

**FEDERAL AID ANNUAL
PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
PO Box 115526
Juneau, AK 99811-5526

ANNUAL SURVEY AND INVENTORY

STATE: Alaska

GRANT AND SEGMENT NO.: AKW-4 Wildlife Restoration FY2015

PROJECT NO.: 35.0

PERIOD: July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015

PROJECT LOCATION: Statewide

PROJECT TITLE: Status, Public Use, and Management of Small Game Populations in Alaska

REPORT DESCRIPTION: This performance report describes small game program survey and inventory, research, management, and education activities for Fiscal Year 2015. Activities are listed by objective.

I. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED TOWARDS PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

All project objectives were addressed and work completed during this reporting period.

OBJECTIVE 1: Receive recommendations and assist ADF&G management staff in addressing local or regional small game issues.

JOB/ACTIVITY: A good relationship has been built between the small game program and area management biologists statewide. The program has developed research questions, management proposals, and educational materials based on these relationships to assist and ease existing staff workload. Program staff attended 2 Board of Game (BOG) meetings in winter 2015 to assist management staff with various small game related questions. Additionally, program staff met with local Advisory Committees (AC) to address small game concerns and provide relevant data to inform ACs interested in crafting small game proposals for the 2014-15 and 2015-16 BOG cycle.

OBJECTIVE 2: Design and implement springtime survey techniques that will provide more timely and useful abundance trend data for managers in select locations on and off the road system.

JOB/ACTIVITY: A total of 4 ruffed, 2 sharp-tailed, and 2 sooty grouse, 19 willow, and 14 rock ptarmigan abundance survey locations were visited and surveys completed during spring 2015. Beginning in May 2014, ADF&G and the University of Alaska-

Fairbanks (UAF) Cooperative Extension identified new sharp-tailed grouse survey locations near Delta Junction and Tok. Those efforts continued in spring 2015 further expanding the number of survey locations in both areas.

OBJECTIVE 3: Implement of harvest composition monitoring through wing and tail collections of grouse and ptarmigan and hunter effort statewide.

JOB/ACTIVITY: A total of 891 wings were collected during regulatory year 2015. All 7 species of Alaskan grouse and ptarmigan were represented in the collection from 17 of 26 game management units (GMU). A program goal is to increase hunter awareness and participation in the wing collection effort as it is a cost effective way to collect harvest composition data and understand which statewide grouse and ptarmigan populations are being exploited.

OBJECTIVE 4: Create and maintain an effective network of volunteers throughout the state to accomplish program goals that include fall harvest samples and hunter effort questionnaire.

JOB/ACTIVITY: Since the inception of the program passionate volunteers have been recruited to assist with education programs (Becoming and Outdoors Women-BOW), complete ruffed grouse drumming surveys, and provide objective and sound field and hunter effort reports. In May, 15 residents of the Kenai Peninsula volunteered to assist and complete 7 willow and rock ptarmigan abundance survey routes. Due to staff time limitations these surveys would not have been completed without this effort. We hope to employ this model in other areas across the state to expand our ability to monitor grouse and ptarmigan populations.

OBJECTIVE 5: Promote the development of a research plan with universities in Alaska, federal agencies, and others when a need is recognized and funding is available.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1: Beginning in spring 2013, a study was initiated by the small game program to better understand rock ptarmigan movement and distribution relative to road access in GMU 13B. Beginning in May 2014, the program also completed the first year of a research project examining rock ptarmigan breeding densities at Eagle Summit. This study has been further expanded during spring / summer 2015 to include movement, mortality, and nest monitoring through the use of VHF radio necklace collars.

OBJECTIVE 6: Begin a 3-year research project examining willow ptarmigan distribution and seasonal movement patterns. This will require the capture of live willow ptarmigan for which an Animal Care and Use Committee Plan will be approved prior to commencing field work.

JOB/ACTIVITY: In winter 2012, the small game program secured funding through the Alaska Energy Authority to support research in cooperation with UAF on the distribution and movements of willow ptarmigan near the proposed Susitna River-Watana hydroelectric facility. This project has entered its third and final year. All collaring efforts have been completed and birds will be monitored through May 2016. At that point a robust data analysis will take place with a final project report anticipated in December 2016. The Small Game Program (Project No. XX) has supported this study with personnel resources and periodic use of capture equipment.

OBJECTIVE 7: Develop educational programs, seminars, and interactive material with ADF&G staff and non-governmental organizations on small game hunting and life history for the public.

JOB/ACTIVITY: This project has supported numerous efforts to provide educational material to the public including the creation of videos displaying how we capture rock and willow ptarmigan, a new grouse and ptarmigan poster, funding the reprinting of the grouse and ptarmigan handbook, and creating small game hunter kiosks at the Anchorage, Palmer, Fairbanks, and Juneau offices.

This project has also provided numerous public presentations on Alaska small game and hunting techniques to sportsman shows, school groups, Wildlife Wednesday series, and to various venues with the public. It has also supported the Becoming and Outdoors Woman (BOW) and Alaskans Afield programs with staff, funds, and materials. In September 2014, the second annual Beyond BOW Small Game Hunting event was completed.

OBJECTIVE 8: Complete an annual small game report that documents current status of studied populations, management issues, research studies, and future goals.

JOB/ACTIVITY: This report was completed in July 2015. The small game program is trying to align more closely with other DWC programs by creating a complete annual management report every 2-3 years. Therefore, this year's report was geared more for the hunter in addition to providing a brief update to DWC staff interested in small game population status. Although this year's report was more brief than previous years, it reviews and documents the results from the statewide wing collections, springtime abundance surveys, recent BOG action, and other management concerns.

II. SIGNIFICANT DEVIATIONS AND/OR ADDITIONAL FEDERAL AID-FUNDED WORK NOT DESCRIBED ABOVE THAT WAS ACCOMPLISHED ON THIS PROJECT DURING THIS SEGMENT PERIOD

None.

III. PUBLICATIONS

Merizon, R.A., and C. J. Carroll. 2015. Alaska Small Game Summary 2015. Alaska Department of Fish and Game. 5pp.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

None.

PREPARED BY: Richard A. Merizon and Cameron J. Carroll, ADF&G

DATE: 25 August 2015