

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: – P6.0

PROJECT TITLE: Alaska's Region III Dall's Sheep S&I program: Dall's Sheep 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: Darren Bruning, Fish and Game Coordinator, 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 Dall's sheep population to determine the 5-year trend.

1.1 Conduct summer aerial surveys in established count areas to determine status, trend, productivity, age, sex, and mortality of sheep.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Aerial trend count surveys were conducted to assess trend, distribution, productivity, and sex and age composition of the sheep population during July 2020 and/or June 2021. Survey areas included the following areas:
 - Nutzotin and northern Wrangell Mountains in Unit 12 (no survey)
 - Tok Management Area in Units 12, 20D, and 20E (2 survey units, 12.5 hours of flight time);
 - Glacier Mountain Controlled Use Area in Unit 20E (no survey, lack of funds);
 - Central Alaska Range in Unit 20A (3 survey units, 6 hours of flight time);

- White Mountains in 20B and 25C (3 survey units, 8 hours of flight time);
- Delta Controlled Use Area in Unit 20D, 20A, and 13B (all available sheep habitat, 43.2 hours of flight time);
- Mt. Harper and Tanana Hills area of Units 20B, 20D, and 20E (all available sheep habitat within the drawing hunt area, 5 hours of flight time);
- Central and Eastern Brooks Range in Units 24, 25, and 26: (no survey, poor weather).

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

2.1 Monitor the sheep harvest through field observations, hunter harvest reports and contact with hunters.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Sheep harvest was monitored through contact with hunters during sealing, and through analysis of approximately 1,032 hunt reports from hunting seasons open primarily during August 1–5 and August 10–September 30; including 448 sheep taken in general hunts applicable throughout most of the region, 5 drawing permit hunts, 2 special permits.

2.2 Collect data from sheep presented for sealing by hunters, including the age of harvested sheep.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Harvest data were analyzed, and the results were applied to management planning and ongoing population assessment. A total of 448 rams were harvested and aged by counting horn annuli.

2.3 Opportunistically test for the presence of potentially population-regulating disease

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Region III Management Staff supported ADF&G Veterinary Services in health surveillance of Dall's sheep. This was accomplished by investigating morbidity and mortality reports provided by the general public. Nasal swabs were not collected during this reporting period, primarily due to taking measures to maintain social distancing to address COVID-19 concerns.

Objective 3: Habitat Enhancement and Assessment. Assess Dall's sheep habitat availability directly or indirectly in specified areas of the state and perform habitat enhancement in areas where it is feasible.

3.1 Record observations of biologists and hunters that relate to sheep distribution and habitat use and sheep body condition.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Biologists observed sheep distribution, habitat use, and sheep body condition during surveys listed under objective 1. Habitat plots in the Tok Management Area were observed from the air. No unusual observations were noted.

Objective 4: Dall's Sheep Management with Public Participation and Outreach. Manage each Dall's sheep population with an emphasis on engaging the public in management goals and objectives through public meetings, working groups, educational materials, and incentive programs.

4.1 Prepare Region III data and information for, or draft and complete 5-year Sheep Management Operational Reports and Plans.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We compiled data and information for 5 five-year Sheep Management Operational Reports and Plans scheduled to be published in FY23.

4.2 Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on Dall's sheep management.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- We communicated and coordinated with and provided information at meetings of 15 local Fish and Game Advisory Committees, the Alaska Board of Game, 4 Federal Regional Advisory Councils, the Federal Subsistence Board, Office of Subsistence Management, numerous local village councils and Native corporations, and the Wrangell–St. Elias Subsistence Resource Commission about Dall's sheep 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 Review population objectives to assess their relevance

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.

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 sheep management report and plan, scheduled to be published in FY2024.

III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS.

No SDRs were submitted for this project.

IV. PUBLICATIONS

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 Dall's sheep populations in Interior and Northeast Alaska.

Prepared by: Darren Bruning

Date: September 2021