

**Wildlife Restoration MULTI-YEAR GRANT
INTERIM 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-B-R2-2020

PROJECT NUMBER: 2.0

PROJECT TITLE: Region 2 Deer S&I program: Deer 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: Submit to FAC August 28, 2020

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Cynthia Wardlow

COOPERATORS: Jeff Selinger, Charlotte Westing, Nate Svoboda

Authorities: 2 CFR 200.328
2 CFR 200.301
50 CFR 80.90

I. PROGRESS ON PROJECT OBJECTIVES DURING PERFORMANCE YEAR

Objective 1: Population Size, Status, and Trend. Assess the size and status of Region 2 deer population to evaluate the 5-year trend.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Objective 1 by Area

Unit 6

Unit 6 deer pellet transects were conducted starting May 18, 2020 at Shipyard Bay on northeast Hawkins Island, finishing May 30 at Hook Point on Hinchinbrook Island. Montague Island, Knight Island, and Naked Island were not included in our sample due to COVID-19 related logistical constraints. This year's Mean Pellet Groups/Plot (MPGP) was 2.09, which is higher than the four previous high counts for the same subset (Hawkins and Hinchinbrook only). The unsurveyed areas undoubtedly fared less favorably since they receive deeper snow in all years. However, the severity of the winter and its impact on deer is unknown.

Unit 8

- Fly aerial surveys along the shoreline to assess deer numbers noted on the beach
 - Due to harsh winter conditions and reports of an archipelago wide deer die off, we attempted to survey various overwintering sites. On May 11, we surveyed south facing bays on Sitkalidak Island and observed a large number of deer mortalities in the Ocean Bay area. Unfortunately, weather conditions prevented us from obtaining accurate estimates of mortality in this area. Approximately 96 deer mortalities were observed from Akhiok to Halibut Bay. On May 12, we surveyed the Chief Cove deer mortality transect and counted 13 deer mortalities on the north transect and 3 mortalities on the eastern transect. The Seven Mile Beach area was also surveyed and a total of 32 mortalities were observed along the beach. Living deer were difficult to observe due to their coat color matching the landscape, but we observed ~50 deer in the 2 days of the survey.

- Evaluate procedures described in the literature for assessing population status that may be applicable to this Unit.
 - Literature searches and consultation with other deer researchers throughout the state to develop future projects are ongoing. A review of previous deer work done within the last 10 years in Region 2 has opportunities to build on existing work or explore other research projects using new technology. Travel to assist with other deer research projects was not done during this time due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and budget limitations.

Objective 2: Mortality/Harvest Monitoring and Regulations. Assess the number of deer harvested by hunters and other sources of mortality that might have an impact on each deer population in Region 2.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Objective 2 by Area

Regionwide

All hunters were required to obtain general season deer harvest tickets and report on hunting activities after the season or at the completion of their hunt. All reports are entered into the Winfonet database system. 4,496 hunters reported that they hunted for deer in Units 6 or 8 in this reporting period, with 5,267 distinct records.

Final harvest estimate is approximately 1,725 deer from Unit 6. Reports from hunters suggest that harvest increased as the population increased and success rates improved. Harvest in this reporting period is nearly identical to last year.

Unit 8 hunter, guide, and transporter reports as well as ADFG observations suggest the deer population is significantly reduced compared to previous years. Harvest numbers and hunter success rates are lower than the previous reporting period. Reported harvest was 4,170 deer.

Additional harvest was taken in both areas under Federal Subsistence regulations.

Unit 6

- Conduct a survey of Prince William Sound shoreline in spring to assess deer over-winter survival.
 - No activities were conducted during this reporting period.

Unit 8

- Conduct over-winter mortality transects in standardized mortality count areas.
 - No activities were conducted during the reporting period. Anecdotal reports from residents indicates there was a high over-winter mortality rate.

Units 6 & 8

- Monitor the harvest by communicating with hunters on an opportunistic basis, in the office and in the field.
 - ADF&G staff are available in the Cordova and Kodiak offices to gather anecdotal information from hunters submitting harvest reports and also at other community meetings. Field contacts may be made in the course of other work or in conjunction with other office activities, such as bear, goat or fur sealing.

Objective 3: Habitat Enhancement /Assessment. Habitat Enhancement /Assessment. Assess the nutritional status of the deer population directly or indirectly where it is feasible.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

We are continuing to investigate various modeling approaches to obtain a rigorous population estimate and gather information on recruitment and survival. A full time coastal ungulate biologist was hired during the last reporting period and will be working with local biologists to develop more rigorous protocols. No activities were conducted under this objective during the reporting period.

Objective 4: Deer Management with Public Participation and Outreach. Deer Management with Public Participation and Outreach. Manage each deer population with an emphasis on engaging the public through public meetings, working groups, educational materials, and incentive programs.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

We compiled information and data to inform the next five-year deer Management Reports and Plans for Units 6 and 8. These reports include historical and current data, management directions, methods, Board of Game actions, harvests and natural mortality, habitat assessments, and local and statewide non-regulatory issues. Reports were last completed in FY2018 and are available at the following url: http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildliferesearch.smrdeer2011_2021

The deer survey and inventory approach outlined above provide most of the information required to manage Alaska deer populations in Region 2. Information collected is used to monitor progress toward attaining management objectives for Alaska southcentral deer populations.

We communicated and coordinated with and attended meetings of local Fish and Game Advisory Committees, the Alaska Board of Game, local village councils and Native corporations about deer management. The next Board of Game meeting for Region 2 is scheduled for winter of 2021/2022.

II. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON PROJECT TO DATE.

This project is ongoing. Summaries of past data trends are published at the following url:

http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildliferesearch.smrdeer2011_2021

III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS.

None. Project number 2.0 was significantly underspent during the reporting period due to a staff vacancy in the Soldotna office, restrictions on travel due to COVID-19, and an overall budget shortage which resulted in a request to reduce planned spending to preserve Fish & Game matching funds. Planned travel and site visits were not conducted and personnel time was coded to other projects that did not require travel. Collars were not purchased, and contract pilots were not used to survey the areas of Region 2 where deer are found.

IV. PUBLICATIONS

Project publications for previous years are available at the following url:

http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildliferesearch.smrdeer2011_2021

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

We recommend continued funding for this project to effectively manage deer populations in Southcentral Alaska.

Prepared by: Cynthia Wardlow

Date: October 2020