

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-23-R5-2020 Amendment #1

PROJECT NUMBER: P14.0

PROJECT TITLE: The Status of Wolves and Factors Influencing Their Populations

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

REPORT DUE DATE: Submit to FAC August 27, 2021

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Phillip Perry, Region V Management Coordinator

Authorities: 2 CFR 200.328
2 CFR 200.301
50 CFR 80.90

II. Summary of Work Completed on PROJECT TO DATE.

1. Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on wolf management.

Area management staff reviewed State and Federal regulatory proposals, attended regulatory process meetings, and presented wolf information to the State Board of Game, State Fish and Game Advisory Committees, Federal Subsistence Board, and Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils.

2. Maintain the ability in all units to monitor harvests by collecting data through the wolf sealing process.

The area offices in Barrow, Bethel, Kotzebue, and Nome maintained designated fur sealers in villages in each Game Management Unit to collect harvest information through sealing certificates. Staff supported 29 fur sealers in Unit 18, 17 in Unit 22, 9 in Unit 23, and 6 in Unit 26A.

3. Distribute the annual statewide trapper questionnaire to obtain harvest and population assessment information.

Staff supported this activity by contributing furbearer information and summarizing trapper responses and observations to be included in the trapper questionnaire report.

4. Develop updated population objectives in cooperation with the public and other agencies.

Meetings with the public and other agencies were not held due to conflicting schedules. Population objectives were not updated.

5. Use public communication and education to obtain better harvest data through increased observance of sealing requirements.

Staff discussed sealing and harvest reporting with trappers/hunters, and the public. During public meetings we explained the importance of harvest reports and encouraged trappers to report their harvest.

Activities by Unit:

Unit 18:

1. Monitor wolf harvests through the fur sealing program, and interviews with village residents.

We monitored Unit 18 wolf harvests using fur sealing data for the RY2020 trapping season. Harvest figures are preliminary but include at least 15 wolves (13 Ground shooting and 2 trapping or snaring). Of the 15 wolves harvested 11 were reported to be females, 4 males.

2. Assess population status and trends utilizing sealing records, track surveys, hunter/trapper interviews, and observations by staff and the public.

Sealing data, as well as observations by staff and public, indicate that the Unit 18 wolf harvest was high for this reporting period. Winter weather, specifically snow conditions that are favorable for travel by snowmachine, plays a major role in harvest. The winter of RY20-21 was more favorable than average year. The wolf population was probably close to normal south and east of the Kuskokwim River in Unit 18. Wolf number on the Yukon River within Unit 18 appeared to be average or increasing. This was collaborated by hunter/trapper interviews, observations by staff and the public, and opportunistic track sightings made during aerial survey work for other species. While we expect harvest to be above the long term average due to favorable snow conditions, reported harvest is low as sealing records have been slow to be returned to the department.

3. Assess the effects of wolf predation on prey populations through field observations and interviews with hunters/trappers.

Observers participating in aerial moose, caribou, and muskox surveys, and/or telemetry flights in 2020-2021 recorded wolf kills on both the Kuskokwim and Yukon rivers. In RY2020 all wolf kills observed were of moose and caribou. Looking at annual recruitment and continued rapid population growth in moose populations in both the Yukon, and Kuskokwim drainages and riparian areas, wolf predation is not a factor effecting either population. Observation of Mulchatna caribou being killed by wolves was observed by department staff and the public in RY2020. The most recent population estimate for MCH 13,500. At the time of this report it is unclear to what extent, if any, wolves are affecting the population within Unit 18.

4. Provide public education regarding wolves through the media, during public meetings, and other opportunities.

We discussed wolf numbers, regulations, and management at all Advisory Committee meetings and with numerous trappers and hunters during this reporting period.

Unit 22:

1. Monitor wolf harvest through the fur sealing program, annual hunter/trapper questionnaires and Community-based Harvest Assessments conducted annually in selected villages, and through interviews with trapper/hunters.

Regulatory year 2020-2021 sealing certificates report 14 wolves were sealed in Unit 22: 1 in GMU 22A, 5 in GMU 22B, 1 in GMU 22C, 3 in GMU 22D, and 1 in GMU 22E. Sex composition of harvest was 11 males and 3 females. Two wolves were harvested by nonresidents. Snowmachine was the main mode of transportation (79%, 11 of 14) to harvest a wolf.

2. Assess population status and trends utilizing track surveys, sealing records, hunter/trapper interviews and questionnaires, Community-based Harvest Assessments and observations by staff and the public.

Wolf distribution and abundance varies depending on location and abundance of caribou. During this reporting period, caribou were scarce throughout the Seward Peninsula, found in small bands and companies in eastern 22E and northwestern 22B. Department staff and members of the public have reported wolf sign and observations throughout Unit 22. The rate of observation of wolves in Unit 22 does not always correlate with the relatively low reported harvest numbers.

3. Examine pelts presented for sealing for the presence of louse infestation

Wolf hides that were sealed by department staff were examined for hair loss and patches of broken guard which may indicate the presence of lice. Wolves that were inspected by staff did not appear to have visible signs of lice infestation.

4. Record wolf sightings during wildlife surveys as an indicator of wolf population trends.

Observers participating in the 2021 Unit 22A spring moose abundance survey reported observations of wolf tracks and sightings. Unit 22 staff will continue to make observations on wolf and track sightings within the unit during survey and census work for other species.

Units 23 and 26A:

1. Monitor wolf harvest through the fur sealing program, annual hunter/trapper questionnaires and Community-based Harvest Assessments conducted annually in selected villages, and through interviews with trapper/hunters.

Unit 23: Preliminary sealing certificates indicated that 47 wolves were sealed in RY2020, of which 33 were males and 14 were female. Forty-two hunters/trappers reported method of take as firearm and 5 by trapping. Airplanes were indicated as transportation method for 7 wolves, one by boat and 39 were by snowmachine. Eleven were taken by nonresidents, and the remaining 36 by Alaska residents.

Unit 26A: Preliminary sealing certificates indicated that 20 wolves were sealed in RY2020, of which 12 were males and 8 was female. All 20 wolves were taken using

ground shooting as the method of take.. None of the wolves were reported as trapped. Snowmachines were indicated as transportation method for all 20 wolves and all were listed as grey in color. All wolves were t harvested by Alaska residents.

There is no community harvest survey data to report during this reporting period.

2. Conduct aerial surveys in selected portions of Units 23 and 26A during late winter to assess population status.

A wolf survey in Unit 26A was not attempted because very low populations were documented in RY2015 through RY2020.

3. Record wolf sightings during moose censuses in Unit 26A as an indicator of wolf population trends.

During the April 2021 Unit 26A spring moose trend area count we observed three gray wolves. In April 2020 during the 26A spring moose survey we observed six wolves on the Upper Colville: 2 black, 1 white and 3 grey wolves. In 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2019 we counted 3.10, 1.66, 0.45, 2.4, 2.5, 0.3, 0.8, 1.0, 0.37, and 0.65 wolves per hour, respectively. It appears that wolf numbers been variable over the last 11 years.

III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS.

IV. PUBLICATIONS

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

Prepared by: Phillip Perry

Date: 9/29/21