

Furbearer Management Report and Plan, Game Management Unit 16:

Report Period 1 July 2017–30 June 2022, and

Plan Period 1 July 2022–30 June 2027

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Gerrit Van Diest



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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 public website.

This species management report and plan was reviewed and approved for publication by Todd Rinaldi, Management Coordinator for Region IV for the Division of Wildlife Conservation.

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Cover Photo: Wolverine on the move. ©2008 ADF&G. Photo by Todd Rinaldi.

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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 16 during for 5 regulatory years 2017–2021, along with plans for the next 5 regulatory years 2022–2026. A regulatory year (RY) begins 1 July and ends 30 June (e.g., RY21 = 1 July 2021–30 June 2022). This report is produced primarily to provide agency staff with data and analysis to help guide and record agency efforts. It is also provided 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 furbearers.

I. RY17–RY21 Management Report

Management Area

Game Management Unit 16 is located in southcentral Alaska, west of Anchorage. Unit 16 consists of the drainages into western Cook Inlet from Redoubt Creek and the Susitna River, including the drainages of Redoubt Creek and the drainages on the west side of the Susitna River upstream from its junction with the Chulitna River, and the drainages into the west side of the Chulitna River upstream of the Tokositna River, including the drainages on the south side of the Tokositna River up to the Tokositna Glacier. It is subdivided into Unit 16A which is east of the east bank of the Yentna River from its mouth upstream to the Kahiltna River, east of the east bank of the Kahiltna River and east of the Kahiltna Glacier, and Unit 16B which covers all portions south and west of Unit 16A (Fig. 1). Unit 16A is 1,850 mi²; Unit 16B is approximately 5½ times larger at 10,405 mi².

Summary of Status, Trend, Management Activities, and History of Furbearers in Unit 16

Unit 16 is adjacent to Unit 14 which contains more than half (approximately 400,000) of the people living in Alaska. However, most of Unit 16 is roadless; only a small portion of 16A has road access along the Parks Highway (29 miles) and Petersville Road (20 miles). The accessible areas are receiving increased pressure from recreational trappers. The majority of Unit 16 is accessible only by snowmachine or airplane for most of the trapping season (and by boat for beaver trapping). Due to this difficulty of access, most of the trappers in Unit 16 do so for subsistence and to supplement their income. Conflicts with other trail users are rare. A few local residents trap full-time to generate income, primarily from marten and beaver hides (Peltier 2013)

Furbearers in Unit 16 include beaver (*Castor canadensis*), coyote (*Canis lantrons*), 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 zibethacus*), 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 Brockman 2025).

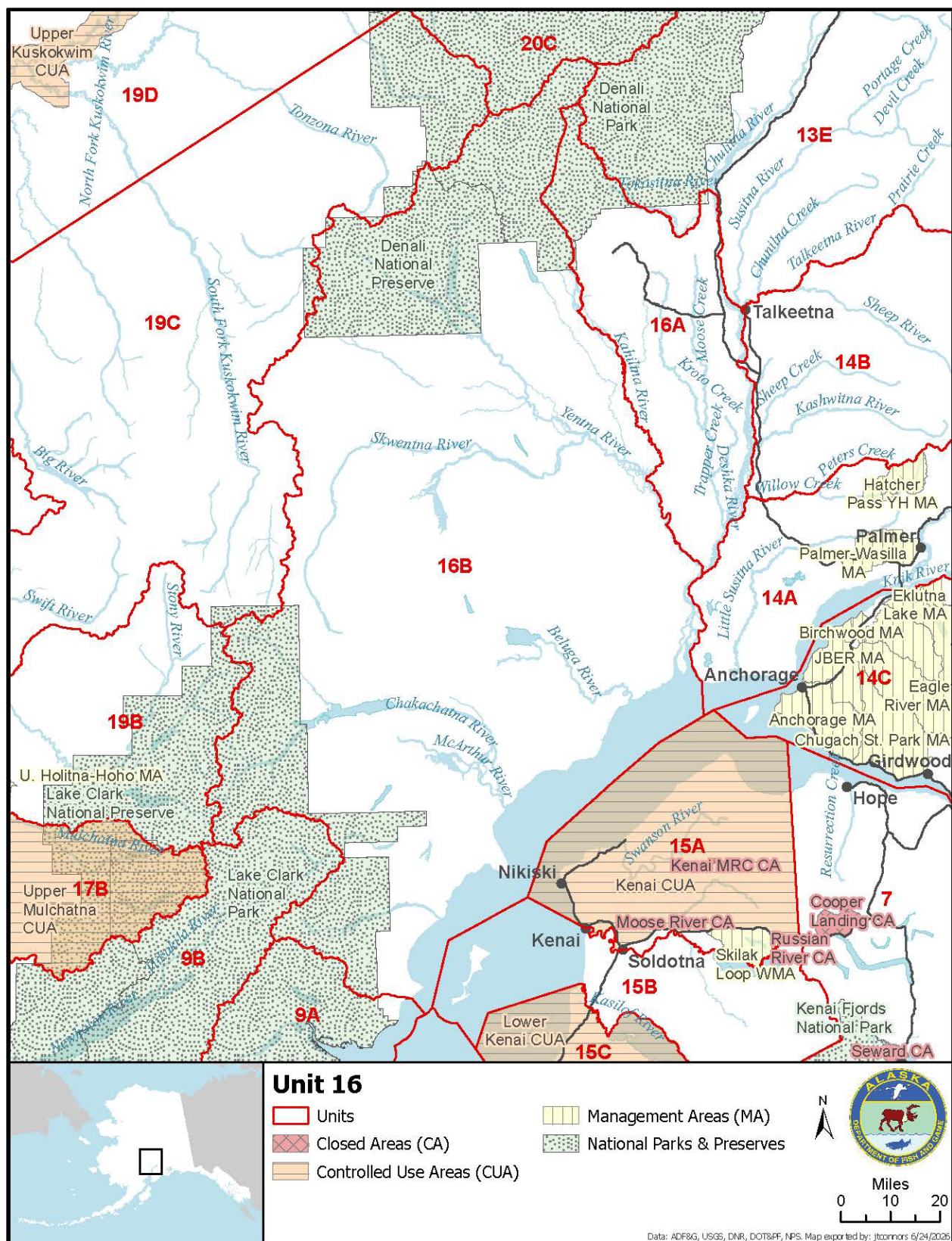


Figure 1. Game Management Unit 16, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2022.

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 were 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

There are no other existing wildlife management plans for furbearers outside of the division's series of furbearer management reports and plans.

GOALS

1. Provide for optimum harvest of furbearers.
2. To 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 has made a positive determination for furbearers in all units, including Unit 16, with a harvestable surplus of 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 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 changes in the furbearer population and harvest pressure.

Methods

ADF&G staff record GPS locations and characteristics for any furbearers observed during aerial survey flights. Most observations occur during moose surveys when sightability is ideal. ADF&G welcomes discussions from trappers regarding observations. Anecdotal reports are recorded to the maximum level of detail available. Additional information is gathered through the sealing process (Activity 2.1).

Results and Discussion

During RY17–RY21, some trappers reported a declining trend in marten sign and activity and an increase in lynx harvest in Unit 16.

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

We collect harvest data by sealing hides of marten, river otter, wolverine, and lynx taken by trappers and hunters. We record location and date of harvest, method of take, transportation mode, and sex. For lynx and river otters, the hide measurements are also recorded. 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 the ADF&G Wildlife Information Network database (WinfoNet). Harvest data are summarized by regulatory year.

Season and Bag Limit

Trapping season and bag limit, Unit 16, regulatory years 2017–2022.

Species	Season	Bag limit
Beaver	25 September–31 May	No limit
Coyote	15 October–30 April	No limit
Fox, red	10 November–28 February ^a	No limit
Lynx	RY17: 15 December–31 January RY18–RY21: 10 November–28 February ^a	No limit
Marten	10 November–31 January	No limit
Mink	10 November–31 January	No limit
Muskrat	10 November–10 June	No limit
River Otter	10 November–31 March	No limit
Wolverine	Unit 16A: 10 November–31 January Unit 16B: 10 November–28 February ^a	2 wolverines No limit

^a 29 February in RY19.

Hunting season and bag limit, Unit 16, regulatory years 2017–2022.

Species	Season	Bag Limit
Beaver	No open season	–
Coyote	No closed season	No limit
Fox, red	1 September–15 February	2 foxes
Lynx	1 December–31 January	2 lynx
Wolverine	Unit 16A: 1 September–31 January Unit 16B: 1 September–31 March	1 wolverine

*Results and Discussion*Harvest by Hunters-Trappers

BEAVER

Beaver harvest data are not available for this reporting period because sealing was not required for beaver in Unit 16.

LYNX

Lynx harvest increased from a low of 3 in RY17 to a high of 28 in RY21 (Table 1). The average for the period was higher than the previous 5 years (13.2 compared to 5.8 in RY12–RY16), which demonstrates that the low of the cycle was split between the two reporting periods. RY21 is likely at or near the peak of the cycle at 28 lynx harvested as the previous high peaked at 12 lynx harvested in RY12. Most lynx were harvested by trapping. The majority of lynx harvested came from Unit 16B.

Table 1. Lynx harvest and method of take for hides sealed in Unit 16, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2021.

Regulatory year	Total harvest	Successful participants	% Juveniles ^a	Method of take			
				Shot	Trapped	Snared	Unknown
2017	3	2	33	0	3	0	0
2018	5	4	20	1	4	0	0
2019	6	6	0	1	4	1	0
2020	24	18	8	4	15	4	1
2021	28	19	7	5	18	5	0

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

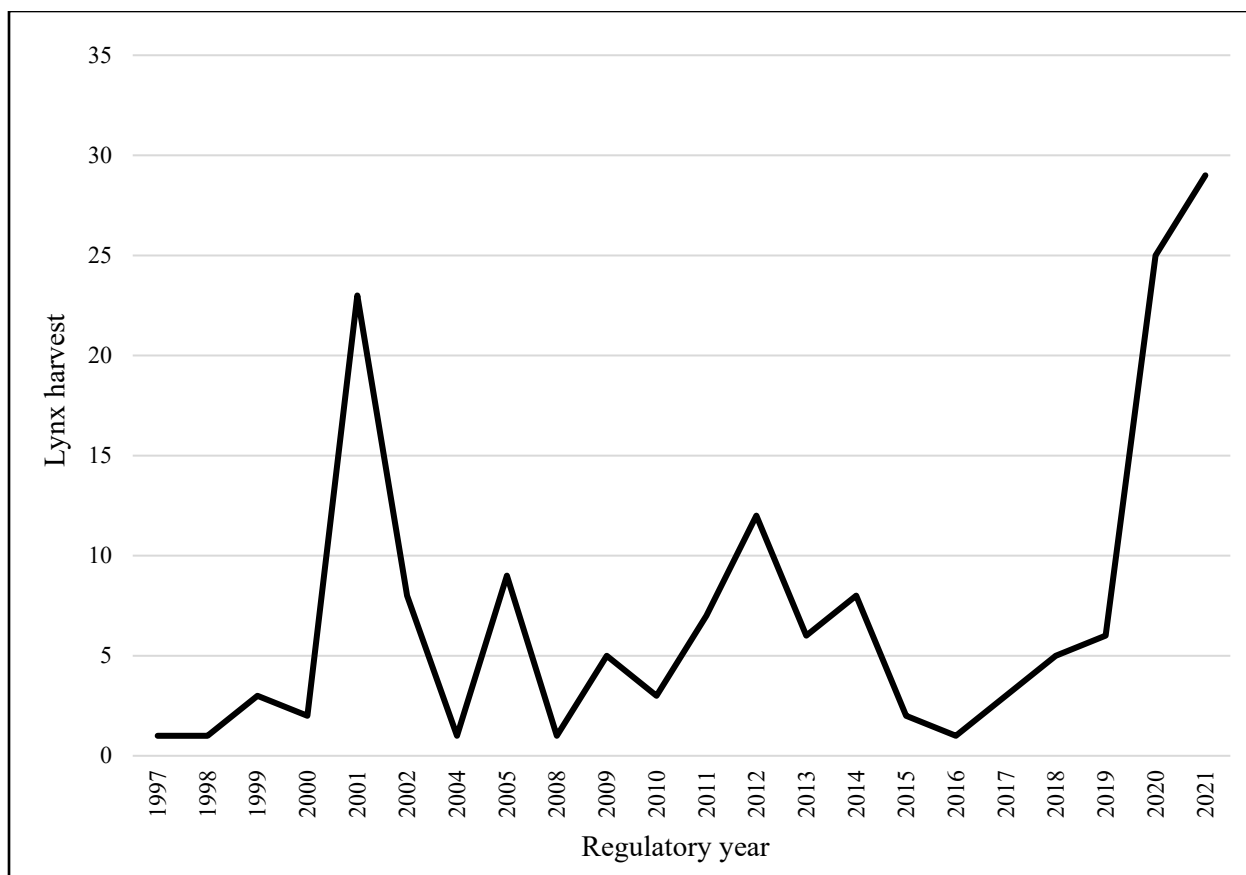


Figure 2. Lynx harvest in Unit 16, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2021.

RIVER OTTER

River otter harvest averaged 22.2 river otters during the reporting period, a decrease from the previous 5-year period average of 41.6. Unit 16A comprises a slight majority of the harvest with an average of 11.8 otters harvested annually compared to 10.4 harvested annually in Unit 16B. Trapping is the most common form of take in these units (Table 2).

Table 2. River otter harvest and method of take for hides sealed in Unit 16, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2021.

Regulatory year	Total harvest	Successful participants	% Males	% Juveniles ^a	Method of take			
					Shot	Trapped	Snared	Unknown
2017	27	12	52	38	0	27	0	0
2018	27	10	48	25	1	26	0	0
2019	9	6	78	33	0	9	0	0
2020	23	14	67	35	0	23	0	0
2021	25	14	48	19	0	25	0	0

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

MARTEN

Marten harvest averaged 286 martens for the reporting period (Table 3). This is less than the previous 5-year average of 395. The harvest during this reporting period peaked in RY20 with 485 harvested; this peak coincided with the increase in lynx harvest in RY20 (Table 1), which could indicate an increase in prey abundance during that period. 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/survival of martens in response to prey species that fluctuate in abundance across years. Unit 16 is generally considered good marten habitat with contiguous coniferous forests.

Table 3. Marten harvest and method of take for hides sealed in Unit 16 Southcentral Alaska, regulatory year 2017–2021.

Regulatory year	Total harvest	Successful participants	% Males	Method of take			
				Shot	Trapped	Snared	Unknown
2017	364	20	72	0	364	0	0
2018	176	16	71	0	156	0	20
2019	203	16	60	0	181	1	21
2020	485	34	61	3	441	3	38
2021	200	21	57	0	195	5	0

WOLVERINE

Wolverine harvest averaged 29.4 wolverines during the reporting period (Table 4). This is an increase from the previous 5-year average of 20.8. Most wolverines are trapped, and few trappers take more than 3 wolverines annually.

Table 4. Wolverine harvest and method of take for hides sealed in Unit 16, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2022.

Regulatory year	Total harvest	Successful participants	% Males	Method of take			
				Shot	Trapped	Snared	Unknown
2017	37	22	55	1	29	2	5
2018	23	14	71	1	21	0	1
2019	21	16	76	4	14	3	0
2020	34	19	74	1	32	0	1
2021	32	18	45	9	22	0	1

Harvest Chronology

Marten, river otter, and lynx harvest occurs primarily in December and January, although harvest can be variable and dependent on conditions during the trapping season (Table 5). Wolverine harvest also occurs primarily in December; however, the low number of lynx harvested annually can influence the percentage calculation of the chronology. Beaver harvest varies seasonally and is influenced by weather conditions each year with early break up years resulting in more harvest in the spring.

Table 5. Harvest chronology for river otters, lynx, martens, and wolverines sealed in Unit 16, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2021.

Species	Regulatory year	Percent of harvest									Total harvest ^a
		Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	
River otter	2017	0	0	26	19	37	11	7	0	0	27
	2018	0	4	22	48	14	7	4	0	0	27
	2019	0	11	11	22	44	0	11	0	0	9
	2020	0	0	4	26	52	9	4	0	4	23
	2021	4	0	4	4	28	52	8	0	0	25
Lynx	2017	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	3
	2018	0	0	0	60	40	0	0	0	0	5
	2019	0	0	0	46	38	17	0	0	0	6
	2020	0	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	24
	2021	0	0	11	39	36	14	0	0	0	28
Marten	2017	0	0	17	59	24	0	0	0	0	364
	2018	0	1	11	44	44	0	0	0	0	176 ^a
	2019	0	0	3	75	21	0	0	0	0	203 ^a
	2020	0	0	28	41	31	1	0	0	0	485
	2021	0	1	4	31	65	1	0	0	0	200
Wolverine	2017	0	0	14	32	22	30	3	0	0	37
	2018	0	0	0	22	43	35	0	0	0	23
	2019	0	0	1	14	33	29	19	0	0	21
	2020	0	0	6	15	47	29	3	0	0	34
	2021	0	0	9	6	44	31	6	0	3	32

^a Total includes unknown month of take.

Transport Methods

The most common form of transportation used by trappers in Unit 16 is snowmachine; however, the large amount of remote area leads to trappers using aircraft to access their trapping grounds (Table 6).

Table 6. Transport methods used by trappers for river otters, lynx, martens, and wolverines sealed in Unit 16, Southcentral Alaska, regulatory years 2017–2021.

Species	Regulatory year	Percent of harvest								Total harvest
		Airplane	Foot	Boat	ATV	Snow-machine	ORV	Highway vehicle	Unknown	
River otter	2017	7	7	0	0	78	0	4	4	27
	2018	0	7	4	4	81	0	4	0	27
	2019	0	0	11	0	44	44	0	0	9
	2020	0	22	4	0	74	0	0	0	23
	2021	24	36	4	0	36	0	0	0	25
Lynx	2017	67	0	0	0	33	0	0	0	3
	2018	20	0	0	0	80	0	0	0	5
	2019	0	0	0	0	83	0	17	0	6
	2020	8	8	0	0	79	0	4	0	24
	2021	18	14	0	0	68	0	0	0	28
Marten	2017	13	1	0	0	77	0	9	0	364
	2018	11	22	0	0	32	0	23	11	176
	2019	7	18	0	0	63	0	0	12	203
	2020	6	5	0	0	74	0	1	15	485
	2021	21	11	0	0	65	0	2	0	200
Wolverine	2017	38	0	0	0	57	3	3	0	37
	2018	35	0	0	0	61	0	0	4	23
	2019	29	5	0	0	62	0	0	5	21
	2020	33	3	0	0	62	3	0	0	34
	2021	31	19	0	0	47	0	0	3	32

Recommendations for Activity 2.2

Continue.

Alaska Board of Game Actions and Emergency Orders

The Board of Game met in spring 2018 and spring 2021 to discuss regional hunting and trapping regulations. In 2018, the following changes were implemented:

1. Allow beaver to be harvested with a firearm during the entire trapping season.
2. Extend the lynx season by two months, changing the season dates from 15 December–31 January to 10 November–28 February.

Emergency Orders were issued annually during the reporting period to align the trapping and hunting seasons for lynx in Unit 16 with the previous reporting period, to provide continuity with previous seasons and avoid over harvest.

3. Habitat Assessment-Enhancement

There were no habitat-related activities conducted in Unit 16 for the benefit of furbearers during RY17–RY22.

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

Data Recording and Archiving

Harvest data and copies of sealing forms are stored on ADF&G's WinfoNet database.

Field data sheets are scanned and housed on the network server in the Palmer area biologist office and paper copies are stored in file folders located in the Palmer assistant area biologist's office.

Agreements

None.

Permitting

None.

Conclusions and Management Recommendations

Quantifiable management objectives for beavers, river otters, lynx, marten, and wolverines may not be warranted as harvest and trapper effort are relatively low. Harvest information is available for these species from sealing records, and application of existing and emerging methods may provide opportunities to monitor population trends.

Harvests of furbearers appear to be within sustainable limits, and no changes in seasons or bag limits are recommended.

II. Project Review and RY22–RY26 Plan

Review of Management Direction

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

The existing management direction and goals appropriately direct management of furbearers in Unit 16. The management direction for the unit ensures that furbearers will persist as part of the natural ecosystem and ensures continued hunting (for 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, the Unit 16 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 the

unit that require a departure from statewide goals for furbearer management, and furbearers are not currently managed at a subunit scale.

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 16, 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 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 changes in the furbearer population and harvest pressure.

Methods

Locations, group size (if applicable) and characteristics will be recorded during aerial survey flights. 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 understand the potential impact of furbearer harvest on their populations.

Methods

We collect harvest data by sealing hides of furbearers taken by trappers and hunters. We record location and date of harvest, method of take, transportation mode, and sex. For lynx, river otters, and beavers, the hide measurements are also recorded. 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 the ADF&G Wildlife Information Network database (WinfoNet).

3. Habitat Assessment-Enhancement

There are no habitat-related activities planned for the benefit of furbearers in Unit 16 for RY22–RY26.

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

Data Recording and Archiving

Harvest data and copies of sealing forms will be stored on ADF&G's WinfoNet database.

Field data sheets will be scanned and housed on the network server in the Palmer area biologist office paper copies will be stored in file folders located in the Palmer assistant area biologist's office.

Agreements

None.

Permitting

None.

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