

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 : P7.0

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

PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE: July 1, 2019 to 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.

The Status of Alaska Furbearers and Factors Influencing Their Populations In

Region V

Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on furbearer management.

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

Maintain the ability in all units to monitor harvests by collecting data through the furbearer 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, 8 in Unit 22, 9 in Unit 23, and 6 in Unit 26A.

Monitor harvests through the fur sealing program, fur acquisition reports, the annual hunter/trapper questionnaire, and Community-based Harvest Assessments conducted annually in selected villages.

Unit 18: We analyzed fur sealing data for the RY20 trapping season. These preliminary harvests reports are close to what we anticipated for harvest, but final numbers should be a little higher for all species. For RY 20; 4 lynx, 23 river otter, and 2 wolverines were reported. The presence of a local fur buyer encourages trappers to not only participate in trapping and passing the knowledge of how to trap on to the next generation but also increase the number of people in getting their fur sealed. A below average number of furs sealed in RY20 trapping season is expected because of lower than average fur prices, a prolonged downturn in the fur market, and decreased trapping effort.

Unit 22:

Furbearer harvest results by subunit are based on RY20-21 sealing certificates:

Species	GMU 22A	GMU 22B	GMU 22C	GMU 22D	GMU 22E	Total
Lynx	19	78	0	19	0	116
Otter	9	14	10	3	0	36
Wolverine	3	10	3	2	0	18

Opportunistic interviews completed in Unit 22 by management staff suggest that beaver, marten, and red fox are also harvested by residents of Unit 22 communities. Arctic foxes are opportunistically harvested on the sea ice near crab pots in fewer numbers.

Unit 23 The preliminary harvest reported on RY20 sealing certificates included 13 otter (8 males, 5 females sex); taken by Alaska residents. Of the 13 otter, 12 were trapped, one was shot. Transportation was by snowmachine. One hundred and one lynx were reported taken. This included 44 females and 57 males. Of these, 3 were reported shot and 98 were trapped. Nineteen wolverines were sealed (3 female, 16 male, 3 unknown), 1 was taken by ground shooting 17 by trapping and 1 nonreported.. For transportation, all were taken using a snowmachine.

Unit 26A: We analyzed fur sealing data for the RY2020 trapping season and reported harvests were: 19 wolverines (17 males, 2 female) and 4 lynx (2 male, 2 unknown). Eighteen out of nineteen the wolverines taken in 26A were ground shot, one was trapped. Three lynx were shot, the other was trapped. Snow machines were used for transportation for 17 of the wolverines and all the lynx. A highway vehicle was used for one wolverine and an ATV for the other. No other furbearers that needed to be sealed were taken in 26A.

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

Throughout Region V we communicated with local trappers and hunters to improve harvest reporting through the fur sealing process; explained the importance of harvest reporting at public meetings in villages; prepared newspaper articles explaining the importance of sealing furs to obtain harvest data; and attended meetings hosted by local chapters of the Alaska Trappers Association.

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

Unit 18: We observed furbearers and furbearer sign opportunistically during aerial and ground based work for other species; and continue to interview trappers, pilots, and others regarding furbearers. Muskrat numbers continue to remain low but increasing since the 2009-2010 winters. Lynx numbers are starting to rebound after population low in 2014. River otter harvest has likely declined with a preliminary harvest in RY2020 of 23. Harvest data is not gathered for beaver, marten and fox however numbers appear to be stable in abundance over the reporting period.

Unit 22: Sealing data reports suggest lynx numbers have declined in Unit 22A in recent years, potentially due to a lack of sealing compliance. Harvest rates and anecdotal sightings suggest that the local population is currently in its peak. The reported unit wide average annual harvest of lynx over the 5-year period of RY10 to RY14 is 64 per year (range 19 – 123) versus an average reported harvest of 56 lynx RY16 to RY20 (range 15 – 116). Reports and observations of abundant snowshoe hares and Alaska hare sign in 22B, 22C, and 22D during the winter of 2020-2021 suggest lynx food resources in the unit are still high. River otters are believed to be more common than harvest numbers would indicate. The unit wide average annual harvest of river otters remained constant from a 5-year average of 11 otters (range 4–15) annually during RY11 – RY15 to an average of 19 otters (range 11–36) annually during RY16 – RY20. It is difficult to surmise the incidence of wolverine throughout Unit 22; observations and anecdotal reports suggest wolverines exist throughout the unit and are especially concentrated in the Kiglualik and Bendeleben Mountains. The unit wide average annual harvest of wolverines during the 5-year period of RY11 – RY15 was 39 (range 27 – 51) wolverines, and the period of RY16 to RY20 was 32 wolverines per year (range 18 – 52).

Unit 23: Furbearer sealing records always seem to lag a little. For this regulatory year harvest records appear to be within the range of levels observed in previous years based on sealing records. Opportunistic observations of furbearers, contacts with hunter and trappers, and community-based harvest assessments are within normal ranges. Last year, lynx population levels appeared to be increasing in at least part of Unit 23. Distribution has varied substantially among drainages in recent years. The reported unit wide average annual harvest of lynx from RY13 to RY20 is 46 per year (range 27-101) versus 66 lynx harvested during last period, and the 101 lynx harvested this period. The unit wide average annual harvest of otters from RY13 to RY20 is 8 otters per year (range 1-16), although this year was 13. Wolverine harvest to appear to be follow effort and overall harvest numbers can be influenced by relatively few trappers that put in a lot of

effort. Unit 23 during the reporting period reported 19. The unit wide average annual harvest of wolverines from RY13 to RY20 is 39 wolverines per year (range 6-60).

Unit 26A: Opportunistic observations of wolverines on aerial surveys and interviews with local residents indicate that wolverines appear to be at high numbers. Observations of high snowshoe hare numbers and their browsing effects during the regulatory year might indicate a future increase in the lynx population. Arctic and red foxes are both in a period of medium population level. Coyotes are rare and no river otters were reported or sealed in RY2020. Populations of muskrat seem to be increasing around the Colville River. They have been sighted and increasing in numbers in Umiat and Nuiqsut.

Coordinate with the Statewide Trapper Questionnaire report and prepare unit summaries of furbearer population status and harvest.

Summaries of trapper harvest information and general population status for each game management unit are provided to support annual trapper questionnaire reports.

Develop updated population objectives in consultation with the local public and other agencies.

Furbearer information is available for discussion during Advisory Committee and Regional Advisory Council meetings. Beaver populations continue to be considered too high by many members of the public because their dams impede boat passage on creeks and waterways, as well as spawning salmon.

Work with community members in rural locations to keep fur sealing vendors active and up to date with new information.

In Unit 22, fur vendors were contacted to ensure their sealing supplies were adequate. Finding new fur sealers in communities has been part of an on-going efforts to ensure sealing and reporting requirements are met. Public service announcements were sent to communities at the end of the trapping season to remind hunters & trappers to visit their local sealer.

III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS.

IV. PUBLICATIONS

None

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS

Prepared by: Phillip Perry, Management Coordinator Region 5

Date: 9/29/21