

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

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

**PROJECT NUMBER:** P 17.0

**PROJECT TITLE:** Region I Black Bear S&I program: Alaska's Black Bear 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:**

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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 each black bear population to determine the 5-year trend.

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

- Solicit anecdotal observations from biologists, big game guides, and hunters for changes in black bear abundance.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** In Region I all harvested black bears must be sealed, which provides an opportunity to collect information on harvested bears, hunting effort, and anecdotal information from hunters. Region I staff monitored black bear abundance throughout the region by analyzing hunt reports and sealing records including information on harvest, skull size, age, sex ratio, and effort required to harvest a bear.

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

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

- Collect data, determine sex, and extract a tooth for aging from black bears presented for sealing by hunters or other human-caused bear mortality.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Sealing regulations provides an opportunity to collect information on harvested bears, hunting effort, and information from hunters. Region I staff monitored black bear harvest through sealing records, which included locations of harvest. Area management staff monitored all sources of mortality including harvest, Agency kills, Defense of Life and Property (DLP) kills, disease, accidents, and parasites.

GMU	Regulatory Year					5-Year Average
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
01A	69	65	74	80	75	73
01B	9	9	17	11	10	11
01C	45	65	80	97	84	74
01D	20	26	37	33	45	32
02Z	146	147	174	188	116	154
03Z	111	184	205	219	114	167
05A	3	14	3	5	6	6
05B	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 1. Summary of black bear harvest by GMU for Southeast Alaska, regulatory years 2015 – 2019. A regulatory year begins on July 1 of that year and extends through June 30 of the following year.

**Unit 5**

- Monitor the annual harvest of glacier colored black bears.

Area management staff monitored the number of glacier-colored black bears in the harvest.

OBJECTIVE 3: Habitat Enhancement/Assessment. Assess black bear habitat availability directly or indirectly in specified areas of the region and inform land use planning affecting black bear 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 on black bear populations.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Regional management staff participated in land use planning processes by reviewing and providing comments on projects throughout the region. Information provided aided in the conservation of black bear habitat.

**Units 1C**

- Monitor black bear use of Sweetheart Lake Hydroelectric Project area using trail cameras, by identifying individuals through DNA analysis of hair samples, and by capturing and radio collaring several bears to learn about seasonal movements and habitat use before and after development.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: No progress. Region I staff did not accomplish capture and collection of information on black bears using the proposed Sweetheart Lake Hydroelectric project area. The value and feasibility of this project needs to be reassessed.

OBJECTIVE 4: Black Bear Management with Public Participation and Outreach. Manage each black bear population with an emphasis on engaging the public law enforcement, and public sanitation officials through agency meetings, public meetings, working groups, educational materials, and incentive programs.

- Prepare 5-year Bear Management Operational Reports and Plans for each unit/subunit inhabited by black bear.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Regional management biologists completed Bear Species Management Plans and Reports for bears reporting on the period RY2011 – RY2016 and planning for the period RY2017 – RY2022. Unit-specific reports and plans can be found at:

<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=librarypublications.wildlifepublications&sort=all&species=Sitka+Black-tailed+Deer&submit=Search>

- Provide information to the public, state, and federal regulatory processes on black bear management.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Region I staff engaged with the public through Fish and Game Advisory Committees and with local agencies and residents. Staff discussed management issues and regulatory proposals at Fish and Game Advisory Committee meetings and Federal Regional Subsistence Advisory Council. Black bear Species Management Reports were published or in the process of final review before publishing on the Departments website. Staff engaged with local communities and residents through ongoing efforts to educate both groups on bear safety, proper storage of trash and other attractants, and managing small livestock such as chickens.

- Work with local governments and the public to mitigate human-bear conflicts.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Management staff continue to provide educational programs to communities and to support efforts by community groups, the Alaska Wildlife Troopers, and local governments to minimize bear-human conflict.

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

During this reporting period black bear harvest throughout Region I generally increased but remained within the historic range of harvest in all Units/Subunits. Biologists report increasing harvests in Units 1A, 1C, 2, and 3 reflects growing bear populations brought about by harvest restrictions enacted in RY12. At its January 2019 meeting the Alaska Board of Game liberalized black bear harvest regulations by replacing selected draw hunts with general season hunts and by increasing the number of permits that may be issued for remaining draw hunts. Draw hunts will be maintained in a portion of Unit 01C, 02Z, and a portion of 03Z. Unit 01A, 01B, 01D, and the remainder of 3 will be included in the general season. All objectives were accomplished.

COVID-19 restricted non-resident hunters from participating in black bear hunts across Alaska in the spring of RY19.

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

For FY2020 this project was underspent by about \$13,000. That resulted from a dramatic decline in human-black bear conflict situations in Unit 1C. In most years area management biologists and technicians devote significant time within and outside normal work hours to addressing active conflict situations and educating the public on how to prevent conflict with black bears. Black bear conflicts within Unit 1C communities was unusually low during FY2020, likely due to an abundant berry crop. Consequently, the budget was underspent.

## **IV. PUBLICATIONS**

None.

## **V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT**

The Alaska Department of Wildlife Conservation recommends continuing this project.

**Prepared by:** Ross Dorendorf, Wildlife Biologist III, Ketchikan

**Date:** August 2020