

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 : P17.0

PROJECT TITLE: Alaska's Region III Black Bear S&I program: Black Bear 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: Ryan Klimstra, Regional Wildlife Biologist, ADF&G

COOPERATORS: N/A

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 black bear population to determine the 5-year trend.

1.1 Assess population trends through anecdotal field observations made by biologists and members of the public.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We noted black bear locations during aerial surveys for other species.
- We discussed black bear observations across the region with hunters, guides, troopers, and members of the public.
- We discussed black bear observations with moose hunters at the Koyukuk check station during a 6-week period in August and September.

1.2 Obtain estimates of ages of harvested bears by tooth sectioning and counting annuli.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We obtained estimated ages of 71 black bears harvested during the previous year primarily in Unit 20B by results of tooth sectioning and age analysis by counting cementum annuli.

1.3 Conduct a photo and hair sample survey to assess bear occurrence.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We followed up on a pilot photo and hair sample survey that initiated in RY20. We placed cameras at sites (n = 10) visited by bears in the previous year to evaluate bear use of these previously baited sites (no bait was placed at the sites in this fiscal year). We accessed the lake sites by air with department and chartered fixed-wing float planes. River sites were accessed with department boats.

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

2.1 Monitor the black bear harvest through field observations, black bear sealing reports, and interviews with hunters.

2.2 Monitor black bear bait station permit distribution and harvest over bait.

2.3 Collect a tooth for aging black bears harvested in Unit 20B and presented for sealing by hunters

2.4 Collect data, determine sex, and extract a tooth for aging from black bears presented for sealing by hunters or as a result of other human-caused mortality.

2.5 Monitor and analyze black bear bait station permit distribution.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We monitored the harvest of black bears in Units 12, 19D, and 20 through harvest reports, field observations, interviews with successful hunters, bait station registrations, and analyses of harvest report data during a 365-day season. Additionally, when bears were presented for sealing, harvest was monitored through information and data taken on 1) all black bears harvested in Unit 20B and 2) black bears taken in Units 12, 19, the remainder of Unit 20, and Units 21, 24, and 25 by hunters who took their bear hides and/or skulls out of state. Harvest data were analyzed, and the results were applied to management planning and ongoing population assessment.
- Data were recorded for 206 black bears through this process. Results include the following:
 - Premolar teeth for aging were collected from 87 black bears harvested primarily in Units 20B and 20D.
 - We monitored distribution of approximately 829 black bear bait stations throughout Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, and 25 and analyzed their distribution in

relation to roads, communities, black bear harvest, and grizzly bear bait stations. A total of 59 black bears were harvested over bait.

Objective 3: Habitat Enhancement and Assessment. Assess black bear habitat directly or indirectly in specified areas of the state.

3.1 Monitor blueberry abundance through monitoring of permanent blueberry sample areas or through interviews with blueberry pickers and anecdotal evidence.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- During July–August we assessed blueberry abundance at 40 permanent blueberry plots located in Units 12 and 20E.

Objective 4: Black Bear Management with Public Participation and Outreach.

4.1 Compile information and data for, or draft and finalize 5-year black bear survey and inventory operational reports and plans for each Unit inhabited by black bears.

- Accomplishments: We compiled information and data in preparation for writing 5 five-year black bear Management Reports and Operational Plans for Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26B and 26C. These reports and plans will be available at the following site when completed:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=librarypublications.wildlifepublications&sort=all&species=Black+Bear&submit=Search>.

4.7 Develop or review population objectives for black bears in each of 6 areas.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Data and information from activities in objectives 1–4 were used by biologists in 6 area offices to review population and harvest objectives to determine whether each objective remained relevant during the current year and assessed whether harvest was impacting each population.

4.2 Provide black bear information to state and federal regulatory processes on black bear management.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We prepared the black bear portion of 2 Annual Intensive Management Reports for the Board of Game to comply with regulatory requirements for Intensive Management programs. See Section IV, publications, below.
- We communicated and coordinated with and attended meetings of 10 local Fish and Game Advisory Committees, and 3 Federal Regional Advisory Councils about black bear management and to review and analyze regulation proposals for the Federal Subsistence

Board. The number of meetings attended was reduced, and many meetings, including the regular Statewide Board of Game meeting, were cancelled due to COVID-19 concerns.

4.3 Respond to issues and public reports involving black bears associated with conflict behavior, injuries, habituation, and bear–vehicle collisions to help alleviate such conflicts and inform the public about safety.

4.5 Work with local residents and businesses to reduce black bear–human conflicts and minimize attractants that may lead to defense of life or property kills (DLP).

4.6 Educate the public on bear awareness, bear behavior and safety, and provide demonstrations of how to minimize attractants and/or use electric bear fences to reduce bear/human problems as requested.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Six area offices responded to and made recommendations in 6 reports of human–black bear interactions.
- Staff educated the public on bear awareness and safety, used education and/or increased communication with the public to improve understanding of hunting regulations and the value of conserving black bear populations, and to obtain better harvest data through increased harvest reporting.
- We worked with local residents and businesses to reduce black bear–human conflicts and minimize attractants that may lead to defense of life or property kills (DLP).

II. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON PROJECT TO DATE.

Results of objectives 1–4 will be summarized in the report portion of the 5-year Black Bear management report and plan, scheduled to be published in FY2021 (see objective 4.1, above.)

III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS.

No SDRs were submitted for this project.

Reports and plans listed in objective 4.1 were expected to be published in FY2020 but were delayed due to biologists' preparation for and attendance at the Alaska Board of Game meeting to provide biological information and a substantial amount of time responding with biological information for emergency requests to extend or close hunting seasons for all species (including black bear) due to concerns about food shortage due to COVID-19 or spread of the disease among hunters in the field.

IV. PUBLICATIONS

Black bear portion of the Annual Report to the Alaska Board of Game on Intensive Management for Moose with Wolf, Black Bear, and Grizzly Bear Predation Control in Game

Management Unit 19A. February 2021.

http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/research/programs/intensivemanagement/pdfs/2021_gmu_19a_intensive_management_annual_report.pdf

Black bear portion of the Annual Report to the Alaska Board of Game on Intensive Management for Moose with Wolf, Black Bear, and Grizzly Bear Predation Control in Game Management Unit 19D East. February 2021.

http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/research/programs/intensivemanagement/pdfs/2021_gmu_19d_east_intensive_management_annual_report.pdf

No other publications were completed during the report period.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

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

Prepared by: Ryan Klimstra

Date: August 2021