and budgets allow.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Spring body condition and mortality surveys were conducted in Unit 4 from February–May 2021. Overall body condition scores (n=243 for all age and sex classes) was 3.63 (based on a rating scale of 0-5), which was higher than the previous year (3.3). Mortality transects were completed in 15 locations and 2 dead deer related to winter kill were observed. Dead deer per mile was 0.01, which is down from the previous year (0.65 dead deer/mile).

Activity 1C: Habitat Assessment. Assess deer habitat and winter browse availability directly or indirectly in specified areas of Region I.

Regionwide

- Monitor browsing intensity annually in conjunction with spring pellet group transects.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Due to the corona virus-related cancellation of deer pellet surveys, browsing intensity was not quantified during this reporting period.

STRATEGY: PLANNING

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

Activity 2A: Deer Management with Public Participation and Outreach. Manage each deer population with an emphasis on engaging the public through public meetings, working groups, educational materials, and incentive programs.

Regionwide

- Prepare 5-year Deer Management Operational Reports and Plans for each unit/subunit inhabited by deer.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Regional management biologists completed Deer Species Management Plans and Reports for deer reporting on the period RY11 – RY16 and planning for the period RY17 – RY22. Unit-specific reports and plans can be found at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=librarypublications.wildlifepublications&sort=all&species=Sitka+Black-tailed+Deer&submit=Search>

- Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on deer management.

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.

- Provide information on status of deer populations, likely trends, habitat use, and harvest management to other agencies and the public.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Deer harvest data are of great interest to the public, land management agencies like the US Forest Service, and other interest groups. Regional management biologists provided population and harvest data as requested by other agencies and the media and through informal conversations with hunters and other members of the public.

II. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON PROJECT TO DATE.

During this reporting period population trends for deer throughout the region were monitored at a reduced level. The decision to cancel pellet group surveys and the inability to complete aerial alpine deer surveys due to COVID-19 limited staff's ability to assess deer population trends. The regulatory year 2020 data suggests harvest in Region 1 was within the historic range, and the current level of harvest is sustainable.

III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS.

Aerial alpine deer surveys and deer pellet surveys were not completed during this reporting period. Consequently, we did not hire seasonal staff or spend money on field travel and

accommodations in support of those surveys and the budget for those surveys was significantly underspent.

IV. PUBLICATIONS

None.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

The Department of Wildlife Conservation recommend continuation of this project.

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Date: August 17, 2021