

# **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-R3-2020

**PROJECT NUMBER:** P16.0

**PROJECT TITLE:** Alaska's Region III Muskox S&I program: Muskox Populations and Factors Influencing Their Status in Interior and Northeast Alaska

**PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE:** July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2021

**PERFORMANCE YEAR:** July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021; year 2 of a 2-year grant

**REPORT DUE DATE:**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Beth Lenart, Northeast Alaska Area Wildlife Biologist, ADF&G

**COOPERATORS:** N/A

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## **I. PROGRESS ON PROJECT OBJECTIVES DURING PERFORMANCE YEAR**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Conduct 3 investigations by 06-30-2021.

### **Project statement objectives:**

**Objective 1: Population Size, Status, and Trend.** Assess the size and status of each muskox population to evaluate the 5-year trend.

#### **1.1 Conduct annual aerial surveys to estimate population size and determine age–sex composition.**

#### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- ADF&G conducted precalving surveys in Units 26B and 26C in late April 2021 in 10.6 hours of aircraft charter flight time and located 23 of 23 active radiocollared muskox in 11 groups and located 6 groups of muskoxen (1–10 animals per group) that were not associated with radio collars. Groups were photographed to distinguish between adults and yearlings.
- Ground composition surveys were not conducted in Units 26B and 26C due monies being reallocated to caribou.

- ADF&G radiotracked muskox groups in Units 26B and 26C in mid-October 2020 for 6.2 hours of fixed-wing flight time and located 23 of 23 active collars in 15 groups.
- ADF&G radiotracked muskox groups in Units 26B and 26C and counted new calves in groups on 3 and 5 June and during 20–21 June. In early June, we observed 61 calves in 13 groups in 6 hours flight time. In mid-June, we observed 73 calves in 18 groups in 5 hours flight time.
- During Unit 26B and 26C radiotracking flights in April, June, and October muskoxen were distributed in the Sagavanirktok, Kuparuk, Ribdon, Ivishak, Ikillik and Canning river drainages. Muskoxen in Units 19A and 21E were distributed in the portage mountains north of Kalskag and Aniak.
- ADF&G flew a population monitoring survey in Units 19A and 21E on 14 May (7 hours and 39 muskox). All groups were photographed and composition data were obtained.

## **1.2 Capture and radiocollar muskoxen in Unit 26B to maintain 15–30 radio collars on adult female muskoxen**

### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- No muskoxen were captured in Unit 26B in FY21 because an adequate number of muskoxen were collared.

## **1.4 Record muskox observations during surveys of other types of wildlife to document range use and expansion of the population.**

### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- Muskoxen were observed during moose and caribou surveys. Nothing unusual was noted.

**Objective 2: Mortality, Harvest Monitoring, and Regulations.** Assess the number of muskox harvested by hunters and other sources of mortality that might have an impact on each muskox population, statewide.

## **2.1 Monitor natural mortality factors affecting the population**

### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- Two radiocollared muskoxen were found dead of natural causes in Unit 26B in 2021: 1 in early June and 1 in late June.
- No muskoxen were harvested because a hunt was not opened in Units 26B and 26C or Units 19A and 21E.

## **2.2 Examine dead muskoxen to look for causes of death, disease, mineral deficiencies, and contaminants.**

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

No opportunities were presented to investigate cause of death.

**Objective 3: Habitat Enhancement and Assessment.** Assess muskox habitat and browse availability directly or indirectly in specified areas of the state and perform habitat enhancement in areas where it is feasible.

3.1 No activity will be conducted on this objective that is not incidental to other work.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- No assessments were completed and do not appear to be warranted at this time.

**Objective 4: Muskox Management with Public Participation and Outreach.** Manage the muskox populations of Alaska with an effort to engage the public using public meetings, working groups, educational materials, and incentive programs.

**4.1 Prepare data and information for 5-year Muskox Repots and Operational Plans.**

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- The Unit 26B and 26C Eastern North Slope Muskox Management Report and Plan (RY14–RY19) was completed and published June 2021. This report can be found at [https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/research/wildlife/speciesmanagementreports/pdfs/muskox\\_2014\\_2024\\_gmu\\_26b\\_26c.pdf](https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/research/wildlife/speciesmanagementreports/pdfs/muskox_2014_2024_gmu_26b_26c.pdf).
- The Unit 19A and 21E Muskox Management Report and Plan (RY14–RY19) will be completed and published in FY2022 and will be available at the following url: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=librarypublications.wildlifepublications&sort=all&species=Muskox&publicationtype=Species+Management+Report+%28and+Plan%29&submit=Search>.

**4.2 Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on muskox management.**

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We communicated and coordinated with and provided information at meetings of 6 local Fish and Game Advisory Committees, the Alaska Board of Game, 3 Federal Regional Advisory Councils, the Federal Subsistence Board, Office of Subsistence Management, numerous local village councils and Native corporations, about muskox management and to review and analyze biological information prepared to present regarding proposals for the Alaska Board of Game and the Federal Subsistence Board.

**4.3 Develop or review population objectives to assess their relevance**

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Data and information from activities in objectives 1–4 were used by the Unit 26B biologists to review population and harvest objectives to determine whether each objective remained relevant during the current year.
- Data and information from activities in objectives 1–4 were used by the Unit 19A/21E biologists to monitor the population to aid in developing population objectives in the future.

#### **4.4 Use public education and communication to minimize conflicts between human activities and muskoxen.**

##### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- We discussed muskox management with the North Slope Borough wildlife department and 4 Fish and Game Advisory Committees.

#### **4.5 Work with local Advisory Committees, village representatives, and other agencies to promote the establishment of huntable muskox populations.**

##### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- We discussed muskox viable population size and huntable numbers with the North Slope Borough wildlife department and 4 Fish and Game Advisory Committees.

## **II. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON PROJECT TO DATE.**

- Results of objectives 1–4 for Unit 26B and 26C will be summarized in the report portion of the 5-year muskox management report and plan, scheduled to be published in June 2026.

## **III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS.**

No SDRs were submitted for this project.

Budgeted amounts differed from those expected in the project statement due to

1. Personnel: Lower-than expected personnel cost because some operating funds for Unit 26B muskox were reallocated to caribou; therefore, less personnel time in the field.
2. Contractual: Lower-than expected contractual cost because some operating funds for Unit 26B muskox were reallocated to caribou.
3. Supplies: Fewer radio collars and capture supplies were purchased for muskox in Unit 26B because monies were reallocated to caribou.

#### **IV. PUBLICATIONS**

The Unit 26B and 26C Eastern North Slope Muskox Management Report and Plan was published June 2021. This report can be found at [https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/research/wildlife/speciesmanagementreports/pdfs/muskox\\_2014\\_2024\\_gmu\\_26b\\_26c.pdf](https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/research/wildlife/speciesmanagementreports/pdfs/muskox_2014_2024_gmu_26b_26c.pdf).

#### **V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT**

We recommend continued funding for this project in order to effectively survey, inventory and manage muskox populations in Interior and Northeast Alaska.

**Prepared by:** Beth Lenart

**Date:** September 2021