

Furbearer Management Report and Plan, Game Management Unit 1B:

Report Period 1 July 2012–30 June 2017, and

Plan Period 1 July 2017–30 June 2022

Stephen W. Bethune



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

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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 approved for publication by Tom Schumacher, Regional Supervisor for the Division of Wildlife Conservation.

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Purpose of this Report

This report provides a record of survey and inventory management activities for furbearers in Unit 1B for the previous 5 regulatory years and plans for survey and inventory management activities in the 5 years following the end of that period. A regulatory year (RY) begins 1 July and ends 30 June (e.g., RY12 = 1 July 2012–30 June 2013). This report is produced primarily to provide agency staff with data and analysis to help guide and record its own efforts but is also provided to the public to inform them of wildlife management activities. In 2016 the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Division of Wildlife Conservation launched this 5-year report to more efficiently report on trends and describe potential changes in data collection activities over the next 5 years. It replaces the furbearer management reports of survey and inventory activities that were previously produced every 3 years.

I. RY12–RY16 Management Report

Management Area

Game Management Unit 1B consists of approximately 3,000 mi² on the central Southeast Alaska mainland, extending from Cape Fanshaw south to Lemesurier Point and northeast of those points to the Canadian border (Fig. 1). There are no major communities in Unit 1B, however small settlements exist at Point Agassiz near Thomas Bay, on Farm Island in the Stikine Delta, and at Meyers Chuck on the Cleveland Peninsula.

The Stikine River is a transboundary mainland river system that originates in Spatsizi Plateau of British Columbia and transects the Coast Range before flowing into Sumner Strait near Wrangell, Alaska. About 30 miles of the river lie within the boundaries of Alaska where it flows through a steep valley 1–2 miles wide. The Stikine Delta is the largest intertidal wetland in Southeast Alaska and consists of 200 km² (77 mi²) of marsh and tidal flats (Craighead et al. 1984).

Most land area in Unit 1B is within the Tongass National Forest and under federal ownership, with smaller parcels under tribal, state and private ownership. Elevation within Unit 1B ranges from sea level to 9,078 ft. Predominant vegetative communities occurring at low to moderate elevations (<1500 ft) include Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) and coniferous forest, mixed-conifer muskeg and deciduous riparian forests. Mountain hemlock (*T. mertensiana*) dominated forest comprises a subalpine, timberline band occupying elevations between 1,500 and 2,500 ft. In addition to furbearers, big game species present and widely distributed throughout Unit 1B include moose (*Alces alces*), mountain goats (*Oreamnos americanus*), deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), black bears (*Ursus americanus*), and brown bears (*U. arctos*).

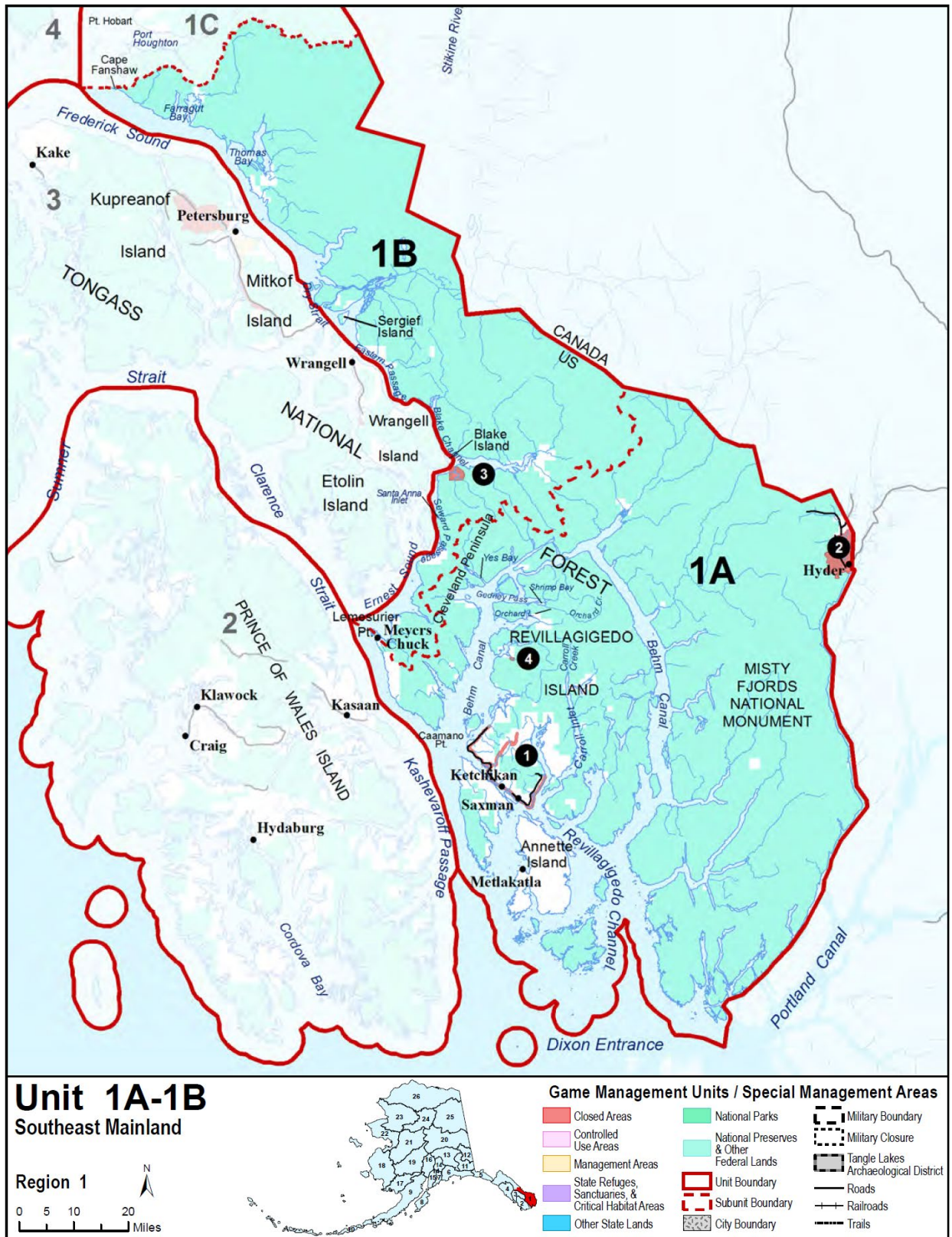


Figure 1. Map of Game Management Unit 1B boundaries, Southeast Alaska.

Summary of Status, Trend, Management Activities, and History of Furbearers in Unit 1B

Except for a few isolated homesteads and cabins, no large communities exist on the Unit 1B mainland, so most trapping pressure comes from residents of Petersburg, Wrangell, and Meyers Chuck. Trappers from these communities must cross open water to access mainland traplines, thus access is largely restricted to boats. An exception is Thomas Bay which has some private residences and an established road system. As with other areas of Southeast Alaska, trapping pressure, and harvest fluctuate widely on an annual basis and are greatly influenced by weather conditions, fuel prices and fur markets. In the Stikine River drainage, snowfall amounts and freeze-up timing and duration influence access, pressure and harvests (Lowell 2013).

Marten (*Martes americana*) are the most important furbearer species for Unit 1B both in number of animals harvested and income. Marten populations fluctuate widely in response to prey abundance and to a lesser extent, trapping pressure. For this reporting period harvests did not appear to correlate with marten prices indicating that perhaps population levels and trapper effort had more to do with harvest levels.

River otters (*Lutra canadensis*) are common along protected coastal areas of Unit 1B. Because river otters are difficult to trap, and pelt preparation is time consuming, prices must be high to substantially influence harvest levels. Otter harvest was consistent during this reporting period.

Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) harvest in Unit 1B is traditionally very low and this reporting period was no exception. In general, 1–2 trappers target beavers annually. Continuing low prices and limited access will likely continue the trend of very low beaver harvest for this Unit.

Wolverines (*Gulo gulo*) naturally occur at low density in Unit 1B. Royle et al. (2011) estimated wolverine densities at approximately 1 wolverine per 100 mi² in Unit 1B. Large home ranges, low densities and long movements combined with difficult access combine to create difficult trapping conditions for wolverines. Consequently, most wolverine harvest is incidental to wolf or marten trapping efforts.

Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) have been documented in Unit 1B but are considered extremely rare. Lowell (2013) reported one lynx harvest during the reporting period 2009–2012.

Mink (*Mustela vison*) are common along the coast and riverine habitats and consistently rank as the second most important furbearer species for trappers in Southeast Alaska (Parr 2018). Mink harvests are not tracked by ADF&G.

Short-tailed weasel (*Mustela erminea*) populations fluctuate annually primarily because of prey availability (Erlinge 1983; Sittler 1995). ADF&G does not track weasel harvests. Discussions with trappers indicate that weasels are mainly taken incidental to marten trapping.

Management Direction

EXISTING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PLANS

Greater Alaska Furbearer Management Plan in 1976 Species Management Plan (ADF&G 1976).

GOALS

To provide:

1. For an optimum harvest of furbearers.
2. The greatest opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping furbearers.

CODIFIED OBJECTIVES

Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Uses

The Alaska Board of Game has made a positive subsistence finding for furbearers in all units, including Unit 1A, with a harvestable surplus to be 90% of the harvestable portion (5 AAC 99.025(13)).

Intensive Management

Not applicable.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

1. Provide information to the Board of Game to further maintenance of viewable and harvestable populations of furbearers.
2. Seal marten, otter, beaver and wolverine pelts as they are presented for sealing.
3. Contact reliable observers for general information about the status and trends of furbearer populations, including the use of an annual trapper survey.

MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Population Status and Trend

ACTIVITY 1.1

Record observations of furbearers seen incidentally during other survey work and anecdotal reports from the public.

Data Needs

Incidental observations are insufficient for estimating the population or detecting changes that would trigger management action. Statistical estimates of furbearers derived from a sample-based estimator including a measure of the precision would be needed to detect change in the population.

Methods

GPS locations and characteristics are recorded for any furbearers observed during other field work. Most observations occur during spring deer pellet, mortality and body condition surveys. Anecdotal reports are recorded to the maximum level of detail available.

Results and Discussion

None.

Recommendations for Activity 1.1

Continue to actively seek information from trappers and others that observe furbearers.

2. Mortality-Harvest Monitoring and Regulations

ACTIVITY 2.1

Monitor harvest through sealing records.

Data Needs

Harvest must be assessed to understand the potential impact of furbearer harvest.

Methods

Harvest data was collected by sealing hides of beaver, marten, and otter taken by trappers. Location and date of harvest, method of take, transportation mode, and sex were recorded. In the case of otters and beavers, hides were measured. Sealing must occur by ADF&G or a State appointed sealer within 30 days of the close of the season. These data are entered into ADF&G's Wildlife Information Network database (Winfonet). Harvest data were summarized by regulatory year (RY), which begins 1 July and ends June 30 (e.g., RY15 = 1 July 2015–30 June 2016).

Season and Bag Limit

Hunting Season and Bag limit, RY12–RY16

Species	Season	Bag Limit
Wolverine	1 Sept–15 Feb	No limit

Trapping Seasons and Bag limits, RY12–RY16

Species	Season	Bag Limit
Beaver	10 Nov–Apr 30	No limit
Marten, otter, mink, Weasel, Lynx	1 Dec–15 Feb	No limit
Wolverine ^a	10 Nov–28 Feb	No limit

^a Wolverine season was extended from 15 Feb to 28 Feb in RY16.

Results and Discussion

Harvest by Hunters-Trappers

MARTEN

Harvest averaged 206 annually for marten during this reporting period (range 53–409; Table 1). Approximately 9 trappers participate each year (range 5–11). Males averaged approximately 69% of the harvest during this reporting period. Marten pelt value averaged \$67.35 during the reporting period (range = \$34.47–\$123.70; Table 2).

Table 1. Harvest and method of take for marten sealed in Unit 1B, Southeast Alaska, RY12–RY16.

Regulatory Year	Total Harvest	Successful Participants	Percent Males	Method of Take (%)			
				Shot	Trapped	Snared	Unknown
RY12	140	10	74	0	100	0	0
RY13	245	11	68	0	100	0	0
RY14	53	9	67	0	100	0	0
RY15	409	11	69	0	100	0	0
RY16	181	5	69	0	100	0	0

Table 2. Average furbearer prices for RY06–RY16 based on Fur Harvesters of America auctions 2006–2016 (Fur Harvesters Auction Incorporated 2016).

Species	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Beaver	24.74	21.24	22.00	13.56	12.03	16.54	20.76	24.96	16.63	13.15	9.40
Weasel ^a	7.59	5.92	6.12	4.25	4.86	3.77	4.50	3.80	4.74	4.74	2.72
Fisher	93.38	76.37	64.33	37.84	56.00	41.16	83.47	121.60	78.35	67.83	30.37
Marten	70.40	63.11	91.67	33.33	31.31	44.71	74.48	123.70	57.33	46.77	34.47
Mink	13.31	14.34	12.19	7.90	12.93	18.00	21.72	24.07	9.83	8.75	7.33
Muskrat	7.17	3.94	2.68	3.80	5.85	9.27	9.05	12.15	10.15	4.25	2.07
Squirrel	2.29	1.34	1.67	1.23	N/A	1.06	1.03	0.94	0.66	0.38	0.70
River otter	70.35	49.50	42.58	36.48	30.50	64.22	83.80	86.17	50.34	41.72	21.05
Wolf	211.75	127.62	200.25	151.15	197.95	180.96	198.46	260.45	190.98	108.50	169.04
Wolverine	256.72	246.23	293.95	192.29	246.31	250.47	266.74	260.60	259.23	230.43	218.36

^a Short-tailed and least weasels.

OTTER

Otter harvests ranged between 12 and 19 for this reporting period (Table 3). The 5-year average is 16. Otters are both trapped and shot. On average, 15% are shot and 85% are trapped.

Participation level was fairly consistent at low levels with between 3 and 8 successful participants annually. Males averaged 60% of the harvest and juveniles made up 34% of the harvest for this reporting period (otter measurements unavailable for RY16). Average price of river otters for this reporting period was \$56.62 (range = \$21.05–\$86.17; Table 2).

Table 3. Harvest and method of take for river otters sealed in Unit 1B, Southeast Alaska, RY12–RY16.

Regulatory Year	Total Harvest	Successful Participants	Percent Males	Percent Juveniles ^a	Method of Take (%)			
					Shot	Trapped	Snared	Unknown
RY12	17	4	35	35	24	76	0	0
RY13	16	4	63	19	19	81	0	0
RY14	19	8	58	47	11	89	0	0
RY15	15	4	73	33	20	80	0	0
RY16	12	3	67	–	0	100	0	0

^a Juvenile otter measure (length) <42".

BEAVER

Beaver harvests ranged 0–24 for this reporting period (Table 4). The 5-year average harvest is 9. In Regulatory year 2015, there was zero effort and harvest (Table 4). Traps were the only method used and the proportion of juveniles in the harvest was low. On average, only one trapper targets beaver annually in Unit 1B. Sex ratio of the beaver harvest in Unit 1B is unknown due to the difficulty of sexing beavers.

Table 4. Harvest and method of take for beavers sealed in Unit 1B, Southeast Alaska, RY12–RY16.

Regulatory Year	Total Harvest	Successful Participants	Percent Juveniles ^a	Method of Take (%)			
				Shot	Trapped	Snared	Unknown
RY12	11	1	9	0	100	0	0
RY13	1	1	0	0	100	0	2
RY14	9	2	–	0	100	0	0
RY15	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
RY16	24	1	17	0	100	0	0

^a Juvenile beavers measure (length + width) ≤ 52".

WOLVERINE

Wolverine harvests averaged 4 annually during this reporting period (Table 5). Males averaged 63% of the harvest. Out of 19 wolves harvested, three were shot, the rest were trapped. During this reporting period, harvests remained steady at low levels. However, their rarity and usefulness as parka trim (wolverine trim sheds frost easily) is reflected in the steady and high average price of \$247 for this reporting period (Table 2).

Table 5. Harvest and method of take for wolverine sealed in Unit 1B, Southeast Alaska, RY12–RY16.

Regulatory Year	Total Harvest	Successful Participants	Percent Males	Method of Take (%)			
				Shot	Trapped	Snared	Unknown
RY12	3	2	100	0	100	0	0
RY13	3	2	33	33	67	0	0
RY14	3	3	100	33	67	0	0
RY15	5	3	60	20		0	0
RY16	5	3	40	0	100	0	0

OTHER SPECIES

There are no harvest data for mink and weasels due to the absence of sealing requirements.

Harvest Chronology

December is the peak month for both marten and river otter harvest (Table 6), with approximately 68% and 51% of the harvest occurring respectively. Beaver and wolverine harvests are more variable and unpredictable in timing which is understandable given the low number of participants.

Transport Methods

Trappers in Unit 1B consistently use boats as the primary mode of transportation for all species (Table 7).

Alaska Board of Game Actions and Emergency Orders

At the 2013 Board of Game (BOG) meeting a proposal was passed allowing trappers to take beaver with a firearm in Southeast Alaska. At the 2015 BOG meeting a proposal was passed lengthening the wolverine trapping season from 10 November–15 February to 10 November–28 February. At the March 2016 Statewide BOG meeting the board rescinded the requirement for all traps and snares to be marked with a trapper’s permanent identification or to post a sign nearby with the same information.

No emergency orders were issued during this reporting period.

Recommendations for Activity 2.1

Continue.

3. Habitat Assessment-Enhancement

Not Applicable.

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

Data Recording and Archiving

- Data sheets are scanned and stored on the WC server (S:\Offices\Petersburg\Furbearer) and the local area biologist’s hard drive.
- Original datasheets are stored in file folders located in the Petersburg Area Biologist’s office.
- Historical survey notes and data sheets are being digitized and scanned for permanent storage on the file server.

Agreements

None.

Permitting

None.

Table 6. Unit 1B marten, river otter, beaver and wolverine harvest chronology (%), RY12–RY16, Southeast Alaska.

Regulatory Year	Month								<i>n</i> ^a
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	
<i>Marten</i>									
RY12	0	0	0	80	53	7	0	0	140
RY13	0	0	0	148	78	19	0	0	245
RY14	0	0	0	16	35	2	0	0	53
RY15	0	0	0	318	78	13	0	0	409
RY16	0	0	0	133	48	0	0	0	181
<i>River otter</i>									
RY12	0	0	0	7	6	4	0	0	17
RY13	0	0	0	10	3	3	0	0	16
RY14	0	0	0	7	5	7	0	0	19
RY15	0	0	0	5	10	0	0	0	15
RY16	0	0	0	11	1	0	0	0	12
<i>Beaver</i>									
RY12	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	11
RY13	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
RY14	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	9
RY15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
RY16	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	16	24
<i>Wolverine</i>									
RY12	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	3
RY13	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	3
RY14	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3
RY15	0	0	1	1	3	0	0	0	5
RY16	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	5

^a Otter taken under damage control permits outside season dates are not included in this table.

Table 7. Unit 1B marten, river otter, beaver, and wolverine harvest by transport method, RY12–RY16.

Regulatory Year	Percent of Harvest							<i>n</i>
	Airplane	Foot	Boat	3 or 4-wheeler	Snow-machine	Highway Vehicle	Unknown	
<i>Marten</i>								
RY12	0	0	118	0	22	0	0	140
RY13	0	0	128	0	0	65	52	245
RY14	0	0	53	0	0	0	0	53
RY15	0	0	377	0	0	0	32	409
RY16	0	44	86	30	21	0	0	181
<i>River otter</i>								
RY12	0	0	17	0	0	0	0	17
RY13	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	16
RY14	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	19
RY15	0	0	15	0	0	0	0	15
RY16	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	12
<i>Beaver</i>								
RY12	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	11
RY13	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
RY14	0	0	4	0	0	5	0	9
RY15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
RY16	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	24
<i>Wolverine</i>								
RY12	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	3
RY13	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	3
RY14	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
RY15	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	5
RY15	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	5

Conclusions and Management Recommendations

It is impractical to set harvest and population objectives for furbearers without any data on population levels. Quantifiable management objectives need to be established for marten, river otters, beavers and wolverines. Harvest information is available for all these species from sealing records, and application of existing and emerging methodologies may provide opportunities to monitor population trends.

The general approach for furbearer management is to expect populations to self-regulate trapper effort and harvest. This approach has been successful, and harvests appear to be within sustainable limits. No changes in seasons or bag limits are recommended.

II. Project Review and RY17–RY21 Plan

Review of Management Direction

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

The existing management direction and goals appropriately direct management of furbearers in Unit 1B. The management direction for Unit 1B ensures that furbearers will persist as part of the natural ecosystem and ensures continued trapping (on applicable species) and viewing opportunities. There is no indication that the long-term sustainability of the furbearer populations or that statewide goals (ADF&G 1976) for human uses cannot be met; therefore, the Unit 1B management direction should continue to be that furbearers will be managed in a manner that complements the statewide furbearer management goals. There are no area-specific issues in Unit 1B that require a departure from statewide goals for furbearer management, and furbearers are not currently managed at a subunit scale.

GOALS

To provide:

1. For an optimum harvest of furbearers.
2. The greatest opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping furbearers.

CODIFIED OBJECTIVES

Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Uses

The Alaska Board of Game has made a positive subsistence finding for furbearers in all units, including Unit 1B, with a harvestable surplus to be 90% of the harvestable portion (5 AAC 99.025(13)).

Intensive Management

Not applicable.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

- Regulate seasons and bag limits to maintain viewable and harvestable populations of mink, marten and river otters.
- Seal harvested marten, beaver, river otter, and wolverine pelts as they are presented for sealing.
- Contact reliable observers for general information about the status and trends of furbearer populations, including the use of an annual trapper survey.

REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Population Status and Trend

ACTIVITY 1.1

Record observations of furbearers seen incidentally during other survey work and anecdotal reports from the public.

Data Needs

Incidental observations are insufficient for estimating the population or detecting changes that would trigger management action. However, a statistical estimate derived from a sample-based estimator, including a measure of precision that would be needed to detect changes in the population are not currently a regional priority.

Methods

GPS locations and characteristics are recorded for any furbearers observed during other field work. Most observations occur during spring deer pellet, mortality and body condition surveys. Anecdotal reports are recorded to the maximum level of detail available.

2. Mortality-Harvest Monitoring

ACTIVITY 2.1

Monitor harvest through sealing records.

Data Needs

Harvest must be assessed to understand the potential impact of furbearer harvest.

Methods

Harvest data was collected by sealing hides of beaver, marten, and otter taken by trappers. Location and date of harvest, method of take, transportation mode, and sex were recorded. In the case of otters and beavers, hides were measured. Sealing must occur by ADF&G or a State appointed sealer within 30 days of the close of the season. These data are entered into ADF&G's Wildlife Information Network database (Winfonet). Harvest data were summarized by regulatory year (RY), which begins 1 July and ends June 30 (e.g., RY15 = 1 July 2015–30 June 2016).

3. Habitat Assessment-Enhancement

Not Applicable.

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

Data Recording and Archiving

Data collected during surveys will be recorded on datasheets and transcribed into the furbearer observations spreadsheet located on the Petersburg server.

Agreements

None.

Permitting

None.

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