

**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-5-2020

**PROJECT NUMBER:** P14.0

**PROJECT TITLE:** The Status of Wolves and Factors Influencing Their Populations

**PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE:** July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2021

**PERFORMANCE YEAR:** July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020; year 1 of a 2-year grant

**REPORT DUE DATE:** Submit to FAC August 28, 2020

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Phillip Perry, Region V Management Coordinator

**COOPERATORS:**

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Authorities: 2 CFR 200.328  
2 CFR 200.301  
50 CFR 80.90

**II. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON PROJECT TO DATE.**

Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on wolf management.

Area management staff reviewed State and Federal regulatory proposals, attended regulatory process meetings, and presented wolf information to the State Board of Game, State Fish and Game Advisory Committees, Federal Subsistence Board, and Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils.

Maintain the ability in all units to monitor harvests by collecting data through the wolf sealing process.

The area offices in Barrow, Bethel, Kotzebue, and Nome maintained designated fur sealers in villages in each Game Management Unit to collect harvest information through sealing certificates. Staff supported 29 fur sealers in Unit 18, 17 in Unit 22, 9 in Unit 23, and 6 in Unit 26A.

Distribute the annual statewide trapper questionnaire to obtain harvest and population assessment information.

Staff supported this activity by contributing furbearer information and summarizing trapper responses and observations to be included in the trapper questionnaire report.

Develop updated population objectives in cooperation with the public and other agencies.

Meetings with the public and other agencies were not held due to conflicting schedules.  
Population objectives were not updated.

Use public communication and education to obtain better harvest data through increased observance of sealing requirements.

Staff discussed sealing and harvest reporting with trappers/hunters, and the public.

During public meetings we explained the importance of harvest reports and encouraged trappers to report their harvest

**Activities by Unit:**

**Unit 18:**

Monitor wolf harvests through the fur sealing program, and interviews with village residents.

We monitored Unit 18 wolf harvests using fur sealing data for the RY19 trapping season. Harvest figures are preliminary, but include at least 36 wolves (27 Ground shooting and 9 trapping or snaring). Of the 51 wolves harvester 17 were reported to be females, 19 males.

Assess population status and trends utilizing sealing records, track surveys, hunter/trapper interviews, and observations by staff and the public.

Sealing data, as well as observations by staff and public, indicate that the Unit 18 wolf harvest was low for this reporting period. Winter weather, specifically snow conditions that are favorable for travel by snowmachine, plays a major role in harvest. The winter of RY19 was more favorable than average year. The wolf population was probably close to normal south and east of the Kuskokwim River in Unit 18. Wolf number on the Yukon River within Unit 18 appeared to be average or increasing. This was collaborated by hunter/trapper interviews, observations by staff and the public, and opportunistic track sightings made during aerial survey work for other species. Do to lag in reporting number because of COVID-19 the state is allowing hunter/trappers additional time to get there fur sealed. The number reported here are expected to be low.

Assess the effects of wolf predation on prey populations through field observations and interviews with hunters/trappers.

Observers participating in aerial moose, caribou, and muskox surveys, and/or telemetry flights in 2019-2020 recorded wolf kills on both the Kuskokwim and Yukon rivers. In RY19 all wolf kills observed were of moose and caribou. Looking at annual recruitment and continued rapid population growth in moose populations in both the Yukon, and Kuskokwim drainages and riparian areas, wolf predation is not a factor effecting either population. Reports of wolves killing muskox on and Near Nelson Island are occasionally reported to the department. Wolf predation on Nelson Island has not influenced population growth or hunt management of Nelson Island Muskox in RY19. Observation of Mulchatna caribou being killed by wolves was observed by department staff and the public in RY19. The most recent population estimate for MCH 13,500. At the time of this report it is unclear to what extent, if any, wolves are effecting the population with in Unit 18.

Provide public education regarding wolves through the media, during public meetings, and other opportunities.

We discussed wolf numbers, regulations and management at all Advisory Committee meetings and with numerous trappers and hunters during this reporting period.

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Provide public education regarding wolves through the media, during public meetings, and other opportunities.

We discussed wolf numbers, regulations, and management at all Advisory Committee meetings and with numerous trappers and hunters during this reporting period.

## **Unit 22:**

Monitor wolf harvests through the fur sealing program, and interviews with village residents.

We monitored Unit 18 wolf harvests using fur sealing data for the RY19 trapping season. Harvest figures are preliminary, but include at least 36 wolves (27 ground shooting and 9 trapping or snaring). Of the 51 wolves harvester 17 were reported to be females, 19 males.

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Provide public education regarding wolves through the media, during public meetings, and other opportunities.

We discussed wolf numbers, regulations and management at all Advisory Committee meetings and with numerous trappers and hunters during this reporting period.

Monitor wolf harvest through the fur sealing program, annual hunter/trapper questionnaires and Community-based Harvest Assessments conducted annually in selected villages, and through interviews with trapper/hunters.

Regulatory year 2019-2020 sealing certificates report 21 wolves were sealed in Unit 22: 1 in GMU 22A, 19 in GMU 22B, 1 in GMU 22C, 0 in GMU 22D, and 0 in GMU 22E. Sex composition of harvest was 34 males and 14 females. Zero wolves were harvested by nonresidents. Snowmachine was the main mode of transportation (92%, 44 of 48) to harvest a wolf.

Assess population status and trends utilizing track surveys, sealing records, hunter/trapper interviews and questionnaires, Community-based Harvest Assessments and observations by staff and the public.

Wolf distribution and abundance varies depending on location and abundance of caribou. During this reporting period, caribou were scarce throughout the Seward Peninsula, found in small bands and companies in eastern 22E and northwestern 22B. Department staff and members of the public have reported wolf sign and observations throughout Unit 22. The rate of observation of wolves in Unit 22 does not always correlate with the relatively low reported harvest numbers.

Examine pelts presented for sealing for the presence of louse infestation

Wolf hides that were sealed by department staff were examined for hair loss and patches of broken guard which may indicate the presence of lice. Wolves that were inspected by staff did not appear to have visible signs of lice infestation.

Record wolf sightings during wildlife surveys as an indicator of wolf population trends.

Observers participating in the 2020 Unit 22D/E spring moose abundance survey reported observations of wolf tracks and sightings. During the survey, a pair of wolves feeding on a fresh moose kill with a dead wolverine near the moose carcass was observed in 22D near the Kuzitrin Bridge, and a single large gray wolf was spotted in 22E near Ear Mountain. Unit 22 staff will continue to make observations on wolf and track sightings within the unit during survey and census work for other species.

### **Units 23 and 26A:**

Monitor wolf harvest through the fur sealing program, annual hunter/trapper questionnaires and Community-based Harvest Assessments conducted annually in selected villages, and through interviews with trapper/hunters.

*Unit 23:* Preliminary sealing certificates indicated that 10 wolves were sealed in RY19, of which 6 were males and 4 were female. Nine hunters/trappers reported method of take as firearm and 1 by trapping. Airplanes were indicated as transportation method for 8 wolves and 2 were by snowmachine. Of the 10 wolves harvested 4 were gray, 3 black/blue, 1 white, and 2 unknowns. Eight were taken by nonresidents, and the remaining 2 by Alaska residents.

*Unit 26A:* Preliminary sealing certificates indicated that 7 wolves were sealed in RY19, of which 6 were males and 1 was female. Seven wolves were taken using ground shooting as the method of date. None of the wolves were reported as trapped. Snowmachines were indicated as transportation method for 6 wolves and 1 hunter was transported by airplane. All seven wolves were grey. One wolf was taken by a nonresident, and the remaining 6 were harvested by Alaska residents. There is no community harvest survey data to report during this reporting period

Conduct aerial surveys in selected portions of Units 23 and 26A during late winter to assess population status.

A wolf survey in Unit 26A was not attempted because very low populations were documented in RY15 through d RY19.

Record wolf sightings during moose censuses in Unit 26A as an indicator of wolf population trends.

During the April 2019 Unit 26A spring moose trend area count we observed three gray wolves. In April 2020 during the 26A spring moose survey we observed six wolves on the Upper Colville: 2 black, 1 white and 3 grey wolves. In 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2019 we counted 3.10, 1.66, 0.45, 2.4, 2.5, 0.3, 0.8, 1.0, 0.37, and 0.65 wolves per hour, respectively. It appears that wolf numbers been variable over the last 11 years.

### **III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS.**

For FY2020 this project was underspent by about \$45,000. Originally the Region intended to conduct several wolf surveys and the staff time was adjusted to do this. Because of the many travel restrictions this year related to Covid 19, Staff were unable to complete this work. The work listed is almost entirely data analysis and personal time should have been coded the reflect this. This would have made up some of the difference between what was budgeted and spent.

### **IV. PUBLICATIONS**

None.

### **V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT**

Many expenditures varied from the original grant submission and there are several reasons for this:

1. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring and subsequent fallout to projects, the ADFG Commissioner mandated a 50% cut in travel.
2. The bulk of the region's travel budget was in the Coordination project.
3. The total operating budget available to Region 5 each year is determined by HQ. Region 5 has traditionally taken the approach of depositing these funds into projects based upon a very broad estimate, and then moving funds across grant projects throughout the year as project needs arise. This very generalized approach, while allowing needed spending flexibility, has resulted in large discrepancies between costs indicated in the grant request and the final expenditures of each project within the grant. This approach has also made it difficult for USFWS to determine if projects are cost-effective as the project budget estimates are not specific to the work described.
4. Staff in Region 5 are also being reminded to code time to individual projects as they conduct work by species.

To rectify these discrepancies amongst individual species' survey & inventory projects between budget requests vs. expenditures, the Region 5 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 the budget/expenditures discrepancies problem while still maintaining maximum flexibility.

**Submitted by Phillip Perry, Region V Management Coordinator**