

**Wildlife Restoration MULTI-YEAR GRANT
INTERIM PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
PO Box 115526
Juneau, AK 99811-5526

**Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Wildlife Restoration Grant**

GRANT NUMBER: AKW-B-R4-20

PROJECT NUMBER: 4.0

PROJECT TITLE: Region IV Brown Bear S&I program: The Status of Alaska Brown Bear and Factors Influencing Their Populations in Central/Southwest Alaska

PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE: July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020

PERFORMANCE YEAR: July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020

REPORT DUE DATE:

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Todd A. Rinaldi

COOPERATORS: Dave Crowley, Heidi Hatcher, and Tim Peltier

Authorities: 2 CFR 200.328
2 CFR 200.301
50 CFR 80.90

Objective 1: Population Size, Status, and Trend. Assess the size and status of each brown/grizzly bear population to determine the 5-year trend.

Objective 2: Mortality/Harvest Monitoring and Regulations. Assess the number of brown/grizzly bear harvested by hunters and other sources of mortality that might have an impact on each population.

Objective 3: Brown/Grizzly Bear Management with Public Participation and Outreach. Manage each brown/grizzly bear population with an emphasis on engaging the public in management goals and objectives through public meetings, working groups, educational materials, and incentive programs.

I. PROGRESS ON PROJECT OBJECTIVES DURING PERFORMANCE YEAR

OBJECTIVE 1: Population Size, Status, and Trend. Assess the size and status of each brown/grizzly bear population to determine the 5-year trend.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Regionwide

- Assess population trends through anecdotal field observations made by biologists and members of the public.

The Region also notes brown bear sightings by sex and age when possible while conducting field work associated with other research and management activities (i.e., caribou and moose surveys, telemetry flights, etc.) and from the public. While reports across the region suggest brown bear populations are stable, field observations by biologists and members of the public in Units 11 & 13 suggest that brown bear numbers in both units have declined over the past few years.

Unit 9

- Use number, age and sex data recorded during fall moose trend surveys to calculate observed bear densities.

We counted few bears in 4 moose trend count areas covering 1,548 km². Moose surveys were flown in November by which time most bears were in dens. Because snowless moose surveys are not proving to be effective, this method to monitor bears should be re-evaluated.

Unit 10 (Unimak Island)

- Record brown bear number, age and sex data during caribou parturition and fall composition surveys for observations of brown bear population status and trends

Weather conditions in fall 2019 and pandemic-related issues in spring 2020 prevented surveys on Unimak Island during this reporting period.

OBJECTIVE 2: Mortality/Harvest Monitoring and Regulations. Assess the number of brown/grizzly bear harvested by hunters and other sources of mortality that might have an impact on each population.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Collect data, determine sex, and extract a tooth for aging from bears presented for sealing by hunters.

During this reporting period information from 512 brown bears was collected during the sealing process and teeth were collected to determine age from more than 450 of those bears. All brown bears are sealed whether from hunting or non-hunt related mortalities. During the sealing process, we record

a variety of data associated with the hunter, hunter effort, and bear morphometry to aid us in management of this species. These include but are not limited to methods of take, transportation used, specimens collected, presence of tattoos or similar identifiers of previous handling, determination of sex, skull length and width, maternal condition and a pre-molar is extracted for laboratory age analysis at a later date.

- Monitor the harvest and hunting effort using data from sealing reports, registration permits, and interviews with hunters.

Unless the hunt is administered under a draw or registration hunt, general season opportunity for brown bear in Region IV does not require residents to acquire a harvest ticket. Brown bear are required to be sealed which serves as the hunt report. The Unit 9 biennial registration hunts were open during the reporting period although the pandemic affected the ability for nonresidents to participate in spring 2020. Five hundred and twelve bears were sealed from Region IV (8 bears taken in Defense of Life or Property). The sealing process provides an opportunity to interview successful hunters and gather sex and age data from the harvested bear(s). Additionally, the sealing process provides insight into the abundance and distribution of brown bears in the unit.

The Region also notes brown bear sightings and activities from the public and while conducting field work associated with other research and management activities.

In Units 11, 13, 14A, 14B, and 16 brown bears can be harvested at a black bear bait station under the seasons and bag limits for brown bear. During this reporting period there were 1,000 bait sites registered within Region IV. One hundred and sixteen brown bears were taken at these bait sites.

- Document all human-caused brown bear mortality by sealing all bears killed though legal harvest, illegal hunting, defense of life or property, and vehicle collisions

Staff documented all human-caused brown bear mortality and recorded 8 instances of a bear killed in defense of life or property, no agency kills, no BVCs, and 3 brown bear-human attacks during this reporting period.

OBJECTIVE 3: Brown/Grizzly Bear Management with Public Participation and Outreach. Manage each brown/grizzly bear population with an emphasis on engaging the public in management goals and objectives through public meetings, working groups, educational materials, and incentive programs.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Respond to issues and public reports involving brown bears associated with nuisance behavior, injuries, habituation and bear-vehicle collisions (BVCs).

An ongoing part of bear management across the region is to work with constituents to address concerns about bears or human-bear conflicts. Staff responds trouble shooting sources of attractants, proper storage of attractants (including proper containment of livestock), loaning out electric fences to thwart bears, and discussing other aversive conditioning techniques with members of the public. We also work with the Alaska State Wildlife Troopers, Alaska State Parks, USFWS, landfills, fish processors as well as communities and tribal councils.

During this reporting period we fielded approximately 35 human-bear conflict phone calls and conducted about 24 site visits to address bear issues. There were 8 DLPs, 0 agency kills, 0 BVCs and 3 brown bear-human attacks during this reporting period.

- Educate the public on bear awareness and safety and provide demonstrations of how to minimize attractants and/or use electric bear fences to reduce bear--human problems as requested.

During the reporting period we fielded approximately 50 human-bear conflict phone calls and used these opportunities to educate the callers about bear attractants and how best to avoid bear-human conflicts. As part of our education message, we highly encourage the use of electric fences to prevent bears from accessing things like fish smokers, fish drying racks, landfills, livestock pens or any other type of attractant found at a person's residence. This includes providing brochures on the use of electric fences, referring the caller to our website that contains ample information on the use of electric fences, and in some cases, loaning out electric fences to the public. In addition, staff were present at the Mat Valley Sportsman's Show and at the Fish Expo in Dillingham providing educational material and discussing ways to reduce bear human conflicts.

Office staff worked with local residents to reduce human/bear conflicts as well as municipal landfill staff in Dillingham, Naknek, and King Salmon. Topics discussed included the proper storage and containment of refuse, game meat, bird seed, livestock, fish waste and other attractants. Emphasis is placed on securing potential attractants away from access by bears.

- Prepare 5-year brown bear Species Management Operational Reports and Plans (SMRPs) for each Unit or Subunit inhabited by brown/grizzly bears.

In February DWC staff met in Fairbanks over three days to discuss brown

bear management and research. Eleven Region IV staff travelled to the workshop providing management and research overviews and engaging in interactive discussions. This was an unanticipated expense but was a necessary and effective tool in preparing Brown Bear Management Reports and Plans which are expected to be finalized in 2021. It did cause the Personnel Services and Travel budgets to be exceeded.

Past plans and information can be found here:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=librarypublications.wildlifepublications&sort=species&sort2=speciesname&speciesname=Brown%20Bear>

- Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on brown bear management.

All information collected is used inform state and federal regulatory processes. Outside of common communication with our federal counterparts there was no federal proposal addressing brown bears during this reporting period. Staff compiled and presented biological, population, and hunting information at more than 12 State Advisory Committee meetings, 4 Regional Advisory Council meetings, Subsistence Resource Commission meetings, and 2 Federal Subsistence Board meetings. There was a special state Board of Game this spring addressing spring draw hunts – specifically Unit 9 registration hunts.

Unit 17

- Work with the local landfill to address fish waste disposal practices that attract bears including the use of cameras to monitor bear activity.

In rural communities, messages regarding the proper disposal of fish waste are frequently conveyed through radio interviews and DFG updates. Dillingham staff frequently engaged with Friends of the Landfill (FOL) to help decrease bear activities in and around the landfill, and to connect with the public on how to coexist with bears. This performance period staff worked with the City of Dillingham in multi-platform informational campaign.

II. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON PROJECT TO DATE.

None for this reporting period.

III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS.

In February 2020 Region IV sent 11 staff involved in brown bear management and research to Fairbanks to participate in a 3-day DWC Brown Bear Workshop. This was the first time in more than 10 years that DWC met formally to discuss brown bear research and management. Although this was an unplanned expense resulting in exceeding the

budgets in personal services by 264% and Travel by 1,039%. More attention will be given to the potential of unanticipated travel but can be challenger with changing travel restrictions due to budget, and now, the COVID Pandemic.

Ongoing brown bear research in Unit 13 referenced above is funded through AKW-R-11-2020 Density and Demography of GMU13 Brown Bears grant award #F19AF00484

IV. PUBLICATIONS

Brown Bear Management Reports and Plans are currently being drafted and are expected to be finalized in 2021. Past plans and information can be found here:
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=librarypublications.wildlifepublications&sort=species&sort2=speciesname&speciesname=Brown%20Bear>

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

We recommend continued funding for this project to effectively manage brown bear populations in Central/southwest Alaska.

Expenditures deviated from the original grant submission because of the following:

- In early 2020, a human virus (now named SARS COV2 or COVID19) caused a global pandemic. While much of the work accomplished was similar to the previous year staff were challenged with working remotely under telework agreements, postponing some critical field work, and altering work plans in an effort to protect employee health. The ADFG Commissioner also mandated a 50% cut in travel.
- As a result of the global pandemic, the USFWS WSFR office approved extending the grant another year and we are reporting for year 1.
- Staff in Region 4 are also being reminded to code time to individual projects as they conduct work by species.

The total operating budget available to each region is determined by Divisional leadership. At times, a region must take a more broad-based approach to budgeting with the understanding that they may then move funds across grant projects throughout the year as project needs arise. For example, the bulk of Region 4's travel and supplies budget was allocated to Caribou S&I and Coordination, to be dispersed to other species' projects if needed. This approach, while allowing needed spending flexibility, sometimes results in larger than anticipated discrepancies between grant requests and actual expenditures.

To rectify the challenge of budgeting specifically per individual species' survey & inventory projects, the Region 4 grant will be restructured to create an operating grant that encompasses all survey, inventory, and coordination activities for all species into one project (the new TRACS reporting platform allows for this type of restructure). This should alleviate any budget/expenditures discrepancy problems in the S&I projects while still maintaining maximum flexibility.

Prepared by: Todd A. Rinaldi, RIV Management Coordinator

Date: August 2020