

Black Bear Management Report and Plan, Game Management Unit 20D

Report Period 1 July 2018–30 June 2023, and
Plan Period 1 July 2023–30 June 2028

Danielle D. Mason



©2020 ADF&G. Photo by Dean Lambert.



Black Bear Management Report and Plan, Game Management Unit 20D

Report Period 1 July 2018–30 June 2023, and
Plan Period 1 July 2023–30 June 2028

PREPARED BY:

Danielle D. Mason
Area Wildlife Biologist

APPROVED BY:

Jason R. Caikoski
Management Coordinator

PUBLISHED BY:

June C. Younkings
Publications Coordinator

©2026 Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Division of Wildlife Conservation
PO Box 115526
Juneau, AK 99811-5526



Hunters are important founders of the modern wildlife conservation movement. They, along with trappers and sport shooters, provided funding for this publication through payment of federal taxes on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment, and through state hunting license and tag fees. These taxes and fees fund the federal Wildlife Restoration Program and the State of Alaska's Fish and Game Fund, which provided funding for the work reported on in this publication.

Species management reports and plans provide information about species that are hunted or trapped and management actions, goals, recommendations for those species, and plans for data collection. Detailed information is prepared for each species every 5 years by the area management biologist for game management units in their areas, who also develops a plan for data collection and species management for the next 5 years. This type of report is not produced for species that are not managed for hunting or trapping or for areas where there is no current or anticipated activity. Unit reports are reviewed and approved for publication by regional management coordinators and are available to the public via the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's public website.

This species management report and plan was reviewed and approved for publication by Jason R. Caikoski, Management Coordinator for Region III of the Division of Wildlife Conservation.

Species management reports and plans are available via the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's public website (www.adfg.alaska.gov) or by contacting Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Division of Wildlife Conservation, PO Box 115526, Juneau, AK 99811-5526; phone: (907) 465-4190; email: dfg.dwc.publications@alaska.gov. The report may also be accessed through most libraries, via interlibrary loan from the Alaska State Library or the Alaska Resources Library and Information Services (www.arlis.org). To subscribe to email announcements regarding new technical publications from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation please use the following link: <http://list.state.ak.us/mailman/listinfo/adfgwildlifereport>.

This document, published in PDF format only, should be cited as:

Mason, D. D. 2026. Black bear management report and plan, Game Management Unit 20D: Report period 1 July 2018–30 June 2023, and plan period 1 July 2023–30 June 2028. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Species Management Report and Plan ADF&G/DWC/SMR&P-2026-30, Juneau.

Please contact the authors or the Division of Wildlife Conservation at (907) 465-4190 if you have questions about the content of this report.

The State of Alaska is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game complies with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. This document is available in alternative communication formats. If you need assistance, please contact the Department ADA Coordinator via fax at (907) 465-6078; TTY/Alaska Relay 7-1-1 or 1-800-770-8973.

ADF&G does not endorse or recommend any specific company or their products. Product names used in this publication are included for completeness but do not constitute product endorsement.

Cover Photo: ©2020 ADF&G. Photo by Dean Lambert. Trail camera image showing 3 black bears (2 cubs between 2 and 3 years old and 1 adult) investigating a bait pole along a trail in Unit 20D, Interior Alaska.

Contents

Purpose of this Report.....	1
I. RY18–RY22 Management Report	1
Management Area.....	1
Summary of Status, Trend, Management Activities, and History of Black Bear in Unit 20D.....	1
Management Direction.....	2
Existing Wildlife Management Plans	2
Goals	2
Codified Objectives	2
Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Uses	2
Intensive Management.....	2
Management Objectives.....	2
Management Activities	3
1. Population Status and Trend	3
2. Mortality-Harvest Monitoring and Regulations.....	3
3. Habitat Assessment-Enhancement.....	5
Nonregulatory Management Problems or Needs.....	6
Data Recording and Archiving	6
Agreements	6
Permitting.....	6
Conclusions and Management Recommendations	6
II. Project Review and RY23–RY27 Plan	6
Review of Management Direction.....	6
Management Direction.....	6
Goals	7
Codified Objectives	7
Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Uses	7
Intensive Management.....	7
Management Objectives.....	7
Review of Management Activities.....	7
1. Population Status and Trend	7
2. Mortality-Harvest Monitoring	7
3. Habitat Assessment-Enhancement.....	7
Nonregulatory Management Problems or Needs.....	7
Data Recording and Archiving	8
Agreements	8
Permitting.....	8
References Cited	8

List of Tables

Table 1. Reported black bear harvest, Unit 20D, Interior Alaska, regulatory years 2018–2022....	4
Table 2. Percentage of black bear bait station registration and total harvest south and north of the Tanana River, Unit 20D, Interior Alaska, regulatory years 2018–2022.....	4
Table 3. Percentage of black bears harvested by transport method, Unit 20D, Interior Alaska, regulatory years 2018–2022.....	5

Purpose of this Report

This report provides a record of survey and inventory management activities for black bear (*Ursus americanus*) in Game Management Unit 20D during the 5 regulatory years 2018–2022, along with plans for the next 5 regulatory years, 2023–2027. A regulatory year (RY) begins on 1 July and ends on 30 June (e.g., RY18 = 1 July 2018–30 June 2019). This report is primarily produced to provide agency staff with data and analysis to help guide and record agency efforts. It is also made available to the public to inform them about wildlife management activities. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game’s (ADF&G, the department) Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC, the division) publishes these reports on a 5-year cycle to document trends and describe potential changes in data collection activities for black bear.

I. RY18–RY22 Management Report

Management Area

Unit 20D lies within the Central Tanana River valley of Interior Alaska and covers approximately 5,637 mi². The community of Delta Junction, located 100 mi southeast of Fairbanks, sits on the west side of Unit 20D. The northern portion of the unit includes the Goodpaster, Volkmar, and Healy river valleys and the Tanana Highlands, with elevations ranging from 851 to 6,444 ft. The southern portion includes the Tanana River floodplain, the lower Delta River floodplain, the Delta Agricultural Project, the drainages of the Robertson, Johnson, and Gerstle rivers, and the northern foothills and mountains of the Alaska Range, with elevations varying up to 10,278 ft. Lowland vegetation consists of a mosaic of shrub- and early-successional-dominated forests, climax bogs, and mature black spruce (*Picea mariana*) forest. Vegetation in the hills, foothills, and mountains grades from taiga at lower elevations to shrub-dominated communities and alpine tundra at higher elevations.

The climate in Unit 20D is typical of Interior Alaska, where temperatures frequently reach 80°F in summer and –40°F in winter. The Delta Junction area is unique in that it frequently receives strong, warm, southerly Chinook winds throughout the winter. These winds bring mild temperatures to the mountains and foothill regions of southern Unit 20D. Ridgetops are often blown free of snow throughout the high country in the southern portion of the unit. While the southern Chinook winds affect northern Unit 20D less, the area is still affected by these winds and even more so by the east winds that occur regularly in the unit.

Summary of Status, Trend, Management Activities, and History of Black Bear in Unit 20D

Black bears are widely distributed throughout Unit 20D. Most black bear harvest in Unit 20D occurs near road-accessible areas and in the northwestern portion of the unit, along major river systems. Black bears provide an important source of meat, hides, and recreation for hunters. Because of the relative ease of access to Unit 20D, interest in black bear hunting is high, especially in spring when baiting is allowed. Black bear harvest is generally higher in spring than in fall. An accurate estimate of the black bear population size is not available for Unit 20D; therefore, ADF&G biologists rely heavily on harvest data to inform management decisions.

Beginning in RY09, black bear hunters in Unit 20D were required to possess a black bear harvest ticket, with a bag limit of 3 bears (excluding cubs within 1 year of life and sows with cubs within 1 year of life). There is no closed season, and hunting over bait is allowed from April 15 to June 30. Black bears are not required to be sealed in Unit 20D, except for skulls and hides if removed from Alaska or sold. The salvage requirement for black bears harvested during 1 June–31 December allows hunters to salvage either the hide or meat; skulls are not required to be salvaged. Despite the regulatory changes and liberal season and bag limit, black bear harvest in Unit 20D has remained relatively consistent and has likely not affected overall population dynamics.

Management Direction

EXISTING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PLANS

The Interior–Western Alaska black bear management plan (ADF&G 1976) has been reviewed and modified through public comments, staff recommendations, and Alaska Board of Game actions over the years. No changes were made during RY18–RY22.

GOALS

- G1. Protect, maintain, and enhance the black bear population and its habitat in concert with other components of the ecosystem.
- G2. Provide the greatest sustained opportunity to participate in hunting black bears.

CODIFIED OBJECTIVES

Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Uses

- C1. Unit 20D has a positive finding for the customary and traditional use of black bears. The amounts reasonably necessary for subsistence (ANS) for Unit 20 outside the Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Area are 20–30 black bears. The ANS for black bears is not specified for the individual subunits of Unit 20, including Unit 20D.

Intensive Management

Not applicable.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

- M1. Manage for a sustained yield of black bears with a 3-year mean harvest mortality composed of at least 55% males.

MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Population Status and Trend

No population status and trend activities were conducted for black bears in Unit 20D during RY18–RY22 (harvest data are collected, monitored, and analyzed through Activity 2.1). Activities to assess the Unit 20D black bear population status and trend have not been needed to achieve or evaluate the management goals (G1 and G2) and objective (M1), nor to evaluate the codified objective (C1). Accurate survey techniques for estimating black bear population size in Interior Alaska have not yet been fully developed.

2. Mortality-Harvest Monitoring and Regulations

ACTIVITY 2.1. Monitor and analyze harvest data (C1 and M1).

Data Needs

Harvest data are necessary to determine whether the codified and management objectives (C1 and M1) are achieved. In addition, bear bait station registration is necessary to monitor bait station distribution and to disseminate bear baiting information to the public and the Board of Game.

Methods

Black bear harvest was monitored through mandatory reporting of general season harvest tickets and optional sealing records. A reminder email, letter, or both were sent to hunters who did not report. Harvest reports provide additional data such as the location of hunt and harvest, number of days hunted, mode of transport, number of bears harvested, date of harvest, sex, and method of take. Additional harvest-related information (e.g., skull size, whether the bear was taken over bait, incidental take, and meat or hide salvage) was collected during the sealing process, which is required only in Unit 20D if hides or skulls are to be removed from Alaska or sold. Other black bear mortality, including take in defense of life or property (DLP), was monitored through sealing and reported to the Alaska Wildlife Troopers. DLP incidents must be accompanied by a DLP report form submitted to ADF&G.

Season and Bag Limit

During RY18–RY22, there was no closed season for black bears in Unit 20D. The bag limit was 3 bears per year, and the harvest of cubs or females accompanied by cubs was prohibited. Black bears could be taken over bait from 15 April through 30 June. Hunters using bait were required to complete a bear baiting clinic and register bait stations with ADF&G before hunting.

Results and Discussion

Harvest by Hunters

Reported black bear harvest decreased over the reporting period, from 39 bears in RY18 to 20 bears in RY22. A higher number of bears was harvested in the spring compared to the fall in all years. The 5-year average harvest was 27 bears, down from the 5-year average of 37 bears during the previous reporting period (RY13–RY17). The management objective (M1) was met; the harvest was composed of at least 55% males in each year of the reporting period (Table 1).

Table 1. Reported black bear harvest, Unit 20D, Interior Alaska, regulatory years 2018–2022.

Regulatory year	Season	Hunter harvest			
		Male	(%)	Female	Total
2018	Fall 2018	9	(82)	2	11
	Spring 2019	20	(71)	8	28
	Total	29	(74)	10	39
2019	Fall 2019	9	(90)	1	10
	Spring 2020	14	(64)	8	22
	Total	23	(72)	9	32
2020	Fall 2020	2	(100)	0	2
	Spring 2021	12	(60)	8	20
	Total	14	(64)	8	22
2021	Fall 2021	4	(50)	4	8
	Spring 2022	11	(73)	4	15
	Total	15	(65)	8	23
2022	Fall 2022	4	(67)	2	6
	Spring 2023	10	(71)	4	14
	Total	14	(70)	6	20

During RY18–RY22, a total of 341 bait sites were registered in Unit 20D (Table 2). Annually, the number of sites ranged from a high of 81 sites in RY19 to a low of 54 sites in RY21. On average, more bear bait sites were registered south of the Tanana River. In 4 of the 5 years of the reporting period, a higher percentage of the harvest occurred north of the Tanana River, despite more bait stations being located south of the river. During the reporting period, 80 black bears were brought in for optional sealing; of those, 58% were taken over bait.

Table 2. Percentage of black bear bait station registration and total harvest south and north of the Tanana River, Unit 20D, Interior Alaska, regulatory years 2018–2022.

Regulatory year	Percent bait stations ^a			Percent harvest ^a		
	South of Tanana River	North of Tanana River	<i>n</i>	South of Tanana River	North of Tanana River	<i>n</i>
2018	64	36	75	49	51	39
2019	59	41	81	63	38	32
2020	58	41	75	27	73	22
2021	54	46	54	39	61	23
2022	34	66	56	45	55	20

Note: *n* refers to the number of bait stations or the number of black bears harvested (including bears not taken over bait).

^a Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Hunter Residency and Success

During RY18–RY22, most black bears harvested in Unit 20D were taken by Alaska residents. Based on the reported harvest, 74% of successful resident hunters resided within Unit 20D. A total of 10 bears were harvested by nonresidents during the reporting period, compared to 126 taken by residents.

Harvest Chronology

Black bear harvest in Unit 20D during RY18–RY22 occurred primarily in the spring (May–June), which is similar to past reporting periods.

Transport Methods

All-terrain vehicles and boats continued to be the most common modes of transportation used by successful black bear hunters in Unit 20D during RY18–RY22 (Table 3).

Table 3. Percentage of black bears harvested by transport method, Unit 20D, Interior Alaska, regulatory years 2018–2022.

Regulatory year	Airboat	Airplane	ATV ^a	Boat	Highway vehicle	Horse or dog	Other	<i>n</i>
2018	0	15	33	33	13	5	0	39
2019	0	13	31	28	19	6	3	32
2020	5	0	55	23	18	0	0	22
2021	0	13	35	35	17	0	0	23
2022	0	15	30	30	25	0	0	20

Note: *n* refers to the number of black bears harvested.

^a ATV stands for all-terrain vehicle.

Other Mortality

Defense of life or property (DLP) black bear kills continue to occur at low levels. This is likely due to the liberal hunting season and bag limit, which allow hunters to harvest problem bears (except cubs or sows with cubs) without going through the DLP process. During RY18–RY22, 6 DLP mortalities were reported in Unit 20D, 3 of which took place in relation to mining activities.

Alaska Board of Game Actions and Emergency Orders

The Board of Game took no action on black bears in Unit 20D during RY18–RY22.

Recommendations for Activity 2.1

Continue collecting harvest data through harvest ticket reports and sealing records.

3. Habitat Assessment-Enhancement

No habitat assessment or enhancement activities were conducted for black bears in Unit 20D during RY18–RY22.

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

None.

Data Recording and Archiving

All harvest and sealing data are stored in an internal database on ADF&G's Wildlife Information Network (WinfoNet) server. All other electronic files are stored on the Delta server, and hard copy files are kept in a file cabinet in the Delta Junction office.

Agreements

There were no agreements between the department and external entities to conduct management for black bears in Unit 20D during RY18–RY22.

Permitting

No permits were required to manage black bears in Unit 20D during RY18–RY22.

Conclusions and Management Recommendations

The management objective to maintain a 3-year mean of at least 55% males in the black bear harvest (M1) was met in Unit 20D and the Unit 20 codified objective (C1) was also met during RY18–RY22. The reason for the decline in total reported harvest is unclear but is likely a result of effort; the number of registered bait sites also decreased during the reporting period. Additionally, during the winter of 2021–2022, Interior Alaska experienced a very unusual rain-on-snow event that led to a late breakup. Poor weather and trail conditions may have contributed to the decreased effort and number of bait stations in RY22. As in prior reporting periods, most of the black bear harvest consisted of males and was taken by hunters using all-terrain vehicles, such as 4-wheelers, or boats. Most of the harvest occurred in the spring, which coincides with the baiting season.

Overall, the RY18–RY22 black bear harvest likely had little effect on unitwide population dynamics. No changes to management goals or to the season or bag limits are recommended. Consideration should be given to developing a coordinated effort by division staff to use DNA techniques to estimate black bear populations and densities in Unit 20D.

II. Project Review and RY23–RY27 Plan

Review of Management Direction

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

No changes are planned to the management direction for black bears in Unit 20D for RY23–RY27.

GOALS

No change from the RY18–RY22 reporting period.

CODIFIED OBJECTIVES

Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Uses

No changes are expected from the RY18–RY22 reporting period.

Intensive Management

Not applicable.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

No change from the RY18–RY22 reporting period.

REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Population Status and Trend

No population status and trend activities are planned for black bears in Unit 20D during RY23–RY27. Activities to assess the Unit 20D black bear population status and trend are not currently necessary to achieve or evaluate the management goals (G1 and G2) and objective (M1) or to evaluate the codified objective (C1).

2. Mortality-Harvest Monitoring

ACTIVITY 2.1. Monitor and analyze harvest data (C1 and M1).

Data Needs

No change from the RY18–RY22 reporting period.

Methods

No change from the RY18–RY22 reporting period.

3. Habitat Assessment-Enhancement

No habitat assessment or enhancement activities are planned for black bears in Unit 20D during RY23–RY27.

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

No problems or needs have been identified for RY23–RY27.

Data Recording and Archiving

No change from the RY18–RY22 reporting period.

Agreements

There are no agreements between the department and external entities to conduct management for black bears in Unit 20D during RY23–RY27.

Permitting

No permits are required to manage black bears in Unit 20D during RY23–RY27.

References Cited

Alaska Department of Fish and Game. 1976. Alaska wildlife management plans: A public proposal for the management of Alaska's wildlife: Interior Alaska. Draft proposal subsequently approved by the Alaska Board of Game. Division of Game, Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Project W-17-R, Juneau.

