

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

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

**PROJECT NUMBER:** P 14.0

**PROJECT TITLE:** Region I Wolf S&I program: Alaska's Wolf Populations and Factors Influencing Their Status

**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



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

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

**Statewide**

- Distribute the annual statewide trapper questionnaire to obtain population assessment information.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

The statewide Trapper Questionnaire was distributed to trappers through a statewide program stationed at Headquarters and is not specific to any region. Data collected through the Questionnaire were compiled and analyzed and an annual report was published. Reports published since 1990 can be found at:

<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=trapping.reports>

**Region I - Units 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5**

- Contact reliable observers to obtain general information about the status and trends of wolf populations, including the use of an annual Trapper Questionnaire.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Area management staff maintained contacts with trappers, primarily when they brought furs in for sealing. Staff asked trappers about their experiences and observations in the field and on the status and trend of wolves in their trapping area. Area management biologists also monitored specific populations as follows:

Area management staff in Ketchikan continued to maintain and monitor images of wolves captured by trail cameras set at strategic locations on Gravina Island in Unit 1A. Relative abundance of wolves on Gravina Island is considered low, likely ranging 1-6 animals.

Area management staff in Unit 1C maintained contacts with homeowners and deer hunters to monitor anecdotal accounts of wolf abundance along the Juneau road system. Those accounts suggest wolf numbers have declined from a peak in RY2017 but remain high.

## **UNIT 2**

- Use Spatially Explicit Capture-Recapture (SECR) method to estimate abundance of wolves in Unit 2 relative to the population objective established by the Board of Game in January 2019. Set hunting and trapping season lengths based on estimated abundance and current Unit 2 Wolf Management Plan.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Staff conducted field work and SECR analysis to determine the Unit 2 fall 2018 population estimate was 170 wolves. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Alaska Board of Game, and US Forest Service agreed to a two-month trapping season with no quota in regulatory year 2019 and requested skin, muscle, and foreleg bone samples from harvested wolves.

OBJECTIVE 2: Mortality/Harvest Monitoring and Regulations. Assess the number of wolves harvested by hunters and trappers and other sources of mortality that might have an impact on each population.

## **Units 1, 2, 3, and 5**

- Monitor the wolf harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires, and contact with trappers and hunters.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Management biologists conversed with hunters and trappers about their observations of wolf populations and made their own field observations. They also monitored harvest relative to previous years to ensure sustainability.

| GMU          | Regulatory Year |            |            |            |            | Average    |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
|              | 2015            | 2016       | 2017       | 2018       | 2019       |            |
| 01A          | 31              | 30         | 30         | 27         | 26         | 29         |
| 01B          | 10              | 24         | 7          | 4          | 25         | 14         |
| 01C          | 13              | 21         | 32         | 22         | 29         | 23         |
| 01D          | 2               | 12         | 10         | 3          | 7          | 7          |
| 02Z          | 7               | 30         | 64         | 46         | 165        | 63         |
| 03Z          | 63              | 59         | 42         | 36         | 42         | 48         |
| 04Z          | 4               | 2          | 3          | 2          | 0          | 2          |
| 05A          | 17              | 0          | 4          | 5          | 5          | 6          |
| 05B          | 0               | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>147</b>      | <b>178</b> | <b>192</b> | <b>145</b> | <b>300</b> | <b>192</b> |

Table 1. Summary of wolf harvest by GMU for Region I, regulatory years 2015 – 2019. A regulatory year begins July 1 of that year through June 30 of the following year.

- Collect data when wolf pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: In Alaska wolves are defined as both big game animals and furbearers. All harvested wolves must be sealed, which provides an opportunity to collect information on each harvested wolf, hunting or trapping effort, and anecdotal data from hunters and trappers. Harvested wolves were sealed throughout the region and data collected at sealing was archived in the statewide fur sealing database for use in analyses and reports.

- Examine pelts presented for sealing for the presence of lice and other abnormalities.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Area management staff examined pelts during sealing to look for signs of parasites or abnormalities. None were reported.

OBJECTIVE 3: Habitat Enhancement. Assess habitat issues related to wolves and their prey and inform land use planning affecting wolf populations.

**Units 1, 2, 3, and 5**

- Participate in land use planning processes as needed to provide the most current information on effects of planned changes, primarily logging and road-building, on wolves and their prey.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Region I management staff actively participated in land use planning processes by providing comments on how activities, primarily logging, might affect wolves and their prey.

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

### **Region-wide**

#### **Units 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5**

- Implement 5-year Wolf Management Reports and Plans developed for RY 2016-2020

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Region I management staff completed Wolf Species Management Reports and Plans reporting on regulatory years 2010 – 2015 following plans for regulatory years 2016 – 2020. Reports specific to each unit/subunit can be found at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=librarypublications.wildlifemanagement#furbeares>

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

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Region I management staff summarized and analyzed wolf abundance and harvest data and presented those data at public forums including presentations to Fish and Game Advisory Committees and federal Regional Subsistence Advisory Council.

- Provide information on status of wolf populations, likely trends, effects on abundance of prey species, and harvest management to other agencies and the public.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Wolf management is often controversial and polarizing. Region I staff provided information on the status and trend of wolf populations, wolf harvest management, abundance and trend of prey populations, and plans for harvest management to fellow agencies, in public forums like Fish and Game Advisory Committee meetings, Regional Subsistence Advisory Council meetings, and to the news media.

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

Region I management staff successfully completed all activities described in the FY2020 Project Statement.

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

Due to COVID 19 and hiring a seasonal technician who lives in Unit 2 to help with the annual population estimate, travel costs were significantly reduced. This was also the first year conducting the Unit 2 population estimate as part of this S&I project, rather than a research project, and line 4000 Commodities costs were lower than anticipated. Those savings were offset by higher than anticipated spending in line 3000 Contractual.

**IV. PUBLICATIONS**

None.

**V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT**

We recommend continuing this project.

**Prepared by:** Tessa Hasbrouck, Wildlife Biologist II, Ketchikan

Ross Dorendorf, Wildlife Biologist III, Ketchikan

**Date:** August 2020