

**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: 6.0

PROJECT TITLE: Region 2 Dall Sheep S&I program: Dall Sheep 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, Dave Battle

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 Dall sheep population to determine the 5-year trend.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Units 7, 14C, and 15

- Conduct aerial surveys to determine status, trend, productivity, and mortality of sheep.
 - Aerial trend count surveys were conducted to assess trend, distribution, productivity, and sex and age composition of the sheep population during July 2019 or June 2020.
 - Sheep surveys were not conducted in Unit 14C during this reporting period due to late snow and budget constraints.
 - Surveys in Units 7 and 15 were completed in a portion of the count areas. Only six of these count areas currently contain sheep: Resurrection Creek (331), Gilpatrick Mountain (332), Twin Lakes (355), Indian Creek (356), Tustumena

Glacier (357), and Fox river (358). Sheep populations continue with their declining population trend. The cause of this decline is unknown, but winter weather conditions may play a role. Sheep numbers are reaching what may be a critically low point where populations are below a functional level on some portions of the Kenai Peninsula.

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

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Units 7, 14C, and 15

- Monitor the sheep harvest through field observations, hunter harvest reports and contact with hunters, collect data from sheep presented for sealing by hunters, including the age of harvested sheep, and opportunistically test for the presence of potentially population-regulating disease
 - Sheep were brought to Region 2 offices in Anchorage and Soldotna and were presented to staff for measuring and sealing. Approximately 25% of all rams taken in Alaska are sealed in Region 2. We collected harvest data at the time of sealing for over 300 sheep. Data collected included days hunted, location of hunt, date of kill, method of take, commercial services used, length and diameter of horns, sheep age, and curl class. Harvest reports are collected at the time of sealing, or throughout the season for unsuccessful hunters. Disease monitoring for *M. ovi* (nasal swabs) was also done on suitable sheep heads brought in to offices.
 - Information was collected during interviews with hunters and from information provided on harvest reports from permit hunts and general seasons. Sheep harvest was monitored through contact with hunters and guides during sealing, and through analysis of hunt reports from hunting season primarily during 10 Aug–30 September, including sheep taken in a general season hunt or in drawing permit hunts. Harvest data were analyzed, and the results were applied to management planning and ongoing population assessment.

Objective 3: Habitat Enhancement /Assessment. Assess Dall sheep habitat availability directly or indirectly in specified areas of the state and perform habitat enhancement in areas where it is feasible.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Units 7, 14C, and 15

- Record observations of biologists and hunters that relate to sheep distribution and habitat use and sheep body condition.
 - Anecdotal information was collected from hunters and others on sheep observations throughout Region 2 during the reporting period. Reports of sheep mortality or sheep exhibiting signs of poor body condition were investigated when weather conditions and staff availability allowed.

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

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Units 7, 14C, and 15

- Prepare 5-year Sheep Management Operational Reports and Plans.
 - We compiled information and data for future five-year Dall's Sheep Management Reports and Operational Plans for Units 7 and 15, and 14C. 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. Previous reports are available at the following url:
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildliferesearch.smrDallsheep20112021>.
- Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on Dall sheep management.
 - We communicated with and attended meetings of local Fish and Game Advisory Committees, the Alaska Board of Game, Federal Regional Advisory Councils, the Federal Subsistence Board, Office of Subsistence Management, numerous local village councils and Native corporations about Dall's sheep management and to review and analyze regulation proposals for the Alaska Board of Game and the Federal Subsistence Board.

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=Dall+Sheep&submit=Search>

III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS.

Project number 6.0 was underspent in Personal Services during the reporting period due to restrictions on travel due to COVID-19, vacancies, and an overall budget shortage. Personal services were allocated to projects that did not require travel. Some sheep surveys were not flown, resulting in reduced spending to preserve Fish & Game matching funds, and additional services and travel did not occur.

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=Dall+Sheep&submit=Search>

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

We recommend continued funding for this project to effectively manage Dall's sheep populations in Southcentral Alaska.

Prepared by: Cynthia Wardlow

Date: October 2020