

**Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Wildlife Restoration Grant**

**GRANT NUMBER:** AKW-B-R1-2020

**PROJECT NUMBER:** P13.0

**PROJECT TITLE:** Elk S&I Program: Region I's Elk Population and Factors Influencing Their Populations

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

**PERFORMANCE YEAR:** July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020; year 1 of a 2-year grant

**REPORT DUE DATE:** August 28, 2020

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Richard Nelson

**COOPERATORS:** None

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

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Population Size, Status, and Trend. Assess the size and status of the elk population to determine the 5-year trend.

Objective 1 by Area

**Unit 3**

- Conduct alpine abundance and composition surveys on Etolin Island using fixed wing or helicopter on an annual basis.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** No surveys for Etolin Island elk were flown during the reporting period. Elk surveys are flown in mid-summer when elk are visible in alpine and sub-alpine habitat on Etolin Island.

An aerial survey was conducted on Zarembo Island in January 2020. Zarembo Island has less alpine habitat than Etolin Island, and elk can often be observed along the shoreline during the fall and winter.

**Units 1, 2, and 3**

- Solicit the observations of state and federal biologists and anecdotal information on elk numbers and distribution provided by commercial fishermen, hunters, and pilots.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Regional management staff maintained contacts with hunters, commercial fishermen, aircraft pilots, members of the public, and agency biologists to monitor distribution of elk in southern Region I. An introduced population of elk is known to inhabit Etolin and Zarembo islands in Unit 3. Although reports of elk sightings or sign in other areas including Prince of Wales, Wrangell, and Kupreanof islands are common; however, we have no direct evidence (photos, tracks, scats, etc.) that elk occur outside of Etolin and Zarembo islands.

OBJECTIVE 2: Mortality/Harvest Monitoring and Regulations. Assess the number of elk harvested by hunters and other sources of mortality that may influence the population.

**Region-wide**

- Monitor harvest through field observations, hunter harvest reports, and contacts with hunters.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Elk hunts in Region I are managed through draw and registration permits that require successful hunters to report to the Petersburg ADF&G office within five days of a kill. Petersburg management staff collected hunting and harvest information from hunters. Biologist collected anecdotal observations from fishermen and other wildlife observers.

GMU	Regulatory Year					5-Year Average
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
3Z	7	5	9	7	7	7

Table 1. Summary of elk harvest by GMU for Southeast Alaska, regulatory years 2015 – 2019. Elk were only reported harvested in GMU 3. A regulatory year begins on July 1 of that year and extends through June 30 of the following year.

- Collect and analyze biological data including incisors for aging and photos of antlers.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: All elk hunts in Region I required successful hunters to turn in a lower jaw so a tooth can be collected for aging. A lower incisor was extracted from each jaw and sent to a commercial lab for aging. Results were archived in the harvest database for future analysis. Regional Management staff collected photos of harvested elk antlers for later comparison with age data.

**OBJECTIVE 3: Habitat Enhancement /Assessment.** Assess elk habitat and browse availability directly or indirectly in specified areas of the state and perform habitat enhancement in areas where it is feasible.

### **Unit 3**

- Monitor elk habitat on Etolin and Zarembo islands.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** None. On Etolin Island elk primarily occur in US Forest Service Wilderness, but on Zarembo Island they occur within a logged landscape. Region I staff have never developed a habitat or browse monitoring program for either island because one population occurs within Wilderness and the other is of small size and likely not limited by habitat. Region I will consider eliminating habitat assessment from the project because it is currently infeasible and likely unnecessary.

**OBJECTIVE 4: Elk Management with Public Participation and Outreach.** Manage each elk population with an emphasis on engaging the public in management goals and objectives through public meetings, working groups, and educational materials.

### **Unit 3**

- Prepare 5-year Elk Management Operational Reports and Plans for each unit/subunit inhabited by elk.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** The Elk Species Management Report and Plan (SMRP) reporting on the period RY2013 – RY2018 and planning for the period RY2019 – RY2024 is currently in draft form. The SMRP will be published before the next reporting period.

- Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on elk management.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** Regional management biologists regularly participated in public regulatory processes by providing data and guidance to Fish and Game Advisory Committees and members of the public to help develop proposals to the Alaska Board of Game, by providing data and commenting on proposals created by the federal subsistence Regional Advisory Council, and by providing presentations and comments to proposals to the Alaska Board of Game.

- Provide information on status of elk populations, likely trends, habitat use, and harvest management to other agencies and the public.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** Regional I management of elk is not based on herd specific population objectives. Region I management is based on harvest success and hunt quality. Elk population information is passed to hunters when they are provided their Registration or Draw permit for Unit 3 elk hunts. Current harvest success indicates a stable and sustainable elk population. The manager also provides the “Guide to Elk Hunting in Southeast Alaska” to hunters with questions about hunting elk in Unit 3.

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

During this reporting period, Region I management staff monitored hunter effort and harvest of elk from Etolin Island and anecdotal accounts of elk elsewhere in southern Region I. Etolin Island elk hunt remains very popular with three draw hunts fully subscribed. Region I managers estimate the population at 250-350 elk and believe harvest remains sustainable. Elk hunting on Zarembo Island has been closed since 2008 due to apparent low numbers of elk. All objectives were accomplished.

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

The increase of salary was due to the 3% General government union pay increase and we hired the incumbent after the project statements were submitted. The project statement has the salary Allocation set at step "A" and the hired employee is at a step "F", an increase of approximately \$6 an hour.

**IV. PUBLICATIONS**

None.

**V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT**

We recommend two changes to future project statements.

The Region will consider eliminating habitat assessment and herd specific population objectives.

**Prepared by:** Frank Robbins, Wildlife Biologist III, Petersburg, AK

**Date:** August 2020