

Wolf Management Report and Plan, Game Management Units 25A, 25B, 25D, 26B, and 26C:

Report Period 1 July 2015–30 June 2020, and
Plan Period 1 July 2020–30 June 2025

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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 Lincoln S. Parrett, 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 wolves (*Canis lupus*) in Game Management Units 25A, 25B, 25D, 26B, and 26C for the previous 5 regulatory years 2015–2019 and plans for survey and inventory management activities in the next 5 regulatory years 2020–2024. A regulatory year (RY) begins 1 July and ends 30 June (e.g., RY14 = 1 July 2014–30 June 2015). 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 wolf management report of survey and inventory activities that was previously produced every 3 years.

I. RY15–RY19 Management Report

Management Area

Unit 25D consists of the upper Yukon River Valley also known as the Yukon Flats. Major drainages within the unit include the main stem of the upper Yukon, Hodzana, Hadweenzic, lower Chandalar, Christian, lower Birch, and lower Porcupine river drainages. Unit 25B is situated to the east of Unit 25D and includes the upper Porcupine, Black, Kandik, and Nation river drainages. Unit 25A consists of the south slope of the Brooks Range west of the Canada border including the Chandalar river drainage. Other large drainages within the unit include the Sheenjek and Coleen rivers. Units 26B and 26C consist of the north slope of the Brooks Range and coastal plain west of the Canada border to the Itkillik river drainage. Combined, Units 25A, 25B, 25D, 26B, and 26C are referred to as northeastern Alaska and encompass approximately 73,756 mi².

Summary of Status, Trend, Management Activities, and History of Wolves in Units 25A, 25B, 25D, 26B, and 26C

Wolves are present throughout this management area, which includes boreal forest, the Brooks Range mountains, and Arctic slope tundra habitats. Primary prey are moose (*Alces alces*), caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*), and Dall sheep (*Ovis dalli*). Wolves are generally less abundant in this area compared to other parts of Alaska because resident populations of prey such as moose occur at low abundance in most areas and large migratory caribou herds may only be seasonably available to wolves.

The aerial track–reconnaissance method (Stephenson 1978, Gasaway et al. 1983) has been the primary method for estimating wolf density across the management area. Estimates of wolf density have rarely been conducted in Units 26B and 26C. The most recent survey in Unit 26B occurred in 2003 when wolf density was estimated at 4.8 wolves per 1,000 mi² (1.9 wolves per 1,000 km²; Caikoski 2009). Unit 26C has not been surveyed since the 1980s; at that time Garner and Reynolds (1986) reported a density of 5.7–8.3 wolves per 1,000 mi² (2.2–3.2 wolves per 1,000 km²). Population density estimates for portions of Units 25D and 25B occurred in 1983,

1984, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2006, and 2009. Methods, survey areas, and results for those surveys are described by Nowlin (1985), Stephenson (2006) and Caikoski (2009, 2012a). However, the most recent survey, which occurred in 2009, resulted in a density estimate of 11.4–13.9 wolves per 1,000 mi² (4.4–5.3 wolves per 1,000 km²; Caikoski 2012a).

Sources and extent of natural mortality have been largely unstudied across the reporting area. However, small packs, small litters, and low pup survival are characteristic of wolf populations in areas where prey are relatively scarce (Mech et al. 1998). Intraspecific strife (Adams et al. 2008) is probably the major cause of natural mortality among adult wolves in northeastern Alaska. Along coastal areas in Units 26B and 26C, rabies provides an additional source of natural mortality (Zarnke and Ballard 1987).

During 2008–2011, ADF&G conducted an intensive management feasibility assessment to evaluate the efficacy of implementing an intensive management plan to reduce predation on moose in western Unit 25D. A part of the feasibility assessment included evaluating whether an increase in wolf harvest to temporarily reduce wolf density in Unit 25D and improve moose survival rates was achievable and sustainable. The results of the feasibility assessment concluded that public-based efforts to reduce wolf abundance to sufficient levels for improving moose survival were not possible. As a result, the management direction in northeastern Alaska during RY15–RY19 is to monitor wolf harvest and provide for maximum opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping wolves. Caikoski (2012b) provides a more comprehensive description of the results of the feasibility assessment.

Management Direction

EXISTING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PLANS

GOAL

G1. Provide sustained opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping wolves.

CODIFIED OBJECTIVES

Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Uses

None, although there is a positive customary and traditional use finding.

Intensive Management

None.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Review annual harvest of wolves.

MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Population Status and Trend

None.

2. Mortality–Harvest Monitoring and Regulations

ACTIVITY 2.1. Review annual harvest by monitoring wolf numbers and population characteristics through incidental sightings, hunter and trapper interviews, and evaluation of sealing documents.

Data Needs

Harvest of wolves in Units 25A, 25B, 25D, 26B, and 26C is low; therefore, monitoring reported harvest is sufficient to assess achievement of our goal (G1) of providing sustained opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping wolves.

Methods

Database queries through ADF&G’s Wildlife Information Network (WinfoNet) were used to construct summaries of reported harvest from fur sealing records.

Results and Discussion

Harvest by Hunters-Trappers

Total reported harvest for RY15–RY19 are as follows: Unit 25A averaged 26 wolves per year (range 20–36); Unit 25B averaged 7 wolves per year (range 4–11); Unit 25D averaged 32 wolves per year (range 21–50); Unit 26B averaged 14 wolves per year (range 8–22); and Unit 26C averaged 3 wolves per year (range 1–4). The goal of sustained opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping wolves was met during RY15–RY19.

Alaska Board of Game Actions and Emergency Orders

No regulation changes were adopted during RY15–RY19.

Recommendations for Activity 2.1

Continue to monitor reported harvest.

3. Habitat Assessment–Enhancement

None.

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

Data Recording and Archiving

Electronic copies of data and reports are stored in WinfoNet – Data Archive (<http://winfonet.alaska.gov/index.cfm>). Project Title: Wolf Management Program Units 25ABD, 26BC. Project ID: GMU 25ABD, 26BC Wolves. Primary Region: Region III.

Agreements

None.

Permitting

None.

Conclusions and Management Recommendations

We achieved our management goal to provide a sustained opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping wolves. With low harvest of wolves and difficult access, we recommend continuing the approach of monitoring annual reported harvest and being attentive to public concerns.

II. Project Review and RY20–RY24 Plan

Review of Management Direction

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

There are no changes planned in the management direction for wolves. We will continue to monitor annual harvest and listen to public concerns, should any arise.

GOAL

- G1. There are no changes to the goals. We will continue to manage for sustained opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping wolves.

CODIFIED OBJECTIVES

Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence Uses

None.

Intensive Management

None.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Review annual harvest of wolves.

REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Population Status and Trend

None.

2. Mortality-Harvest Monitoring

ACTIVITY 2.1. Review annual harvest by monitoring wolf numbers and population characteristics through incidental sightings, hunter and trapper interviews, and evaluation of sealing documents.

Data Needs

Harvests of wolves in Units 25A, 25B, 25D, 26B, and 26C is typically low; therefore, monitoring reported harvest is sufficient to assess achievement of our goal (G1) of providing sustained opportunity to participate in hunting and trapping wolves.

Methods

We will use harvest database queries through ADF&G's Wildlife Information Network (WinfoNet) to construct summaries of reported harvest from fur sealing records.

3. Habitat Assessment-Enhancement

None.

NONREGULATORY MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

Data Recording and Archiving

Electronic copies of data and reports will be stored in the WinfoNet – Data Archive (<http://winfonet.alaska.gov/index.cfm>). Project Title: Wolf Management Program Units 25ABD, 26BC. Project ID: GMU 25ABD, 26BC Wolves. Primary Region: Region III.

Agreements

None.

Permitting

None.

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