

**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: 3.0

PROJECT TITLE: Region 2 Caribou S&I program: Caribou 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, Jason Herreman, 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 each population to determine the 5-year trend.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Kenai Lowland, Kenai Mountain, Killey River, and Fox River Herds (Units 7 and 15)

No Survey was conducted for the Kenai Lowland herd during our normal June survey period in 2020 due to Covid-19 related flight restrictions.

A survey was attempted in February 2020 for the Kenai Mountain herd but was not completed due to weather. No further attempts were made due to Covid-19 related flight restrictions.

A survey was conducted in February 2020 for the Killey River Herd and the Fox River Herd. Count numbers for the Killey River Herd were up from the 413 animals counted in 2019 to 531 caribou. This herd has continued to grow in recent years. Twenty-three animals were counted in the Fox River Herd during February survey flights. This is an increase since no animals were

counted last year. The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge biologist counted 67 animals for the Fox River herd in August, which is within our traditional herd size of 50-100 animals. It appears that animals from the Fox River and Killey River Herds continue to comingle during the winter returning to traditional summer ranges in time for hunting season. Hunters continue to be successful finding animals in the Fox River herd.

Kodiak Herd (Unit 8)

An aerial survey was conducted in August 2019 and a total of 233 animals were counted indicating a slight increase from the previous survey when ~175 animals were counted. This survey identified 6 separate caribou groups or individuals comprised of 230 adults and 3 calves. It is important to note caribou calves were difficult to distinguish from adults due to their larger size this time of year so calf estimates may be underestimated. In addition, due to financial constraints the entire caribou range was unable to be surveyed so a complete count was not feasible. Population levels appear to continue to fluctuate between 250 and 400 animals.

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

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Kenai Lowland, Kenai Mountain, Killey River, and Fox River Herds (Units 7 and 15)

Caribou in Units 7 and 15 are managed under a state drawing permit. Hunters reported harvesting 19 caribou (14 males and 5 females) during this reporting period, which is a slight decrease compared to previous years. Two additional animals were harvested under the Federal season.

Kodiak Herd (Unit 8)

Unit 8 caribou harvest is managed under a general season hunt. Hunters reported harvesting 37 caribou (22 males and 15 females) during this reporting period, slightly lower than the 2018–19 reported harvest of 44.

OBJECTIVE 3: Caribou Management with Public Participation and Outreach. Manage each caribou population with an emphasis on engaging the public through public meetings, working groups, and educational materials.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

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 caribou management. The next Board of Game meeting for Region 2 is scheduled for winter of 2021/2022.

We compiled information and data to inform the next five-year caribou Management Reports and Plans for Units 8 and 7 & 15. 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=librarypublications.wildlifepublications&sort=all&species=Caribou&publicationtype=Species+Management+Report+%28and+Plan%29&submit=Search>

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=librarypublications.wildlifepublications&sort=all&species=Caribou&publicationtype=Species+Management+Report+%28and+Plan%29&submit=Search>

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III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS.

None. Project number 3.0 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.

IV. PUBLICATIONS

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

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=librarypublications.wildlifepublications&sort=all&species=Caribou&publicationtype=Species+Management+Report+%28and+Plan%29&submit=Search>

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

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

Prepared by: Cynthia Wardlow

Date: September 2020