

Wolf Management Report and Plan, Game Management Unit 5:

Report Period: 1 July 2010–30 June 2015, and

Plan Period: 1 July 2015–30 June 2020

[Stephanie Sell](#)



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PREPARED BY:

Stephanie Sell
Area Management Biologist

APPROVED BY:

Thomas V. Schumacher
Management Coordinator

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



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. This funding provided support for Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Wolf Survey and Inventory Project 14.0.

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 Thomas V. Schumacher, Management Coordinator for Region I for the Division of Wildlife Conservation.

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Please cite this document as follows:

Sell, S. 2018. Wolf management report and plan, Game Management Unit 5: Report period 1 July 2010–30 June 2015, and plan period 1 July 2015–30 June 2020. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Species Management Report and Plan ADF&G/DWC/SMR&P-2018-38, Juneau.

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Contents

Purpose of this Report.....	3
I. RY10–RY14 Management Report	3
Management Area.....	3
Summary of Status, Trend, Management Activities, and History of Wolf in Unit 5	5
Management Direction.....	5
Existing Wildlife Management Plans	5
Goals	5
Codified Objectives	6
Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Harvest.....	6
Intensive Management.....	6
Management Objectives.....	6
Management Activities	6
1. Population Status and Trend	6
2. Mortality/Harvest Monitoring and Regulations.....	7
3. Habitat Assessment–Enhancement	9
Nonregulatory Management Problems or Needs.....	9
Data Recording and Archiving	9
Agreements	9
Permitting.....	9
Conclusions and Management Recommendations	9
II. Project Review and RY15–RY19 Plan	10
Review of Management Direction	10
Goals	10
Codified Objectives	10
Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Harvest.....	10
Intensive Management.....	10
Management Objectives.....	10
Management Activities	10
1. Population Status and Trend	10
2. Mortality Harvest Monitoring and Regulations.....	11
3. Habitat Assessment–Enhancement	11
Nonregulatory Management Problems or Needs.....	11
Data Recording and Archiving	11
Agreements	12
Permitting.....	12
References.....	12

List of Figures

Figure 1. Map showing the boundaries of Game Management Unit 5, Alaska..... 4

List of Tables

Table 1. Unit 5, Alaska wolf harvest, regulatory years^a 2010 through 2014..... 8

Table 2. Unit 5, Alaska wolf harvest chronology by month, regulatory years^a 2010 through 2014.
..... 8

Table 3. Unit 5, Alaska wolf harvest by transport method, regulatory years^a 2011 through 2014. 8

Purpose of this Report

This report provides a record of survey and inventory management activities for wolves in Unit 5 for the 5 regulatory years (RY) 2010–2014 and plans for survey and inventory management activities for the following 5 regulatory years, 2015–2019. A regulatory year (RY) begins 1 July and ends 30 June (e.g., RY10 = 1 July 2010–30 June 2011). This report is produced primarily to provide agency staff with data and analysis to help guide and record its own efforts, but it is also provided to the public to provide information about wildlife management activities. In 2016 the Alaska Department of Fish and Game’s (ADF&G) Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) launched this 5-year report type to more efficiently report on trends and describe potential changes in future data collection activities. It replaces the wolf management report of survey and inventory activities that was previously produced every 3 years.

I. RY10–RY14 Management Report

Management Area

Game Management Unit 5 encompasses approximately 5,800 mi² of mainland in northern southeast Alaska and the eastern Gulf of Alaska from Cape Fairweather to Icy Bay (Fig. 1). The unit is divided into administrative Unit 5A east of Yakutat Bay and Unit 5B west of Yakutat Bay. Elevations range from sea level to over 18,000 feet, and much of the unit is glaciated or above tree line. Unit 5 has a maritime climate characterized by relatively mild temperatures and high precipitation. In some winters very deep snow can accumulate, even at low elevation. The Unit 5 landscape is composed of many large glacial systems, including the Malaspina and Hubbard Glaciers, icefields, fjords, complex river systems, dense forested habitat with large meadow systems, extensive sandy beaches, tidelands, and estuaries.

Most land within Unit 5 is publicly owned. However, beyond the limited Yakutat road system, access for hunting or trapping is quite limited. Most of the Unit 5 land area is within Glacier Bay National Park and Wrangell–St. Elias National Park and Preserve, both of which are managed by the National Park Service. In Unit 5A the Tongass National Forest manages most land between Yakutat Bay and the Alsek River, but there are also parcels managed by the State of Alaska, the City and Borough of Yakutat, and the local Alaska Native corporations. The City and Borough of Yakutat, population ~600, is the only permanent settlement in Unit 5.

All of Game Management Unit 5B is either in the Wrangell–St Elias National Park and Preserve or is owned by the Chugach Regional Native Corporation. Most moose habitat is within national park and preserve boundary where regulations allow hunting. Most of the best moose habitat on the western portion of the forelands near Pt. Riou is on land owned by Chugach Native Corporation. To date the corporation has allowed the public to hunt on its land.

Vegetated portions of the unit are in a variety of stages of primary plant succession due to the relatively recent and ongoing retreat of glaciers. Better drained sites that have been deglaciated for longer periods are dominated by Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) forest. Western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) and mountain hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*) also occur on some sites, but most forest has not achieved old-growth condition. Alder (*Alnus spp.*) and willow (*Salix spp.*) are common on wetter or more recently deglaciated sites.



Figure 1. Map showing the boundaries of Game Management Unit 5, Alaska.

Moose and mountain goats are the primary ungulate prey available to wolves in Unit 5, and wolf abundance within the unit appears generally tied to moose abundance. Geographic features divide Unit 5 moose into 3 discrete populations; the Unit 5A Yakutat Forelands, Unit 5A Nunatak Bench, and the Unit 5B Malaspina Forelands, with moose occurring in greatest abundance on the Yakutat Forelands.

Summary of Status, Trend, Management Activities, and History of Wolf in Unit 5

There has never been a scientific study of wolves in Unit 5. However, wolf harvest data, along with anecdotal information, suggest wolf numbers and distribution are similar to what they have been over the last 3 decades. Wolf harvest throughout most of Unit 5 is limited by difficult access. Wolf numbers may fluctuate with increasing and decreasing moose numbers; however, wolves probably subsisted mostly on mountain goats and salmon before the arrival of moose in the area (ca. 1920s and 1930s, ADF&G 1990). Salmon are considered a seasonally important component of wolf diet, especially as a late summer and early fall food source. The abundance and availability of salmon in Unit 5 may help sustain wolf numbers during period declines in moose numbers. Anecdotal evidence from discussions with local hunters and trappers, hunting guides, pilots, and local ADF&G personnel suggests that wolves remain common throughout Unit 5. ADF&G personnel routinely see wolves during aerial moose surveys in both Units 5A and 5B.

Management Direction

Wolves in Unit 5 are sustainably managed to provide for human uses and to ensure wolves remain an integral part of Southeast Alaska's ecosystems (Fig. 1). Compatible human uses include hunting and trapping (both for personal use and commercial sale of furs), photography, viewing, listening, and scientific and educational uses (ADF&G 2002). The aesthetic value of being aware of or observing wolves in natural interactions with their environment is also recognized as an important human use of wolves.

EXISTING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PLANS

There are no formal management plans for wolves in Unit 5. Management objectives and activities have been reviewed and modified through public comments, staff recommendations, and Board of Game actions over the years. A record of these changes can be found in the division's management report series. The plan portion of this report contains the current management plan for wolves in Unit 5.

GOALS

No formal wolf management goals have been established for this unit.

CODIFIED OBJECTIVES

Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Harvest

Hunting

Unit 5– There is a positive customary and traditional use determination finding for wolf in Unit 5 listed in 5 AAC 99.025 (Board of Game 2009).

Trapping

All units with a harvestable portion – 90% of the harvestable portion (Board of Game 2012).

Intensive Management

None.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The general management objective is to regulate seasons and bag limits to maintain a healthy population of wolves on a unitwide basis for viewing and harvest.

MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Population Status and Trend

ACTIVITY 1.1. Monitor wolf abundance and activity using harvest information and public information.

Data Needs

Monitoring abundance helps evaluate whether harvest is sustainable.

Methods

Wolf populations in Unit 5 were monitored, in a general sense, by whatever means available, including harvest data, anecdotal reports, aerial sightings incidental to surveys of other species, discussions with hunters and trappers, and information collected from the annual statewide trapper surveys.

Results and Discussion

Reports of wolf sightings near town are low and consistent with previous years. Anecdotal information from one trapper are that wolf populations are increasing outside of town and that they are noticing some unusual hair loss on pelts. One wolf specimen was sent to our wildlife veterinarian for necropsy and it was suspected to have an endocrine disorder, follicular dysplasia (Alopecia X) or hypothyroidism. Alopecia X is an incompletely understood disorder that may be associated with abnormal levels of sex hormones originating from the adrenal glands (Dr. Kimberlee Beckmen, ADF&G pers. comm.). It is unclear whether this unusual hair loss is widespread or localized in the region and what effect, if any, it is having on the Unit 5 wolf population.

Recommendations for Activity 1.1

Continue.

2. Mortality/Harvest Monitoring and Regulations

ACTIVITY 2.1. Monitor harvest through sealing records.

Data Needs

The distribution and abundance of wolves in Unit 5 cannot be reliably monitored from aircraft. Instead, harvest data along with anecdotal reports and observations are used to ensure wolves are sustainably managed and continue to occupy their historic range.

Methods

Wolves harvested by trappers and hunters are required to be sealed in order to monitor harvest levels. Harvest data are archived in ADF&G's WinfoNet database and are summarized and reported by regulatory year. Information recorded for each wolf includes date of kill, name of trapper or hunter, specific location of kill, method of take and transportation, sex of the wolf, color or the pelt, and the number of other wolves thought to be in the pack.

Season and Bag Limit

<u>Units and Bag Limits</u>	<u>Resident Open Seasons</u>	<u>Nonresident Open Seasons</u>
<i>Unit 5</i>		
Hunting: 5 wolves	1 Aug – 30 Apr	1 Aug – 30 Apr
Trapping: No limit	1 Nov – 30 Apr	1 Nov – 30 Apr

Results and Discussion

Hunter/Trapper Harvest

Hunters and trappers reported harvesting 4–8 wolves annually during RY10–RY14 (Table 1). Hunting and trapping conditions vary from year to year in Southeast Alaska, which affects harvests. During RY10–RY14 the winters were fairly mild with the exception of RY11, when Yakutat received approximately 108 inches of snow. Recent winters have been lacking in snow, which potentially affected the number of trappers in the field due to the need to constantly maintain gear. Harvest locations within Unit 5A were widely distributed along the Yakutat road system, navigable rivers, and around remote air strips. Unit 5A received most of the wolf hunting and trapping pressure in Unit 5. Only 2 wolves were taken in Unit 5B during the report period. Both wolves were likely taken by resident hunters in combination with fall moose or bear hunts.

Most wolves taken during fall and early spring months were taken incidental to hunting other species (Table 2). From January through March most wolves were taken under a trapping license. During the report period, transportation methods used by successful trappers and hunters varied from year to year (Table 3). Because of the small wolf harvest, transportation used by 1 or 2 successful trappers can skew these data. Across all years, highway vehicles, boats, and aircraft were the primary forms of transportation used by wolf hunters and trappers in Unit 5.

Table 1. Unit 5, Alaska wolf harvest, regulatory years^a 2010 through 2014.

Regulatory Year	Reported harvest				Method of Take			
	M	F	Unk	Total	Shot	Trap	Snare	Other
2010	3	3	0	6	3	1	2	0
2011	2	1	1	4	4	0	0	0
2012	5	0	0	5	4	0	1	0
2013	2	2	0	4	1	2	1	0
2014	3	5	0	8	5	2	0	1 ^b

^a A regulatory year begins 1 July and ends 30 June, e.g., regulatory year 2010 = 1 July 2010–30 June 2011.

^b Method of take was archery.

Table 2. Unit 5, Alaska wolf harvest chronology by month, regulatory years^a 2010 through 2014.

Regulatory year	Month of Harvest						
	Aug–Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
2010	0	0	1	1	0	1	3
2011	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
2012	4	0	1	0	0	0	0
2013	0	0	4	0	0	0	0
2014	3	1	0	0	1	1	2

^a A regulatory year begins 1 July and ends 30 June, e.g., regulatory year 2010 = 1 July 2010–30 June 2011.

Table 3. Unit 5, Alaska wolf harvest by transport method, regulatory years^a 2011 through 2014.

Regulatory year	Transportation Method			
	Airplane	Boat	3- or 4- wheeler	Highway vehicle
2010	2	2	1	1
2011	4	0	0	0
2012	3	1	0	1
2013	0	0	1	3
2014	1	1	2	3

^a A regulatory year begins 1 July and ends 30 June, e.g., regulatory year 2010 = 1 July 2010–30 June 2011.

Due to the remote nature of most of the unit and substantial proportion of National Park land where harvest is not allowed, we do not attempt to estimate the abundance of wolves in Unit 5. Although no quantitative data are available, the trapper questionnaire statewide annual report for 1 July 2012–30 June 2013 reported trappers felt wolves were common in Unit 5. Anecdotal reports and discussions with local hunters, trappers, and pilots, as well as harvest data, suggest that wolves are common and seen all over the Yakutat Forelands.

Permit Hunts

None.

Alaska Board of Game Actions and Emergency Orders

During its November 2010 meeting, the Alaska Board of Game adopted a proposal to prohibit trapping in areas near the community of Yakutat and along some roads and trails. The intent of the proposal was to protect pets from being trapped. The impact to wolf harvest due to these changes is low. No emergency orders were issued to close wolf trapping or hunting season during the report period.

Recommendations for Activity 2.1

Continue to monitor total harvest.

3. Habitat Assessment–Enhancement

No habitat assessment or enhancement activities were conducted.

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

Data Recording and Archiving

- When printed hard copies of species wildlife management reports for wolves in Unit 1C will be stored in the Douglas Area Office Library. Electronic versions of these reports are typically made available via ADF&G’s public website through the division’s publications page: www.wildlifepublications.adfg.alaska.gov
- Wolf sealing data are stored electronically in ADF&G’s Wildlife Information Network (WinfoNet).

Agreements

None

Permitting

None

Conclusions and Management Recommendations

Our knowledge of the Unit 5 wolf population is limited to the results of harvest reporting, information provided by hunters, trappers, local pilots, trapper surveys, and incidental observations by department staff. Based on these sources we believe the Unit 5 wolf population remains stable, sustainably managed, and distributed throughout its historic range. Prey appear relatively abundant enough to sustain the wolf population in Unit 5. Moose are doing well in all areas of the unit, except for the small Nunatak Bench population, mountain goats are available, and there is a small deer population on islands and adjacent shoreline of southeastern Yakutat Bay in the vicinity of Yakutat. Beaver are abundant and salmon are seasonally plentiful throughout the forelands. Because few people live in Unit 5, access is difficult, and weather is often inclement, hunting and trapping pressure on wolves will probably remain low. No changes in seasons or bag limits are recommended at this time.

II. Project Review and RY15–RY19 Plan

Review of Management Direction

Wolves in Unit 5 are sustainably managed to provide for human uses and to ensure wolves remain an integral part of Southeast Alaska’s ecosystems (Fig. 1). Compatible human uses include hunting and trapping (both for personal use and commercial sale of furs), photography, viewing, listening, and scientific and educational uses (ADF&G 2002). The aesthetic value of being aware of or observing wolves in natural interactions with their environment is also recognized as an important human use of wolves.

GOALS

No formal wolf management goals have been established for this unit.

CODIFIED OBJECTIVES

Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Harvest

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Unit 5– There is a positive customary and traditional use determination finding for wolf in Unit 5 listed in 5 AAC 99.025 (Board of Game 2009).

Trapping

All units with a harvestable portion – 90% of the harvestable portion (Board of Game 2012).

Intensive Management

None

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The general management objective is to regulate seasons and bag limits to maintain a healthy population of wolves on a unitwide basis for viewing and harvest.

MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Population Status and Trend

ACTIVITY 1.1. Monitor wolf abundance and activity using harvest information and public information.

Data Needs

Monitoring abundance helps evaluate whether harvest is sustainable.

Methods

Wolf populations in Unit 5 were monitored, in a general sense, by whatever means available, including harvest data, anecdotal reports, aerial sightings incidental to surveys of other species, discussions with hunters and trappers, and information collected from the annual statewide trapper surveys.

2. Mortality Harvest Monitoring and Regulations

ACTIVITY 2.1. Monitor harvest through sealing records.

Data Needs

The distribution and abundance of wolves in Unit 5 cannot be reliably monitored from aircraft. Instead, harvest data along with anecdotal reports and observations are used to ensure wolves are sustainably managed and continue to occupy their historic range.

Methods

Wolves harvested by trappers and hunters are required to be sealed to monitor harvest levels. Harvest data is archived in ADF&G’s WinfoNet database and is reported by regulatory year. Information recorded for each wolf included date of kill, name of trapper or hunter, specific location of kill, method of take and transportation, sex of the wolf, color or the pelt, and number of other wolves thought to be in the pack.

Additionally, wolf populations in Unit 5 are monitored by other means including anecdotal reports, aerial sightings incidental to surveys of other species, discussions with hunters and trappers, and information collected from the annual statewide trapper surveys.

Season and Bag Limit

<u>Units and Bag Limits</u>	<u>Resident Open Seasons</u>	<u>Nonresident Open Seasons</u>
<i>Unit 5</i>		
Hunting: 5 wolves	1 Aug – 30 Apr	1 Aug – 30 Apr
Trapping: No limit	1 Nov – 30 Apr	1 Nov – 30 Apr

3. Habitat Assessment–Enhancement

No habitat assessment or enhancement activities will be conducted.

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

Data Recording and Archiving

- When printed hard copies of species wildlife management reports for wolves in Unit 1C will be stored in the Douglas Area Office Library. Electronic versions of these reports are

typically made available via ADF&G's public website through the division's publications page: www.wildlifepublications.adfg.alaska.gov

- Wolf sealing data are stored electronically in ADF&G's Wildlife Information Network (WinfoNet).

Agreements

None.

Permitting

None.

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- Alaska Department of Fish and Game. 1990. Strategic plan for management of moose in Region I, Southeast Alaska: 1990-94 Final. Division of Wildlife Conservation, Douglas. Alaska Department of Fish and Game. 2002. Strategic plan. Division of Wildlife Conservation, Juneau.
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