

Furbearer Management Report and Plan, Game Management Units 14A and 14B:

Report Period 1 July 2017–30 June 2022, and
Plan Period 1 July 2022–30 June 2027

Tim C. Peltier

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Report Period 1 July 2017–30 June 2022, and

Plan Period 1 July 2022–30 June 2027

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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 five 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 five 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 (ADF&G) public website.

This species management report and plan was reviewed and approved for publication by Todd Rinaldi, Management Coordinator for Region IV 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 Units 14A and 14B for the 5 regulatory years 2017–2021 and plans for survey and inventory management activities in the 5 regulatory years, 2022–2026. A regulatory year (RY) begins 1 July and ends 30 June (e.g., RY17 = 1 July 2017–30 June 2018). 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 report more efficiently 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 were previously produced every 3 years.

I. RY17–RY21 Management Report

Management Area

Unit 14A is in southcentral Alaska, north of Anchorage. The total area of Unit 14A is 2,685 mi². Unit 14A is bounded on the west by the east bank of the Susitna River, beginning at the mouth at Cook inlet heading north to the mouth of Willow Creek. The northern boundary runs east and northeast along Willow and Peters creeks to their headwaters, continues along the south side of the hydrologic divide separating the Susitna River and the Knik Arm drainages, to the outlet creek at Lake 4408. The eastern boundary follows the east bank of the Chickaloon River south to the bridge at Glenn Highway milepost 77.7, then runs southeast along the hydrologic divide separating Carbon and Coal creeks, to the hydrologic divide between the Matanuska River and the Knik Glacier. The southern boundary goes west across the face of the glacier to the south bank of the Knik River, along the Knik River to Cook Inlet, and follows Cook Inlet southwest to the mouth of the Susitna River (Fig. 1).

Unit 14B covers approximately 2,512 mi² of the Talkeetna Mountains. It consists of the area east of the Susitna River and south of the Talkeetna River, with the northeastern border drawn from the headwaters of the Talkeetna River to the outlet creek at Lake 4408, and the southern border following the hydrologic divide that separates the Susitna River and Knik Arm drainages (Fig. 1). Much of the area is above timberline or is heavily forested with birch (*Betula* spp.), aspen (*Populus* spp.), and spruce (*Picea* spp.).

Summary of Status, Trend, Management Activities, and History of Furbearers in Units 14A and 14B

Game Management Unit 14 is divided into 3 subunits and contains more than half of the human population (more than 320,000 people) living in Alaska. Unit 14A, in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough area, is located in the fastest growing population center in the state. In Unit 14B most of the human population is limited to the Parks Highway corridor and the community of Talkeetna. Unit 14A and 14B are managed by DWC Region IV. Unit 14C includes the Municipality of Anchorage and is managed out of Region II. Most trapping in Unit 14 is low volume, and many

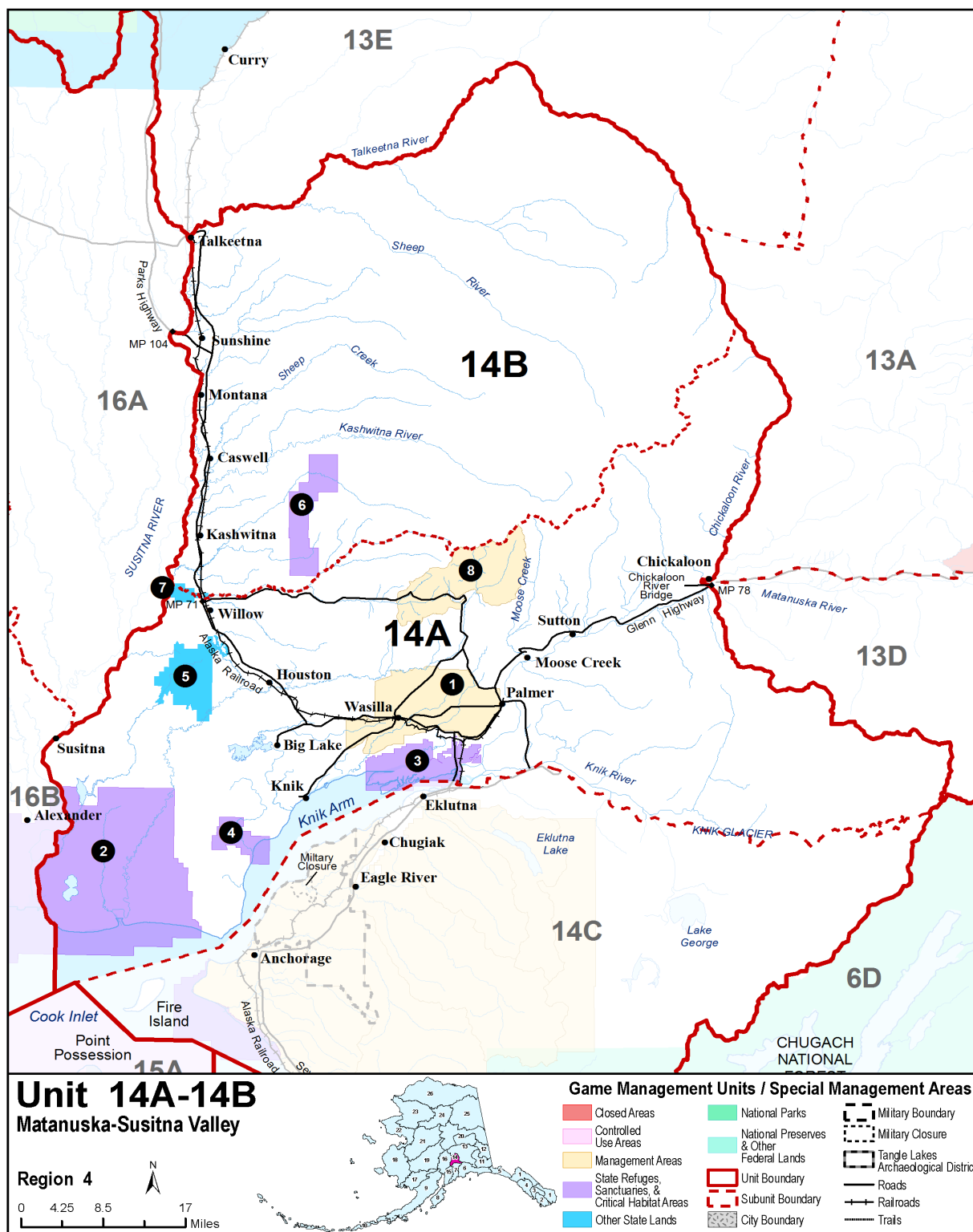


Figure 1. Game Management Units 14A and 14B, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2021.

resource users access areas from established roads or trails. Availability of additional trapping areas close to the major communities is limited due to the expanding human population. Conflicts with other trail users are common, and educational efforts have begun. Trapping and hunting are prohibited or severely restricted in the western half of Unit 14C (the Anchorage bowl); therefore, most consumptive use occurs in Units 14A and 14B (Harper 2007). The proximity of Anchorage to Units 14A and 14B means that for people from Anchorage wishing to trap, these units are the nearest location to do so. As a result, recreational trapping, rather than trapping for subsistence or income supplement, comprises the majority of the trapper effort in the valley.

Furbearer species in Unit 14A and 14B include beaver (*Castor canadensis*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), short-tailed weasel (*Mustela erminea*), least weasel (*Mustela nivalis*), American marten (*Martes americana*), American mink (*Neovison vison*), muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*), arctic ground squirrel (*Spermophilus parryii*), red squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*), hoary marmot (*Marmota caligata*), river otter (*Lutra canadensis*), wolverine (*Gulo gulo*), and wolf (*Canis lupus*; addressed separately in *Wolf Management Report and Plan, Game Management Units 14A and 14B* [Peltier 2024]). Information on life history, range, habitat, and management of furbearers is available on our species website: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=animals.listmammals>.

Trappers reported that beaver, coyote, ermine, muskrat, red fox, and red squirrels were common in RY17. By RY21 only ermine and red fox were reported as common and red squirrel as abundant. Marten, mink, muskrat, wolves, and wolverine were reported as scarce for the entire reporting period. Lynx and river otter were each reported as common for only a single year during the reporting period. Prey species such as grouse, hare, mice, rodents, and ptarmigan varied throughout the reporting period (Spivey 2019, 2020; Bogle 2021a, 2021b, 2022).

Management Direction

EXISTING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PLANS

- *Alaska Wildlife Management Plans: Southcentral Alaska, Cook Inlet Furbearer Management Plan* (ADF&G 1976)
- *Strategic Plan* (ADF&G 2002)

GOALS

1. Provide for optimum harvest of furbearers.
2. Provide the greatest opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping of furbearers.

CODIFIED OBJECTIVES

Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Uses

The Alaska Board of Game (BOG, the board) made a positive customary and traditional finding for furbearers in all units, including Unit 14, with an amount necessary for subsistence uses to be 90% of the harvestable portion (5 AAC 99.025(13)).

Intensive Management

Not applicable.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

To provide the greatest opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping of furbearers.

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

Abundance data are necessary to understand trends in the furbearer population relative to harvest pressure.

Methods

Furbearer population trends are assessed based primarily on information from trapper observations and incidental observations of biologists while conducting other wildlife surveys. This information gives the managers an idea of the status and trend of the populations of furbearers although it lacks an estimate of the density or trajectory of any furbearer populations. Population surveys for furbearers would be preferable for management, but at this time they are not necessary to ensure opportunity to harvest or long-term sustainability.

Results and Discussion

Relative abundance was compiled from anecdotal reports from the public as well as staff observations while conducting other surveys. Most furbearer populations were stable during this report period. The only trends that appeared were an increase in the lynx population and a dip in marten numbers in RY18 and RY19.

Recommendations for Activity 1.1

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

2. Mortality-Harvest Monitoring and Regulations

ACTIVITY 2.1 Monitor harvest through sealing records.

Data Needs

Harvest must be assessed to determine trends in hunter-trapper effort and availability of furbearers.

Methods

We collected harvest data by sealing hides of beaver, marten, otter, wolverine, and lynx taken by trappers. We recorded the location and date of harvest, method of take, transportation mode, sex, and in the case of lynx, 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 were entered into the department's Wildlife Information Network (WinfoNet). Harvest data were summarized by regulatory year.

Season and Bag Limit

Species	Hunting	
	Season	Bag Limit
Beaver	No open season	—
Coyote	No closed season	No limit
Red fox	1 September–15 February	2 foxes
Lynx	1 December–31 January	2 lynx
Wolverine	1 September–31 January	1 wolverine
Species	Trapping	
	Season	Bag Limit
Beaver	10 November–15 May	No limit
Coyote	10 November –31 March (14A) 10 November –30 April (14B)	No limit
Red fox	10 November –28 February ^a	No limit
Lynx	10 November –28 February ^{ab}	No limit
Marten	10 November–31 December (14A) 10 November–31 January (14B)	No limit
Mink	10 November –31 January	No limit
Muskrat	10 November–15 May	No limit
River otter	10 November –31 March	No limit
Wolverine	15 December–31 January (14A) 10 November –31 January (14B)	2 wolverines

^a 29 February in RY19

^b January 31 in RY17

Results and Discussion

Harvest by Hunters-Trappers

BEAVER

Harvest ranged from 53–71 during the reporting period and averaged 63 beavers (Table 1). This is a decrease from the previous 5-year average of 114 beavers (range 74–170 beavers). Most beavers taken in these units were trapped. Overall, there has been a downward trend in both participation and harvest over the past 25 years (Fig. 2). The decrease in harvest does not necessarily reflect a decrease in beaver abundance but rather a decrease in the hunter-trapper effort and the relatively low prices offered for beavers currently.

Table 1. Harvest and methods of take for beavers sealed in Units 14A and 14B, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2021.

Regulatory year	Total harvest	Successful participants	Percent juveniles ^a	Method of take			
				Shot	Trapped	Snared	Unknown
2017	70	24	27	2	64	2	2
2018	71	20	52	0	58	11	2
2019	53	12	40	2	51	0	0
2020	62	20	49	0	61	1	0
2021	63	17	33	0	63	0	0

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

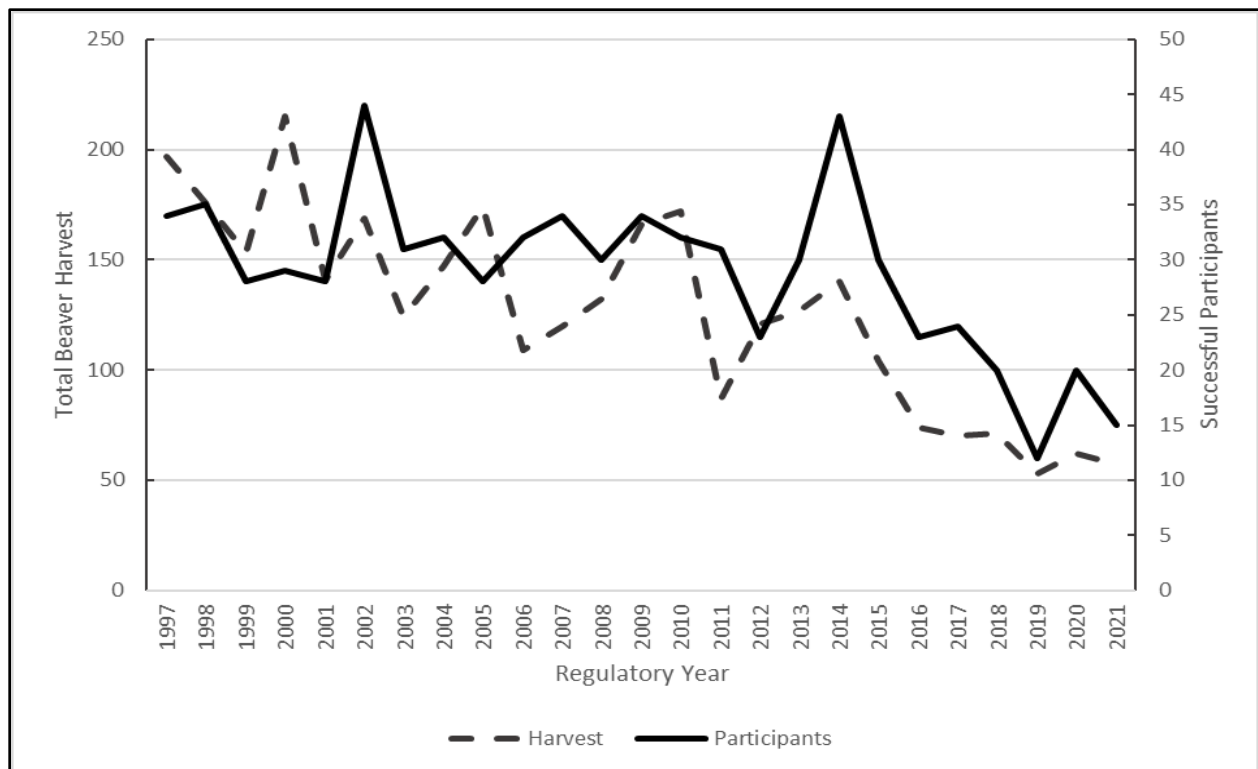


Figure 2. Beaver harvest and hunter-trapper success in Units 14A and 14B, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 1997–2021.

LYNX

Lynx harvest was high in RY20 with 98 lynx harvested, after increasing from 4 at the beginning of the reporting period in RY17 (Table 2). The average for this period was higher than the previous 5 years (45.2 compared to 11.2 during RY12–RY16). This demonstrates that the peak of the lynx cycle was in the center of the RY17–RY22 reporting period and that the peak of the prior cycle was split across reporting periods. The previous high point of the lynx cycle occurred in RY12 with a harvest of 27 lynx. Lynx in these units show roughly a 10-year cycle that has been peaking at approximately the start of each decade (i.e. 1990, 2000, 2012). Most lynx were harvested by trapping. The majority of lynx harvested came from Unit 14A (Fig. 3).

Table 2. Harvest and method of take for lynx sealed in Units 14A and 14B, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2021.

Regulatory year ^a	Total harvest	Successful participants	Percent juveniles ^a	Method of take			
				Shot	Trapped	Snared	Unknown
2017	4	4	0	1	1	2	0
2018	12	6	0	0	10	2	0
2019	38	16	27	3	13	22	0
2020	99	44	20	10	67	13	8
2021	74	32	28	10	41	20	3

^a Juvenile lynx measure < 34" (length).

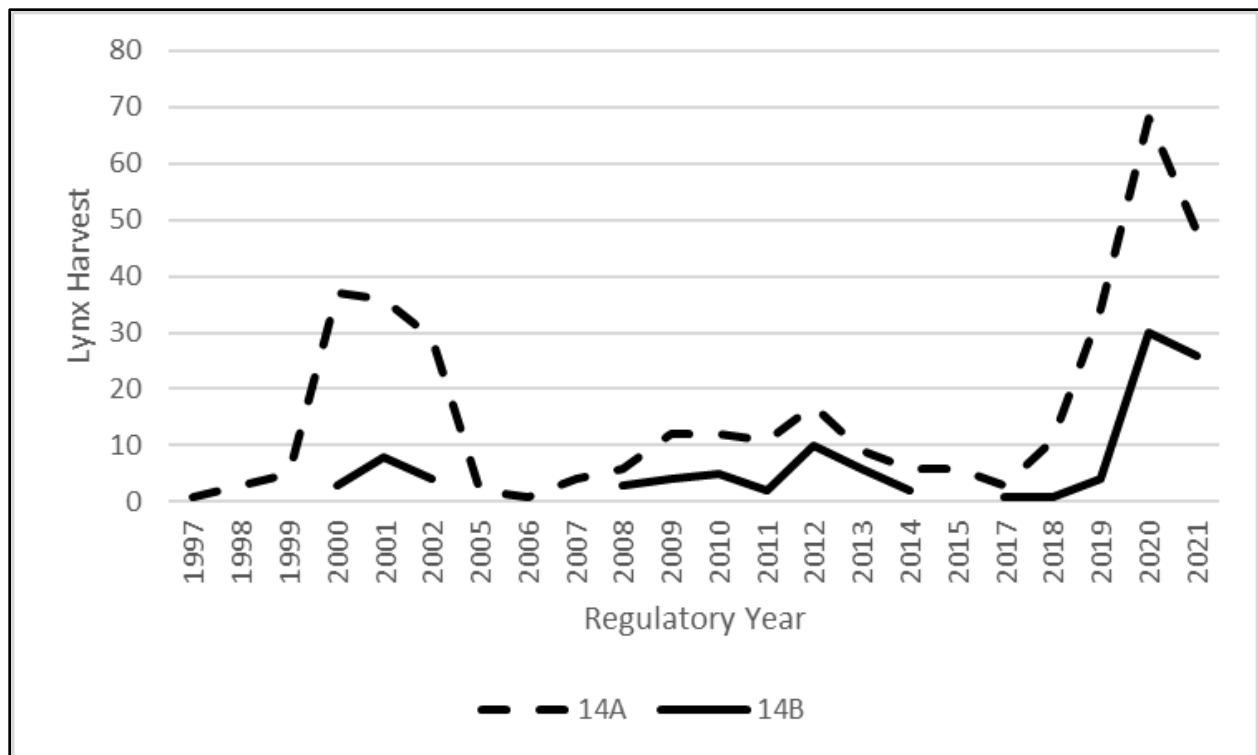


Figure 3. Lynx harvest in Units 14A and 14B, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 1997–2021.

RIVER OTTER

Annual river otter harvest averaged 25.4 during the reporting period; an increase from the previous 5-year period average of 22.8. Most of the harvest occurred in Unit 14A with an average of 17 otters harvested annually, in contrast to 9 harvested annually in Unit 14B. Trapping is the most common form of take in these units (Table 3).

Table 3. Harvest and method of take for river otters sealed in Units 14A and 14B, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2021.

Regulatory year	Total harvest	Successful participants	Percent males	Percent juveniles ^a	Method of take			
					Shot	Trap	Snare	Unknown
2017	18	9	39	25	0	17	0	1
2018	23	17	53	50	0	23	0	0
2019	16	12	53	33	0	15	1	0
2020	30	14	40	58	0	30	0	0
2021	40	17	59	52	0	36	4	0

^a Juvenile otters measure <42 inches total (length + width).

MARTEN

Annual marten harvest averaged 84 martens for the period (Table 4). This is more than the previous 5-year period average of 69. Marten trapping is less time consuming and less difficult than other species, therefore it is less market driven and harvest for this species is probably a better indicator of abundance than it may be for other species. In addition, harvests reflect productivity and survival of martens in response to prey species (and potentially other factors such as pathogens, predation, severe weather, etc.) that fluctuate in abundance across years. The areas where harvest commonly occurs in Unit 14 are generally considered marginal marten habitat due to the high level of human settlement disturbing contiguous coniferous forests (Harper and McCarthy 2013).

Table 4. Harvest and method of take for martens sealed in Units 14A and 14B, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2021.

Regulatory year	Total harvest	Successful participants	Percent males	Method of take			
				Shot	Trapped	Snared	Unknown
2017	101	13	65	0	86	0	15
2018	33	9	54	0	25	0	8
2019	34	9	70	0	33	0	1
2020	161	25	67	1	158	0	2
2021	89	18	69	0	83	0	6

WOLVERINE

Wolverine harvest averaged 8.4 wolverines annually during the reporting period (Table 5). This is an increase from the previous 5-year average of 4.4 (range 2–7) wolverines annually. Most wolverines are trapped, and few trappers take more than 1 wolverine annually.

Table 5. Harvest and method of take for wolverines sealed in Units 14A and 14B, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2021.

Regulatory year	Total harvest	Successful participants	Percent males	Method of take			
				Shot	Trapped	Snared	Unknown
2017	8	6	50	1	5	2	0
2018	8	8	63	2	6	0	0
2019	3	3	50	2	1	0	0
2020	13	10	42	1	12	0	0
2021	10	5	80	1	9	0	0

Harvest Chronology

Marten, river otter, and lynx harvest occurs primarily in December and January, although harvest can be variable and dependent on weather conditions conducive for travel (Table 6). Wolverine harvest also occurs primarily in December; however, the low number of wolverines harvested annually can influence the percentage calculation of the chronology, because a small number can have a large impact. Beaver harvest varies seasonally and is influenced by weather conditions, with early break-up years resulting in more harvest in the spring.

Transport Methods

The most common form of transportation used by trappers in the units is snowmachine, however the large amount of area available from the roadside allows many trappers to access their trapping grounds by highway vehicle as well (Table 7).

Alaska Board of Game Actions and Emergency Orders

The BOG met in spring 2018 and spring 2021 to discuss regional hunting and trapping regulations. In 2018, a change was made to the trapping regulations within Units 14A and 14B to extend the lynx season by 2 months. Beginning in RY18, the lynx trapping season was 10 November–28 February. In 2021, the board made changes to coyote and marten seasons which will take effect in RY22.

Emergency Orders in Units 14A and 14B were issued annually during RY17–RY22 to align the lynx trapping and hunting season dates with the season dates of RY07–RY16 to provide continuity. These changes are consistent with following the lynx tracking strategy.

Recommendations for Activity 2.2

Continue.

Table 6. Furbearer harvest percent by month, Units 14A and 14B, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2021.

Species	Regulatory year	Percent of harvest									<i>n</i>
		Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	
Beaver ^a	2017	4	10	7	10	21	16	0	3	19	70
	2018	0	4	14	17	28	4	4	18	6	71
	2019	4	0	9	9	0	0	0	21	57	53 ^b
	2020	2	0	5	27	18	11	2	21	11	62
	2021	6	14	8	5	3	13	10	5	29	63
Lynx	2017	0	0	0	50	50	0	0	0	0	4
	2018	0	0	8	42	42	8	0	0	0	12
	2019	0	0	26	34	29	11	0	0	0	38
	2020	0	0	15	26	38	10	0	0	0	99 ^b
	2021	3	1	16	33	40	7	0	0	0	75
River otter	2017	0	0	17	28	28	17	10	0	0	18
	2018	0	4	9	31	39	4	4	9	0	23
	2019	0	0	56	25	13	0	6	0	0	16
	2020	0	0	20	13	54	7	3	0	3	30
	2021	0	0	30	20	22	13	10	0	5	40
Marten	2017	0	0	7	70	23	0	0	0	0	101
	2018	0	0	12	67	15	6	0	0	0	33
	2019	0	0	12	79	9	0	0	0	0	34
	2020	0	0	24	52	24	0	0	0	0	161
	2021	0	0	12	59	0	29	0	0	0	89
Wolverine	2017	0	0	25	25	50	0	0	0	0	8
	2018	0	0	13	25	37	25	0	0	0	8
	2019	0	0	0	0	33	67	0	0	0	3
	2020	0	0	0	61	31	8	0	0	0	13
	2021	0	0	0	50	40	10	0	0	0	10

^a Beavers taken under damage control permits outside season dates are reflected in the total.

^b Total includes unknown month of take.

Table 7. Furbearer harvest percent by transport method, Units 14A and 14B, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2021.

Species	Regulatory Year	Percent of harvest								<i>n</i>
		Airplane	Foot	Boat	ATV	Snow-machine	ORV	Highway vehicle	Unknown	
Beaver	2017	0	19	19	13	33	4	10	2	70
	2018	0	28	18	25	13	0	13	3	71
	2019	0	17	4	11	8	0	60	0	53
	2020	0	24	13	3	35	0	24	1	62
	2021	0	11	38	8	25	0	17	0	63
Lynx	2017	0	25	0	0	50	0	25	0	4
	2018	8	25	0	8	42	0	17	0	12
	2019	0	5	0	8	32	8	47	0	38
	2020	0	15	0	7	51	4	14	9	99
	2021	0	39	0	0	44	0	15	2	75
River otter	2017	0	17	0	6	39	0	33	5	18
	2018	0	22	0	9	43	0	26	0	23
	2019	0	31	0	0	25	0	44	0	16
	2020	0	7	3	20	43	0	23	4	30
	2021	0	28	5	0	47	0	20	0	40
Marten	2017	0	42	0	2	42	0	0	14	101
	2018	6	3	0	3	64	0	0	24	33
	2019	29	9	0	0	50	0	9	3	34
	2020	3	5	0	0	88	0	3	1	161
	2021	0	16	0	6	60	16	1	1	89
Wolverine	2017	0	50	0	0	50	0	0	0	8
	2018	38	0	0	0	50	0	0	12	8
	2019	33	0	0	0	33	0	0	33	3
	2020	15	8	0	0	77	0	0	0	13
	2021	20	10	0	0	70	0	0	0	10

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

Data Recording and Archiving

- Harvest data and copies of sealing forms are stored in WinfoNet.
- Scanned copies of field data sheets are housed on the network server in the Palmer area biologist office (O:\WC\Palmer Area Office Folder\Species\Furbearer) and hard copies are stored in file folders in the Palmer assistant area biologist's office.

Agreements

None.

Permitting

None.

Conclusions and Management Recommendations

Harvest of furbearers remained relatively stable during this reporting period with the largest fluctuations seen in the marten and lynx harvests. Lynx are expected to have large fluctuations in harvest due to the cyclical nature of their population. Marten harvest variability is not as predictable as lynx; marten and other furbearer harvest can be influenced by population fluctuations or by trapper effort. Trapper effort is driven by many things including fur prices, weather, snow conditions, and gas prices. During this reporting period the fur prices generally declined, and the cost of gas was high. The metrics of method of take, method of transport, and harvest chronology were stable, indicating no shift in how or when furbearers in Units 14A and 14B were targeted. Harvests of furbearers appear to be within sustainable limits, and no changes in seasons or bag limits are recommended.

II. Project Review and RY17–RY22 Plan

Review of Management Direction

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

The existing management direction and goals appropriately direct management of furbearers in Units 14A and 14B. The management direction for the units ensures that furbearers will persist as part of the natural ecosystem and ensures continued hunting (of applicable species), trapping, 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, furbearers in Units 14A and 14B should continue to be managed in a manner that complements the statewide furbearer management goals. There are no area-specific issues in the units that require a departure from statewide goals for furbearer management.

GOALS

1. Provide the opportunity to trap and hunt furbearers.
2. Maintain an optimal and sustainable harvest of 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 14, with a harvestable surplus to be 90% of the harvestable portion (5 AAC 99.025(13)).

Intensive Management

Not applicable.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

To provide the greatest opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping of furbearers.

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

Abundance data are necessary to understand trends in the furbearer population relative to harvest pressure.

Methods

Locations and group size (if applicable) of furbearers will be recorded during aerial survey flights for moose. Most observations occur during moose surveys when sightability is ideal. Anecdotal reports will be 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 determine trends in hunter-trapper effort and availability of furbearers.

Methods

We will collect harvest data when sealing hides taken by trappers and hunters. We will record the location and date of harvest, method of take, transportation mode, and sex, and also measure the hides of beavers, lynx, wolverine, marten, and river otters. These data will be entered into an ADF&G database (WinfoNet).

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

Data Recording and Archiving

- Harvest data and copies of sealing forms will be stored in WinfoNet.
- Field data sheets will be scanned and housed on the network server in the Palmer area biologist office (O:\WC\Palmer Area Office Folder\Species\Furbearer\Scanned Archive Files) and hard copies stored in file folders located in the Palmer assistant area biologist's office.

Agreements

None.

Permitting

None.

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