

# Unit 4 Brown Bear Management Strategy



Alaska Board of Game, Sitka  
2013

Phil Mooney, Sitka Area Biologist





- 5800 square miles
- >5000 miles of shoreline
- Admiralty Is. ~1690 sq. miles
- Baranof Is. ~1860 sq. miles
- Chichagof Is. ~ 2210 sq. miles
- ~95% is Tongass National Forest

# Outline

## ➤ Background

- 1995 BOG bear committee report
- 1998 Department white paper
- 1998 BOG-formed Brown Bear Management Team (BBMT)

## ➤ Current Issues

## ➤ BOG proposals

# 1995 Southeast Brown Bear Committee

- Members: Board of Game, ADFG, US Forest Service, Guides, Dept. of Public Safety, Admiralty Bear Assoc., Territorial Sportsmen Visitors Assn., Tlinget-Haida Central Council, SE Guides Assn., and AK Visitors Assn.
- Address 2 issues:
  - Regulate NR brown bear hunting to prevent overharvest
  - Regulate bear viewing to maintain high quality viewing
- Recommended a mortality rate of 3% to maintain harvest at the 1995 level
  - Concerns about habitat loss, uncertainty about bear population estimate, magnitude of unquantified wounding loss, and a desire to maintain harvest at the existing level which had been biologically sustainable

Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Division of Wildlife Conservation

Brown Bears of Unit 4  
Past, Present and Future:  
A Status Report and  
Issues Paper

July 1998

## ADF&G's 1998 "white paper"

- Presented the history and research of brown bears in Unit 4
- Led to the framework that guided development of the Unit 4 Brown Bear Management Strategy

# 1998 – Brown Bears of Unit 4 – Past, Present and Future: A Status Report and Issues Paper

- Purpose was to identify issues and suggest remedial actions that:
  - Minimize effects of habitat loss from logging
  - Manage roads and human access
  - Conduct development projects/minimize effects
  - Manage solid waste
  - Regulate tourism/bear viewing
  - Regulate hunting/deal with proliferation of guides
  - Establish/maintain population and habitat monitoring program
  - Increase education promoting better human-bear coexistence
  - Continue bear research

# BOG Direction, Involvement, and Ownership

- Over the last 2 decades, interest in hunting and viewing of brown bears in Southeast Alaska has increased, as has potential for conflict among user groups. At the request of the Alaska Board of Game a team of interested stakeholders, the Unit 4 Brown Bear Management Team, was assembled to develop comprehensive management recommendations in GMU 4. Recommendations made by this citizen and agency group included:
  - Controlling the increase in the number of brown bear hunting guides that occurred over the past decade by limiting the number of guides and hunts they provide.
  - Setting a total annual human-caused mortality cap of 4% for all bears and 1.5% for females on each island.
  - Addressing the growing demand for bear viewing opportunities by managing viewing and hunting to minimize conflict

Alaska Board of Game  
ADF&G Division of Wildlife Conservation

**Southeast Alaska  
UNIT 4 BROWN BEAR  
MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**



Joel Bennett

**Recommendations of a citizens and agency  
brown bear management advisory team**

**June 2000**

**1998 – 2000**

**BBMT & BBMS**

- **Team composed of 15 individuals nominated by organizations representing various landowners/ resource agencies, special interest groups, the Board of Game, and other diverse entities**
- **At the request of the Alaska BOG the charge was to develop comprehensive management recommendations for brown bears in Unit 4**



# Members

- **Greg Streveler: (BBMT Chair) Alaska Board of Game**
- **Eruk Williamson: Alaska Board of Game**
- **Paul Johnson / Mike Sofoulis: Southeast Alaska Guide Association, Alaska Professional Hunters Assoc.**
- **Marti Marshall: U.S. Forest Service**
- **Bob Hinman / Ron Somerville: Territorial Sportsmen**
- **Bruce Baker / KJ Metcalf: Friends of Admiralty Island, Southeast Alaska Conservation Council**
- **Mim McConnell: Port Alexander Fish and Game Advisory Committee**
- **Jerry Barber: Sitka Fish and Game Advisory Committee**
- **Bob Engelbrecht / Bob Janes: Alaska Visitors Association**
- **Paul Grant: Admiralty Bear Association**
- **Scott Newman / Dave Helmick: Petersburg Fish and Game Advisory Committee**

# Members (continued)

- **Ken Schoonover / Mike Deppner: Huna Totem Corporation**
- **Jack Whitman: Alaska Department of Fish and Game**
- **Steve Behnke / Jeff Sloss: Alaska Wilderness and Recreation Tourism Association**
- **Floyd Kookesh: Federal Southeast Subsistence Regional Advisory Council**
- **Alternates: Joel Bennett, Brad Dennison, Greg Petrich, Janice Searles**
- **Staff: Tom Paul, ADF&G**
- **Facilitators: Diana Cote, Kim Garner, Doug Larsen**
- **Recorders: Elizabeth Andrews, Ellen Fritts, Doug Larsen, Fran Preston**

# Guidelines

- **Review issues of resource management and any human activities in Unit 4 that affect brown bears, such as hunting, viewing, human access, and habitat alteration;**
- **Agree on brown bear management goals and objectives;**
- **Determine what changes are needed in current management to meet those goals and objectives;**
- **Develop key elements of a management strategy that reflects those changes;**
- **Convey the strategy to the appropriate resource management agencies and regulatory boards with recommendations for their action; and**
- **Strive for consensus among interest groups.**

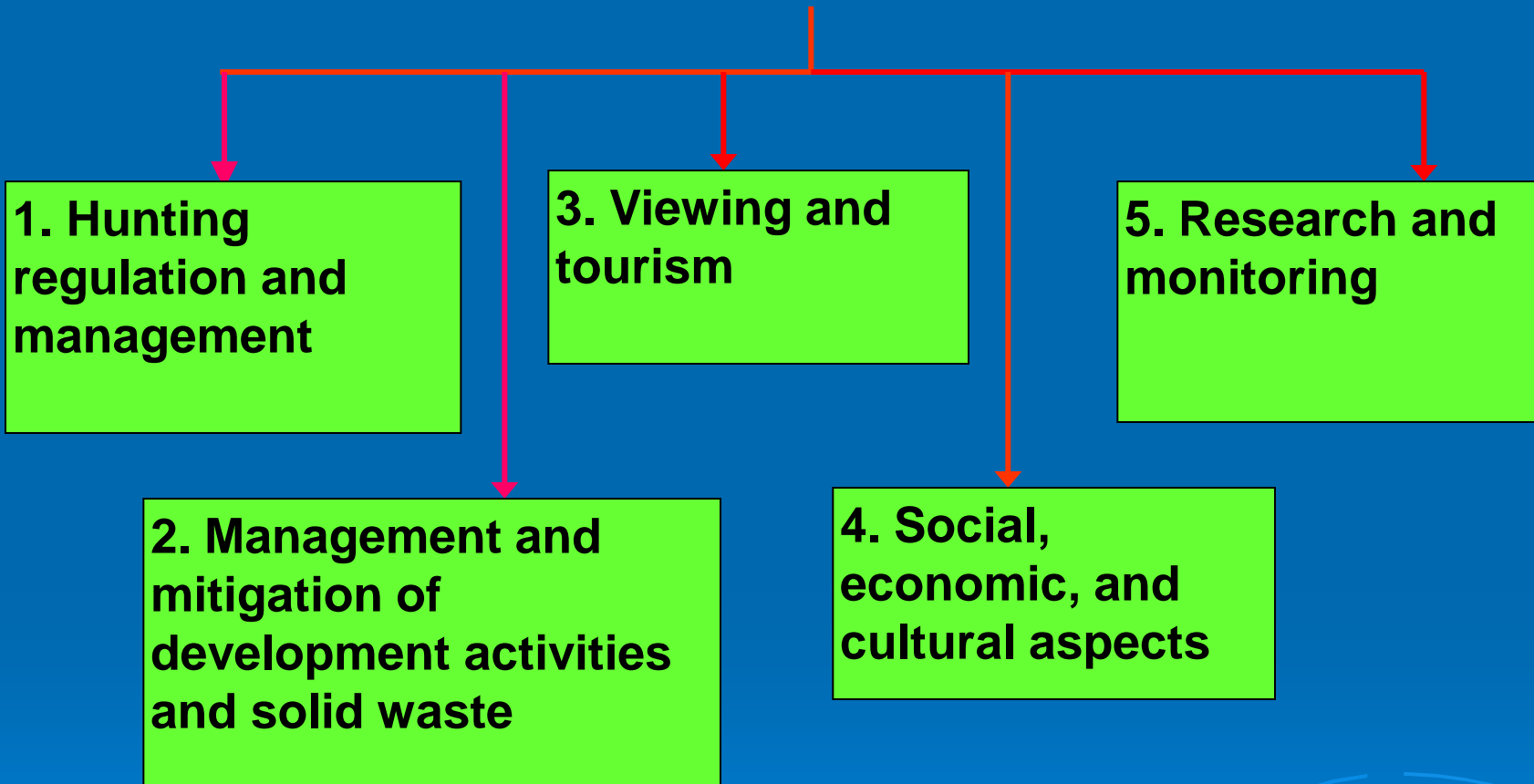
# BBMS - Goals

- Promote the long-term conservation and health of GMU 4 brown bears and their habitats
- Develop recommendations to provide for a broad spectrum of public enjoyment and uses, (hunting and nonhunting), of Unit 4 brown bears that is sustainable over the long-term
- Improve communication among the public and agencies involved in brown bear management

# Issues

- Hunter harvest and other mortality levels
- Guide use and allocation
- Roads and use by bears and humans
- Human activities and development
- Solid waste management
- Information and education strategies

# Brown Bear Management Strategy



# Structure of the Report

Within these 5 sections:

- Thirty eight (38) issues were identified
- Seventy (70) recommendations were proposed

# Brown Bear Management Strategy

**1. Hunting  
regulation and  
management**

**3. Viewing and  
tourism**

**5. Research and  
monitoring**

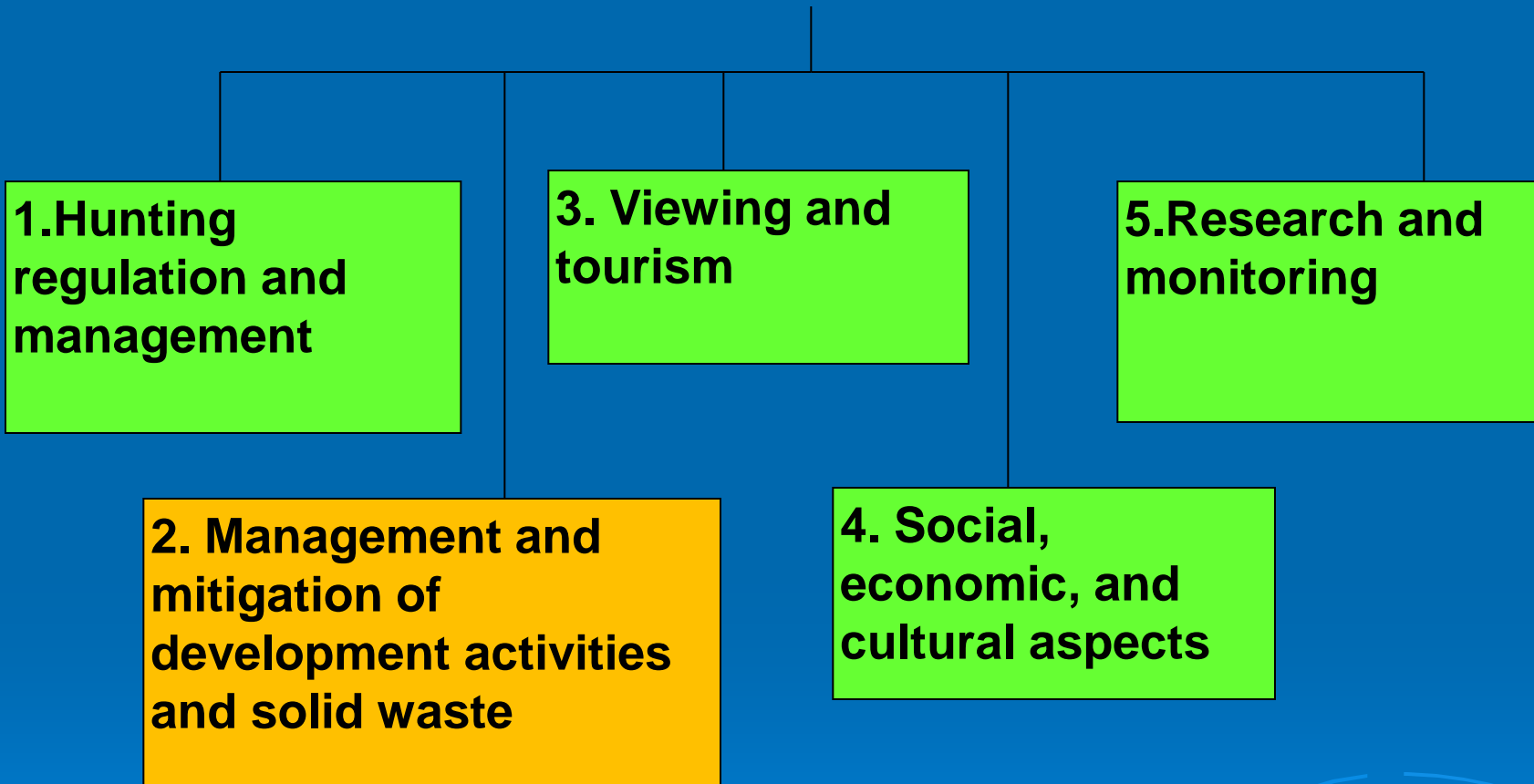
**2. Management and  
mitigation of  
development activities  
and solid waste**

**4. Social,  
economic, and  
cultural aspects**

**Ten (10) issues - 26 recommendations**



# Brown Bear Management Strategy



**Eight (8) issues - 13 recommendations**

# Brown Bear Management Strategy

1. Hunting regulation and management

3. Viewing and tourism

5. Research and monitoring

2. Management and mitigation of development activities and solid waste

4. Social, economic, and cultural aspects

**Six (6) issues - 8 recommendations**

# Brown Bear Management Strategy

**1. Hunting  
regulation and  
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**3. Viewing and  
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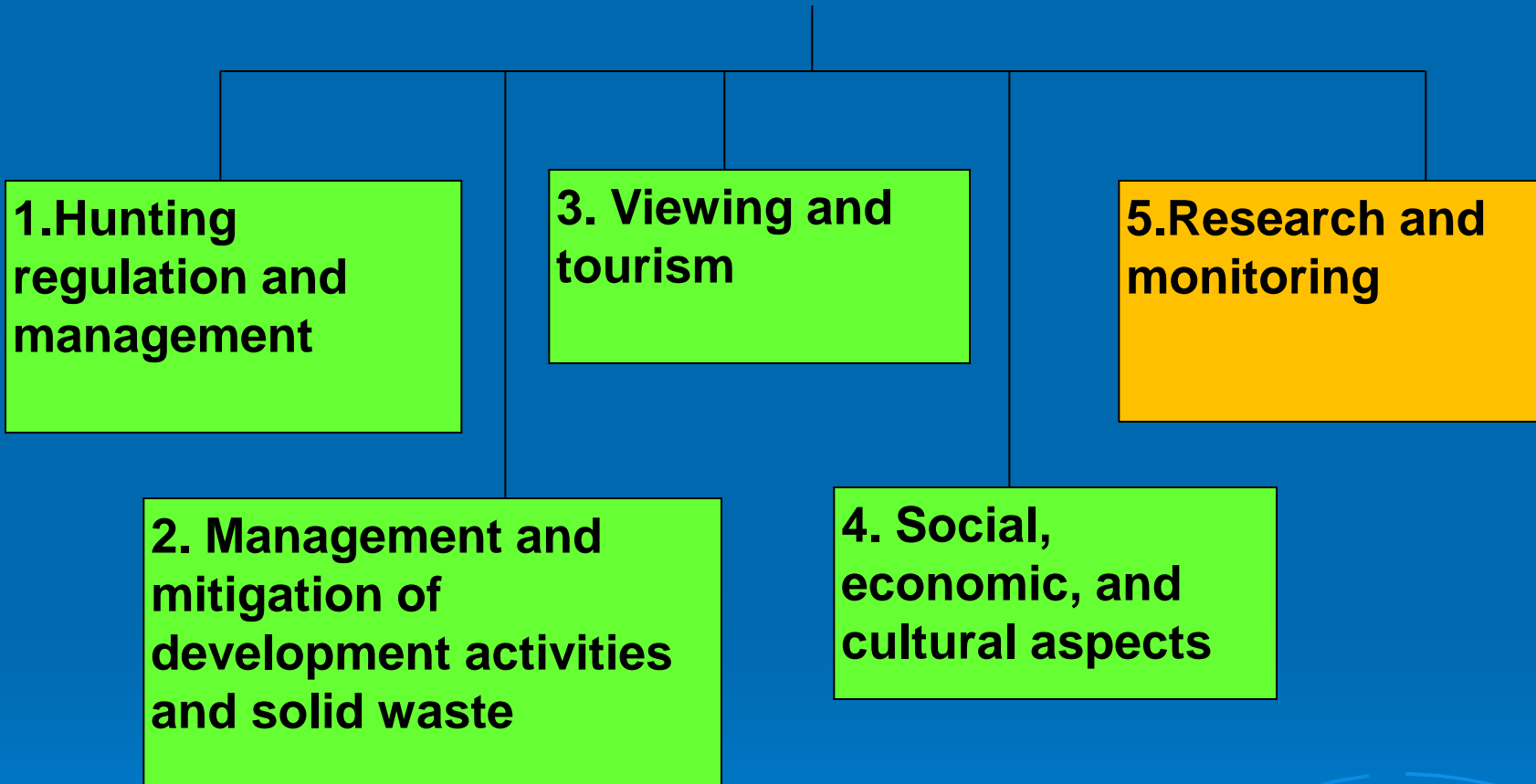
**5. Research and  
monitoring**

**2. Management and  
mitigation of  
development activities  
and solid waste**

**4. Social,  
economic, and  
cultural aspects**

**Eleven (11) issues - 17 recommendations**

# Brown Bear Management Strategy



**Three (3) issues - 6 recommendations**

# **BBMS recommendations included:**

- **Controlling the increase in the number of brown bear hunting guides in the unit by limiting the numbers of guides and hunts they provide**
- **Setting an annual human-caused mortality cap of 4% for all bears and 1.5% for females on each island**
- **Addressing the growing demand for bear viewing opportunities by managing viewing and hunting opportunities in a manner that minimizes conflicts**

# Implemented Recommendations

## ➤ BOG-related:

- BOG resolution 98-127, submitted to the state legislature on October 26, 1998, requesting that the Big Game Commercial Services Board or an equivalent be reinstated
- Adopted wounding loss provision in 2004 (Units 1-4) and amended it in 2006 to include Unit 5
- Reviewed Pack Creek and USFS Zoological cooperative work on Admiralty (bear hair snaring, visitor /viewing operation, etc.)
- Established a moratorium on new proposals to extend bear hunting in the Seymour Canal area of Admiralty Is.
- Reviewed BBMS progress in 2004
- Reviewed and maintained Closed and Controlled Use Areas in 2006

# Implemented Recommendations

## ➤ Others:

- Monitored harvest and met guideline levels 7 of last 12 years
  - Issued EOs in fall 2011 to close islands when mortality guidelines were exceeded
  - Issued EO fall 2012 for Baranof Island
- Maintained communication and worked with stakeholders of the BBMS to meet its recommendations and anticipate developing issues
- Produced hunter ethics brochure
- Continued bear awareness education
- Provided bear education/safety for mine, hatcheries, and tourism staff
- Completed shoreline analysis EIS
- Completed Access Travel Management Plan
- Assessed sites for bear viewing development
- Completed NEC bear research

# Recommendations Not Yet Implemented

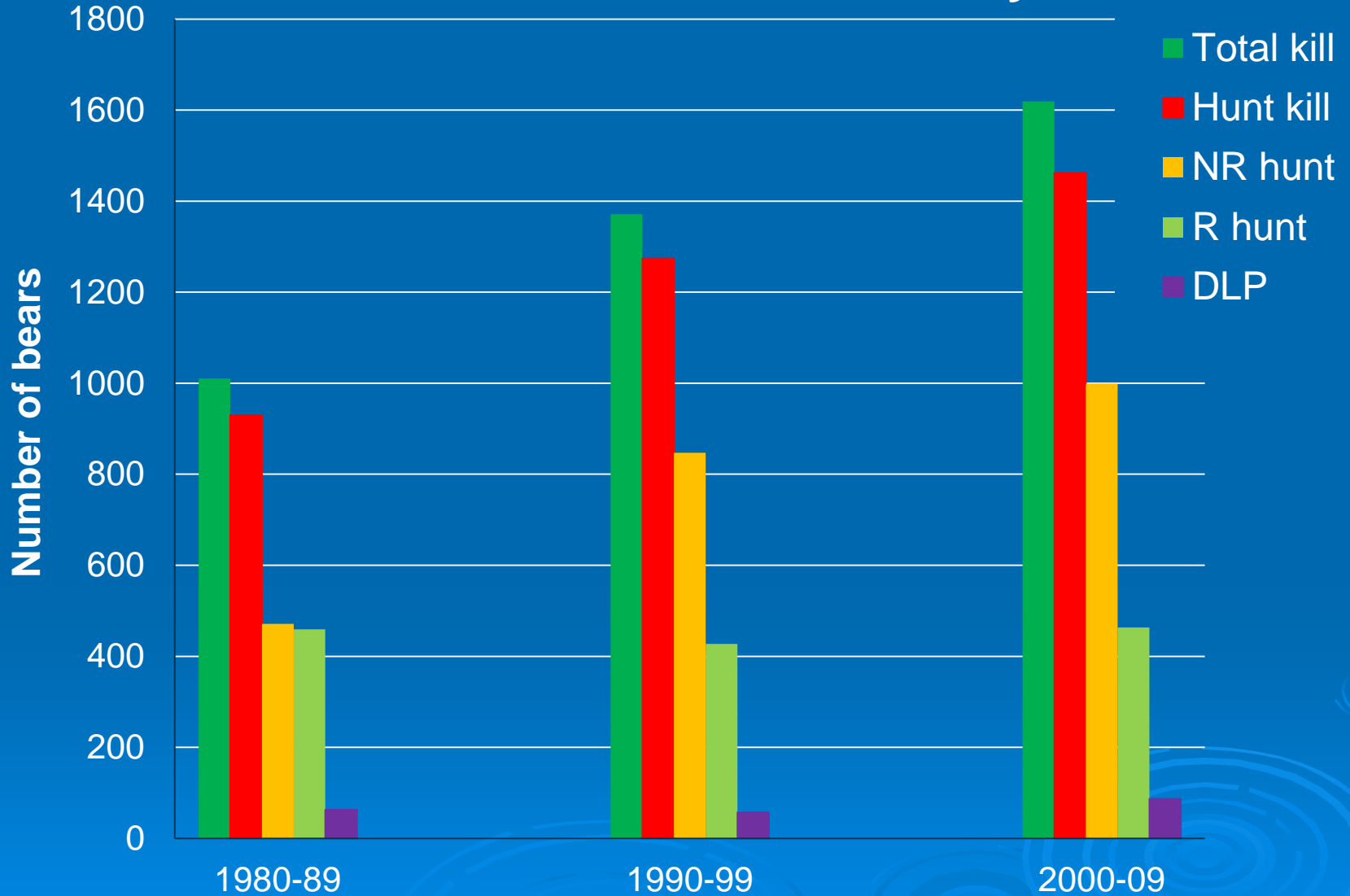
- Guide numbers not reduced to 20
- Guideline numbers of hunts/GUA
- Next of kin guidelines
- No population estimate for south Admiralty Island



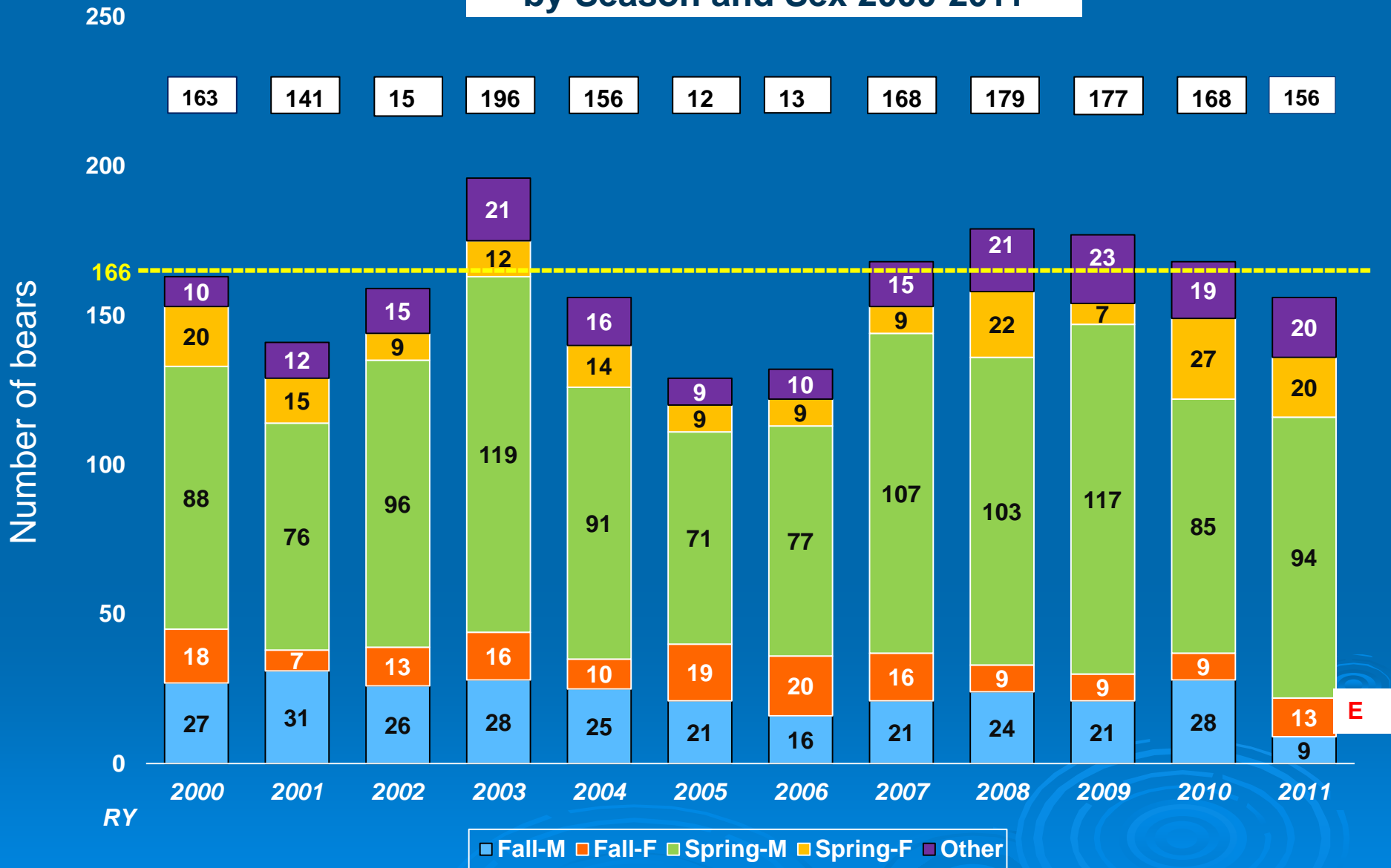
# Current Issues

- Human-caused mortality exceeding 3 year average
- Registered guide numbers 28 instead of 20, as prescribed
- Number of hunts/GUA commonly exceed recommended numbers
- Hunt/harvest exceeds the anticipated 50% success
- Harvest of females high during fall seasons
- No population estimate for Baranof Island or South Admiralty Island, and other estimates are dated
- Increase in NOK (2<sup>nd</sup> degree kindred) hunts
- Wounding loss counted as human-caused mortality
- Private land – NR hunts

# GMU 4 Brown Bear Mortality



# GMU4 Brown Bear Mortality History by Season and Sex 2000-2011



# BBMS Recommendations for addressing excessive human caused mortality

- Mandatory adjustment of number of guided hunters;
- Season adjustments;
- Institution of drawing permits for nonresidents on a GUA basis;
- Institution of drawing permits only after the above management alternatives have been employed.

# Current Proposals before the Board

- 32 – Alternate spring/fall seasons for NRs
- 33 – Change and shorten the fall season
- 34 – Restrict bag limit based on harvest of female skull size
- 35 – Modify harvest allocation above 4% level for residents
- 36 – Exclude wounding loss from counting as a mortality factor

# Summary

- The BBMS continues to provide useful guidance and has the support of many interest groups;
- Some BBMS recommendations have not been implemented;
- BBMS guideline mortality is being exceeded;
- Public work session scheduled