

# Wildlife Restoration MULTI-YEAR 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-R2-2020 Amendment #1 SFY21

**PROJECT NUMBER:** 2.0

**PROJECT TITLE:** Region 2 Deer S&I program: Deer Populations and Factors Influencing Their Status

**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:** Submit to FAC August 28, 2021

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Cynthia Wardlow

**COOPERATORS:** Jeff Selinger, Charlotte Westing, Nate Svoboda

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Authorities: 2 CFR 200.328  
2 CFR 200.301  
50 CFR 80.90

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

**Objective 1: Population Size, Status, and Trend.** Assess the size and status of Region 2 deer population to evaluate the 5-year trend.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

#### Objective 1 by Area

##### Unit 6

We conducted deer pellet transects starting May 17, 2021 at Shipyard Bay on northeast Hawkins Island and finishing June 5, 2021 at Hook Point on Hinchinbrook Island. Surveys on Naked, Knight and North Montague Island were conducted using the USFS R/V Tenacious to comply with COVID-19 protocols and use a smaller crew. Numerous days of bad weather led to a protracted schedule. Between advancing green-up, expense, poor tides, and competing demands on field staff, San Juan Bay on Montague Island could not be surveyed again this year. This year's Mean Pellet Groups/Plot (MPGP) is 1.64, the highest observed since 1998 (1.84). This may indicate that the population is at or above pre-crash levels.

## Unit 8

- Fly aerial surveys along the shoreline to assess deer numbers noted on the beach
  - Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 restrictions, no pilots were available in early spring so no spring mortality surveys were conducted in 2021. However, the relatively mild weather conditions during winter 2020 likely resulted in minimal die off. Anecdotal observations from guides, hunters, and transporters indicated winter die off of deer was minimal island-wide.
- Evaluate procedures described in the literature for assessing population status that may be applicable to this Unit.
  - Literature searches and consultation with other deer researchers throughout the state to develop future projects are ongoing. A review of previous deer work done within the last 10 years in Region 2 has opportunities to build on existing work or explore other research projects using new technology. Travel to assist with other deer research projects was not done during this time due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and budget limitations.

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

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

#### *Objective 2 by Area*

##### Regionwide

All hunters were required to obtain general season deer harvest tickets and report on hunting activities after the season or at the completion of their hunt. All reports are entered into the Winfonet database system. 4,496 hunters reported that they hunted for deer in Units 6 or 8 in this reporting period, with 5,267 distinct records.

Final harvest estimate is approximately 1,700 deer from Unit 6 which is near the ten-year average. Reports from hunters suggest that harvest reflects a stable population and an absence of limiting weather. Harvest in this reporting period is nearly identical to last year.

Unit 8 hunter, guide, and transporter reports as well as ADFG observations suggest the deer population rebounding after the harsh winter in 2019. Harvest numbers and hunter success rates are lower than the previous reporting period. Reported harvest was 3,483 deer.

Additional harvest was taken in both areas under Federal Subsistence regulations.

## Unit 6

- Conduct a survey of Prince William Sound shoreline in spring to assess deer over-winter survival.

- This is done incidentally while conducting deer pellet transects. Few carcasses were found during this reporting period.

#### Unit 8

- Conduct over-winter mortality transects in standardized mortality count areas.
  - No activities were conducted during the reporting period. Anecdotal reports from residents indicates there was low over-winter mortality.
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#### Units 6 & 8

- Monitor the harvest by communicating with hunters on an opportunistic basis, in the office and in the field.
  - ADF&G staff are available in the Cordova and Kodiak offices to gather anecdotal information from hunters submitting harvest reports and also at other community meetings. Field contacts may be made in the course of other work or in conjunction with other office activities, such as bear, goat or fur sealing.

**Objective 3: Habitat Enhancement /Assessment.** Habitat Enhancement /Assessment. Assess the nutritional status of the deer population directly or indirectly where it is feasible.

#### ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

We are continuing to investigate various modeling approaches to obtain a rigorous population estimate and gather information on recruitment and survival. A full time coastal ungulate biologist was hired during the last reporting period and will be working with local biologists to develop more rigorous protocols. No activities were conducted under this objective during the reporting period.

**Objective 4: Deer Management with Public Participation and Outreach.** 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.

#### ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

We compiled information and data to inform the next five-year deer Management Reports and Plans for Units 6 and 8. These reports include historical and current data, management directions, methods, Board of Game actions, harvests and natural mortality, habitat assessments, and local and statewide non-regulatory issues. Reports were last completed in FY2018 and are available at the following url: [http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildliferesearch.smrdeer2011\\_2021](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildliferesearch.smrdeer2011_2021)

The deer survey and inventory approach outlined above provide most of the information required to manage Alaska deer populations in Region 2. Information collected is used to monitor progress toward attaining management objectives for Alaska southcentral deer populations.

We communicated and coordinated with and attended meetings of local Fish and Game Advisory Committees, the Alaska Board of Game, local village councils and Native corporations about deer management. The next Board of Game meeting for Region 2 is scheduled for winter of 2021/2022.

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

This project is ongoing. Summaries of past data trends are published at the following url:

[http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildliferesearch.smrdeer2011\\_2021](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildliferesearch.smrdeer2011_2021)

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

None. Project number 2.0 was significantly underspent during the reporting period due to a staff vacancy in the Soldotna office, restrictions on travel due to COVID-19, and an overall budget shortage which resulted in a request to reduce planned spending to preserve Fish & Game matching funds. Planned travel and site visits were not conducted and personnel time was coded to other projects that did not require travel. Collars were not purchased, and contract pilots were not used to survey the areas of Region 2 where deer are found.

## **IV. PUBLICATIONS**

Project publications for previous years are available at the following url:

[http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildliferesearch.smrdeer2011\\_2021](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildliferesearch.smrdeer2011_2021)

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

We recommend continued funding for this project to effectively manage deer populations in Southcentral Alaska.

**Prepared by:** Cynthia Wardlow

**Date:** October 2020