

Furbearer Management Report and Plan, Game Management Unit 26A:

Report Period 1 July 2012–30 June 2017, and
Plan Period 1 July 2017–30 June 2022

Carmen Daggett



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PREPARED BY:

Carmen Daggett
Area Wildlife Biologist

APPROVED BY:

Phillip Perry
Management Coordinator

REVIEWED BY:

Adam Craig
Biometrician

Shawna Karpovich
Research Coordinator

PUBLISHED BY:

Ben Henning
Technical Reports Editor

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



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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 Phillip Perry, Management Coordinator for Region V for the Division of Wildlife Conservation.

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Cover Photo: An arctic fox sits on an Utqiagvik snow berm. ©2023 ADF&G. Photo by Carmen Daggett.

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Purpose of this Report

This report provides a record of survey and inventory management activities for furbearers in Game Management Unit 26A for the 5 regulatory years 2012–2016 and plans for survey and inventory management activities in the next 5 regulatory years 2017–2022. A regulatory year (RY) begins 1 July and ends 30 June (e.g., RY15 = 1 July 2015–30 June 2016). This report is produced primarily to provide agency staff with data and analysis to help guide and record agency efforts but is also provided to the public to inform it of wildlife management activities. In 2016 the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's (ADF&G, the department) Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) launched this 5-year report to more efficiently report on trends and to describe potential changes in data collection activities over the next 5 years. It replaces the furbearer management report of survey and inventory activities that was previously produced every 3 years.

I. RY12–RY16 Management Report

Management Area

Unit 26A is an area of 56,000 mi² on the western North Slope of far northern Alaska (Fig. 1).

Summary of Status, Trend, Management Activities, and History of Furbearers in Unit 26A

No furbearer-specific surveys are conducted in 26A. However, incidental observations of lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) and wolverines (*Gulo gulo*) are recorded during annual moose trend count surveys. Red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), arctic fox (*Alopex lagopus*), wolverine, and least weasels (*Mustela nivalis*) are common in the unit. Lynx may have expanded their range, possibly due to an expansion of snowshoe hare habitat leading to an increase in lynx numbers (Zhou et al. 2017) which occurred in the 1990s (Carroll 2007). River otters are rare in Unit 26A and the department has no surveys or incidental data to report regarding them; however, 1 was sealed during RY12–RY16.

Furs are primarily used to make and decorate clothing, though some hunters and trappers sell it commercially.

Rabies is a continuing concern on the North Slope. Arctic foxes are the primary vector of this disease in the circumpolar region (Mørk 2004). ADF&G and the North Slope Borough work together to educate the public about rabies prevention methods such as vaccinating pets and reducing fox numbers when populations are high. Foxes which are suspected of rabies infection are killed and tested for the disease.

Management Direction

EXISTING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PLANS

The existing wildlife management plan is described in *Furbearer management report of survey-inventory activities 1 July 2009–30 June 2012* (Harper and McCarthy 2013).

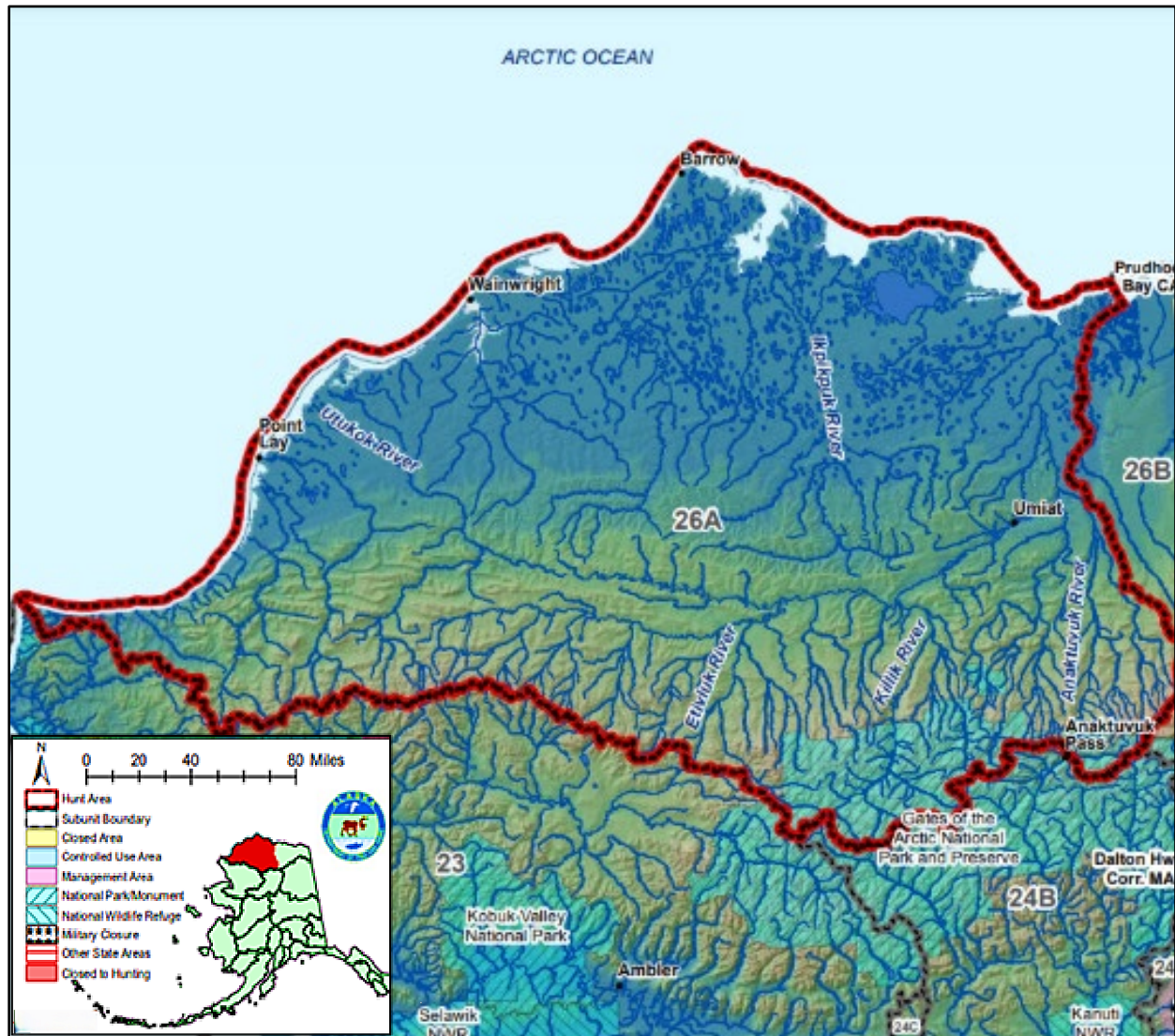


Figure 1. Unit 26A, northern Alaska.

GOALS

The department's goals are to maintain furbearer populations capable of sustained-yield harvests while recognizing that populations fluctuate in response to environmental factors

CODIFIED OBJECTIVES

Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Uses

Unit 26A has an amount necessary for subsistence uses finding at 90% of the harvestable portion for both lynx and wolverines.

Intensive Management

Not applicable.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

- Maintain productive populations and allow for a sustained-yield harvest.
- Seal furs and maintain accurate harvest records to evaluate harvest patterns.
- Provide for subsistence, commercial, and recreational uses of furbearers.
- Minimize adverse interactions between furbearers and the public.

MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Population Status and Trend

ACTIVITY 1.1. Record incidental observations of furbearers during moose surveys.

Data Needs

Furbearers are important sources of furs used in clothing for Alaskans. It is vital these populations remain viable and present for these uses.

Methods

Department staff did not conduct furbearer-specific population surveys. Instead, incidental wolverine and lynx observations were recorded annually in moose surveys areas and triennially in April in the moose minimum count area (Fig. 2; Klimstra and Daggett 2020, Daggett 2024).¹ In RY16 the incidental observations were expanded to the moose minimum count area outlined in black. These areas were chosen to monitor moose and are not representative of typical wolverine or lynx habitat. No observational data are available for red foxes, arctic foxes, river otters, or muskrat during RY12–RY16.

Results and Discussion

Prior to RY12–RY16, the number of wolverines observed during moose surveys averaged 0.28 wolverines per hour (RY83–RY11; Harper and McCarthy 2013). During RY12–RY16, an average of 0.24 wolverines were observed per hour. For lynx, during the 10 years prior to this report period (RY02–RY11), the average number of lynx observed during moose surveys was 0.18 lynx per hour (Harper and McCarthy 2013). During this report period, an average of 0.03 lynx were observed per hour (Table 1), suggesting a potential decrease in lynx observed in the area surveyed for moose.

¹ Moose survey trend count areas which were used to record furbearer observations can be seen in [Moose management report and plan, Game Management Unit 26A: Report period 1 July 2015–30 June 2020, and plan period 1 July 2020–30 June 2025](#).

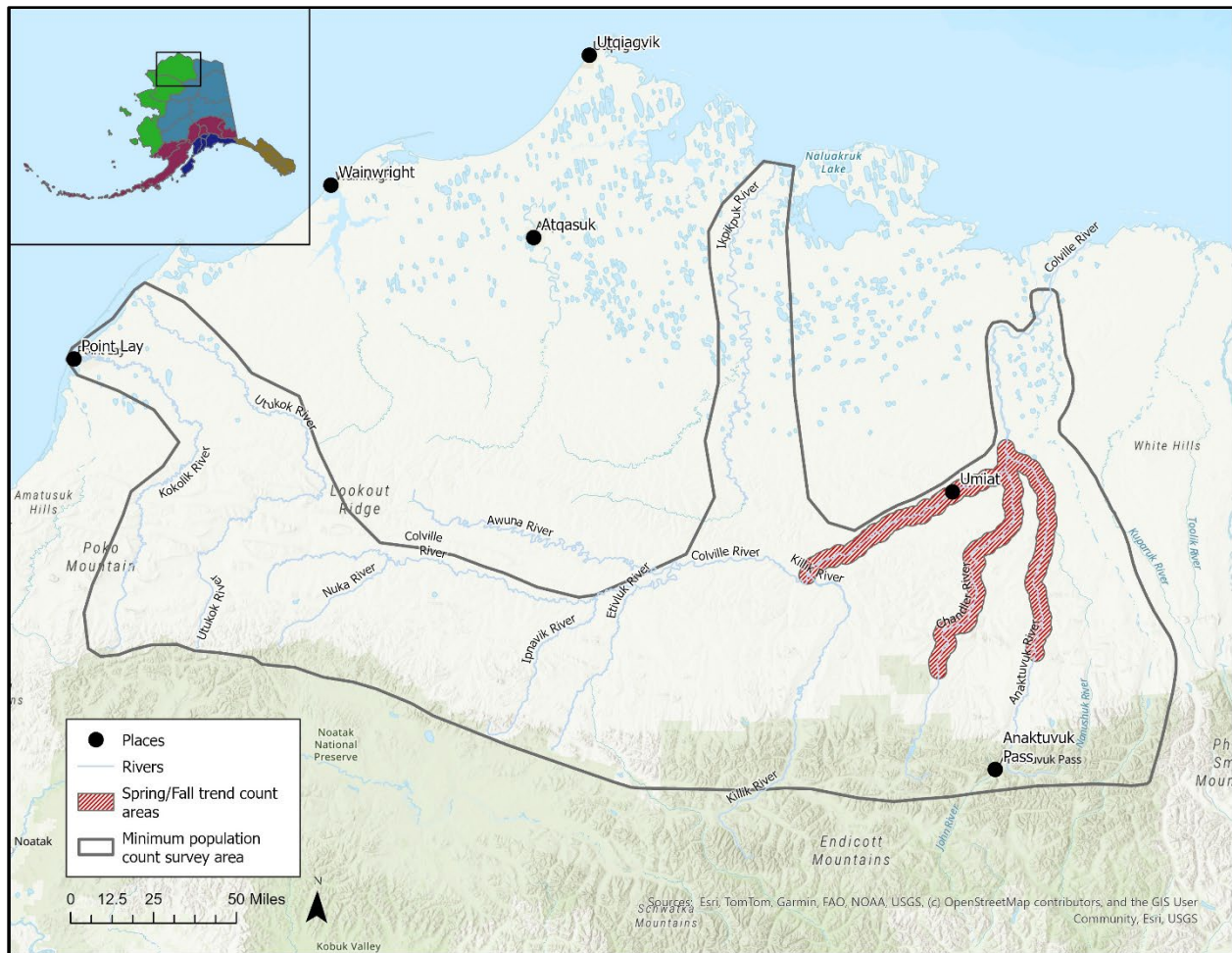


Figure 2. Moose trend count areas where incidental lynx and wolverine observations were recorded are highlighted in red, these include sections of the Colville, Chandler, and Anaktuvuk rivers. The moose minimum count area is outlined in black. Unit 26A, northern Alaska, regulatory years 2012–2016.

Table 1. Total number and observation rate of wolverines and lynx during spring moose counts, Unit 26A, northern Alaska, regulatory years 2012–2016.

Regulatory year	Hrs. flown	Wolverine		Lynx	
		No.	No./hr.	No.	No./hr.
2012	5.9	3	0.51	0	0.00
2013	5.9	2	0.34	1	0.17
2014	6.1	2	0.33	0	0.00
2015	6.9	0	0.00	0	0.00
2016	25.2	1	0.04	0	0.00

Recommendations for Activity 1.1

The department recommends continuing to collect incidental observations of lynx and wolverines during moose surveys.

2. Mortality-Harvest Monitoring and Regulations

ACTIVITY 2.1. Monitor furbearer harvest in Unit 26A annually through sealing records.

Data Needs

Furbearer sealing is required for wolves, wolverines, river otters, and lynx in Unit 26A to evaluate harvest patterns and maintain sustainable populations.

Methods

The location, month, and method of harvest are recorded for all required species, and measurements are taken for the length and width of lynx and river otter hides.

Results and Discussion

Harvest by Hunters-Trappers

There were a total of 2 lynx harvested during RY12–RY16 (Table 2). There were 134 wolverines harvested, 6 of which were taken in RY12. This was a relatively low number in comparison to the subsequent 4 years, in which harvest averaged 26 wolverines per year. Most wolverines were harvested between December and March (Table 3), likely due to the presence of adequate snow and frozen rivers to facilitate snow machine travel. One male river otter was sealed during the report period.

Table 2. Total reported harvest, sex composition, and method of take for wolverines and lynx sealed in Unit 26A, northern Alaska, regulatory years 2012–2016.

Regulatory year	Wolverine harvest	Males (%)	Method of take			Lynx harvest	Males (%)	Method of take		
			Shot	Trapped or snared	Unk			Shot	Trapped or snared	Unk
2012	6	33	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
2013	33	70	22	11	0	2	100	2	0	0
2014	25	52	17	2	6	0	0	0	0	0
2015	39	82	21	14	4	0	0	0	0	0
2016	31	68	26	5	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3. Chronology for reported wolverine harvest in Unit 26A, northern Alaska, regulatory years 2012–2016.

Regulatory year	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Unk	Total
2012	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	6
2013	1	0	0	7	5	7	10	3	0	0	33
2014	0	0	0	1	5	5	8	1	0	5	25
2015	0	0	2	5	13	0	17	0	1	0	38
2016	0	2	0	1	13	6	9	0	0	0	31

Recommendations for Activity 2.1

Continue as reported.

Season and Bag Limit

During RY12–RY16, the Unit 26A trapping season is 1 November–15 April for all furbearer species except muskrat, which ends 10 June. There is no trapping bag limit for any furbearer species in this unit.

The following are Unit 26A hunting seasons and bag limits during RY12–RY16.

Species	Season	Bag limit
Coyote	1 Sep–30 Apr	2 coyotes
Arctic fox	1 Sep–30 Apr	2 foxes
Red fox	1 Sep–15 Mar	10 foxes
Lynx	1 Nov–15 Apr	2 lynx
Wolverine	1 Sep–31 Mar	1 wolverine

ACTIVITY 2.2. Support community harvest surveys in select North Slope communities.

Data Needs

Community harvest surveys help fill information gaps for furbearers that are not required to be sealed.

Methods

Comprehensive community household surveys were conducted by the Division of Subsistence in Point Lay in 2012 and in Anaktuvuk Pass, Utqiagvik, and Nuiqsut in 2014 (Brown et al. 2016, Braem et al. 2017). Households were interviewed about how many of which species they harvested that year.

Results and Discussion

The 2012 and 2014 household interviews indicated that hunters and trappers harvested very few wolverines in 2012 in Point Lay compared to wolverine harvests during 2014 in Anaktuvuk Pass, Utqiagvik, and Nuiqsut (Table 4; Brown et al. 2016, Braem et al. 2017). These interviews estimated a 2014 harvest of 1,266 foxes in Utqiagvik, likely due to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service encouraging harvest to reduce nest predation of protected eider species in 2014. No other household surveys were conducted in Unit 26A during RY12–RY16.

Table 4. Subsistence household survey results for furbearer harvest in Unit 26A, northern Alaska, regulatory years 2012–2016.

Regulatory year	Community	Wolverine	Lynx	Fox	River otter
2012	Point Lay	2	0	11	0
2014	Nuiqsut	15	0	14	0
2014	Anaktuvuk Pass	22	2	9	2
2014	Utqiagvik	37	0	1,266	0

Recommendations for Activity 2.2

Community household surveys were conducted by Division of Subsistence staff. DWC staff do not plan to conduct these surveys. Therefore, we recommend excluding this activity in the RY17–RY22 report.

3. Habitat Assessment-Enhancement

None.

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

No nonregulatory management problems were reported during RY12–RY17.

Data Recording and Archiving

Fur sealing data is stored in WinfoNet (ADF&G's Wildlife Information Network) with carbon copies stored at the department office in Utqiagvik. Survey data which describe incidental observations on furbearers is stored on the Utqiagvik office hard drive under moose surveys.

Agreements

None.

Permitting

None.

Conclusions and Management Recommendations

Incidental observations recorded during RY12–RY16 only covered a small portion of Unit 26A and indicated that wolverine and lynx were present in low numbers. Sealing and community harvest data for all of Unit 26A indicated that wolverines were harvested in relatively high numbers. The contrast of wolverine numbers between the incidental observations and the harvest data may be due to higher numbers in areas of Unit 26A which are outside of the moose survey path or due to the high value of wolverine hides. The 25 wolverines sealed in 2014 represent a much lower number than the 74 which were estimated based on household surveys in the same year. For lynx, the total sealing record of 7 lynx harvested and the 2 lynx which were reported during the household surveys indicate this species is not being harvested in high numbers. This is in alignment with the low number of incidental lynx observations.

Department staff recommend continuing cooperation between the North Slope Borough Wildlife Department and ADF&G to test suspected rabid foxes. We recommend continued efforts to encourage people to vaccinate their dogs to prevent rabies transmission.

II. Project Review and RY17–RY22 Plan

Review of Management Direction

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Management direction from RY12–RY16 is in line with regulations for furbearers in Unit 26A and there is no anticipated change for RY17–RY22.

GOALS

No change from RY12–RY16.

CODIFIED OBJECTIVES

Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Uses

No change from RY12–RY16.

Intensive Management

Furbearers are not an intensive management species.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

No change from RY12–RY16.

REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Population Status and Trend

ACTIVITY 1.1. Record incidental observations of furbearers during moose surveys.

Data Needs

No change from RY12–RY16.

Methods

Continue methods from RY12–RY16. In addition to this, consider conducting a snowshoe hare index survey to keep track of hare and lynx cycles.

2. Mortality-Harvest Monitoring

ACTIVITY 2.1. Monitor furbearer harvest in Unit 26A annually through sealing records.

Data Needs

No change from RY12–RY16.

Methods

Continue. Encourage increased participation in and awareness of the fur sealing program.

3. Habitat Assessment-Enhancement

None anticipated for RY17–RY22.

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

No nonregulatory management problems are anticipated.

Data Recording and Archiving

Sealing records are sent to Anchorage for entry into WinfoNet and carbon copies are filed in the furbearer drawer at the department office in Utqiagvik under furbearer and year. Furbearer survey observation data are stored with the moose survey data on the local area biologist computer and on the Nome server.

Agreements

None.

Permitting

None.

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