

Section 7: Plurals

For the names of certain types of animals, the singular is used to denote both one and more than one individual.

Use: deer, fish, moose, sheep

Some of these nouns have the same form for singular and plural. The regularly formed plural is used to indicate more than one species, strain, or variety.

Use: three fishes of interest

For the names of some large mammals and some other organisms, either the singular or the regularly formed plural may be used to indicate the plural; however, see 7.1 Animals, Fishes, and Related Terms for plurals commonly used in ADF&G writing.

Generally speaking, a number, a fraction, or a quantity of things is singular if considered as a mass and plural if considered as separate units. In general, use a plural verb when human beings are implied.

Use: Six quarts is enough [singular if considered as a mass].
 Five liters were slowly measured out [plural if considered as separate units].
 Half the bottle is shared.
 Half of these women are married.
 Almost 20 percent of the overhead goes to the mortgage.
 Over 20 percent of the profits are reinvested.

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7.1 Animals, Fishes, and Related Terms

When referring to collective groups of species (a mix of species), the plural forms may differ from normal use (e.g., one fish, two fish; but two fishes—one of the trout variety and one of the escocid variety.)

Singular	Plural	Mix of Species
abalone	abalones	NA
alevin	alevins	alevins
alga	algae ¹	algae ¹
bear	bears	Ursids
beaver	beavers	beavers
bison	bison ¹	bison
buck	bucks ¹	bucks ¹
burbot	burbots	burbots
caribou	caribou ¹	NA
char	char ¹	chars ¹
cisco	ciscoes	ciscoes
clam	clams	clams
cod	cod ¹	cods ¹
coyote	coyotes	NA

Singular	Plural	Mix of Species
crab	crab	crabs
deer	deer ¹	deer ¹
doe	does ¹	does ¹
duck	ducks	ducks
elk	elk ¹	NA
fauna	faunas	faunas
fingerling	fingerlings	fingerlings
fish	fish	fishes ^{1, 2}
flora	floras	floras
flounder	flounders ¹	flounders ¹
fox	foxes	foxes
fry	fry	fry
fungus	fungi/funguses	fungi/funguses
furbearer	furbearers	furbearers
geoduck	geoducks	geoducks
gillnet	gillnets	gillnets
goat	goats	goats
grayling	grayling	graylings
goose	geese	geese
grouse	grouse ¹	grouses ¹
halibut	halibut ¹	halibuts ¹
hare	hares	hares
herring	herring ¹	herrings ¹
larva	larvae ¹	larvae ¹
lynx	lynx ¹	lynxes ¹
marten	martens	martens
megalopa ³	megalopae	megalopae
megalops ³	megalops	megalops
mink	mink ¹	minks
mollusk	mollusks	mollusks
moose	moose	NA
muskox	muskoxen	NA
muskrat	muskrats	NA
octopus	octopuses/octopi	octopuses/octopi
otter	otters	otters
parr	parr ¹	parr ¹
pike	pike ¹	esocids ⁵
plankter ⁴	plankton/plankters ³	plankton ⁴
raptor	raptors	raptors
rockfish	rockfish ¹	rockfishes ¹
salmon	salmon ¹	salmon ¹
seal	seals	seals
sea lion	sea lions	sea lions
sheep	sheep	sheep
shrimp	shrimp ¹	shrimps ¹
smolt	smolt	smolts ¹
species	species	species
squid	squid ¹	squids ¹
trout	trout ¹	trouts ¹
walrus	walruses	NA
waterfowl	waterfowl	waterfowl
weasel	weasels	weasels
whale	whales	whales

Singular	Plural	Mix of Species
wolf	wolves	NA
wolverine	wolverines	NA
zoea ¹	zoeas ¹	zoeas ¹

- ¹ The dictionary recognizes two acceptable plurals, but the committee decided that only this plural should be used in ADF&G writing.
- ² For a mix of species, the plural *fish* may be used when referring to fish as subsistence harvests for food. For all other uses, ADF&G recommends following the American Fisheries Society's recommendations to use *fishes* for a mix of species.
- ³ Use either megalopa or megalops and their plurals, but do not mix the two forms (megalops/megalopa) within a document.
- ⁴ Use *plankter* for a single planktonic organism. Use *plankters* when referring to a specific number of such organisms; however, *plankton* may also be used. For example, a count of 1.3×10^3 zooplankters but the zooplankton count was 1.3×10^3 (not 1.3×10^3 zooplankton). Also, use *plankton* when referring to the population or general group of such organisms.
- ⁵ Although technically pickerels and muskellunge are pikes, when referring to a mix of pike species *piques* may be misunderstood to be several or more pike *E. lucius*. Therefore, when referring to a mix of pike species, use *esocids*.

7.2 General Terms

The following singulars and plurals should be used as indicated. Words in brackets are allowed in general writing but not in technical writing. When there are two plurals and both are acceptable, they are separated by a slash (/).

Singular	Plural
addendum	addenda
agenda	agendas
criterion	criteria [criterions ¹]
data point [not data ²]	data
fishery ³	fisheries ³
formula	formulas
forum	fora
genus	genera
hypothesis	hypotheses
index	indices [indexes ¹]
memorandum	memoranda/memorandums
ovum	ova
phenomenon	phenomena
species	species
stratum	strata [stratums ⁴]
symposium	symposia/symposiums
taxon	taxa
virion	virions ⁵
virus ⁵	viruses ⁵

- ¹ Although acceptable in popular writing, this should not be used in technical writing.
- ² Although *data* as a singular is acceptable in popular writing, this should not be used in technical writing. *Datum* is no longer used.
- ³ Use *fishery* or *fisheries* as a plural modifier of *biologist* or *management*; whichever is used, use it consistently within the document, not both. For ADF&G biologists, use *fishery biologist* because this is the term for the job class.
- ⁴ Although the dictionary allows either, the committee did not endorse the use of this plural.
- ⁵ Use *virion(s)* or *virus particle(s)* when referring to a single or multiple particles, especially numbers of (e.g., *a single virion can infect...*). Use *virus/viruses* for all other uses; i.e., when not referring to numbers of particles.

7.3 Apostrophes

To form the possessive of most singular common and proper nouns and some indefinite pronouns, add an apostrophe and an *s*. This is true even when the word ends with an *s*.

Use: the patient's condition one's own view the wolf's territory
 Philip Glass's symphony Yeats's poems Illinois's state capital

Plural nouns may already end in *s*. To create their possessive, add an apostrophe after the *s*.

Use: The dogs' beds were in the garage.
 The lions' water hole had dried up.
 The wolves' territory was shrinking.

To avoid the possessive with inanimate objects, recast the sentence or use an *of* phrase.

Use: the leaf's color = the color of the leaf
 the mineral's characteristics = the characteristics of the mineral
 the regulations' intentions = the intentions of the regulations

To form the plural of abbreviations that do not contain periods, add only *s*. If the abbreviated term is itself a plural, do not add the *s*. In scientific writing do not add *s* to a symbol for a unit of measure.

Use: MDs PCBs mm [not mms] kg [not kgs] lb [not lbs]
 CDC [not CDCs] for Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Do not use an apostrophe with years.

Use: *the 1970s* Avoid: *the 1970's*.