

**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-R-13-2019

PROJECT NUMBER: P1.0

PROJECT TITLE: DWC-SUB 4-year Caribou Harvest Assessment for Communities Located in the Western Arctic Caribou Herd

REPORTING PERIOD: 10/01/2020 - 09/30/2021

PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE: 03/01/2019 – 06/30/2023

PERFORMANCE YEAR: 03/01/2020 – 06/30/2021; Year 3- of a 5-year grant

REPORT DUE DATE: Due to FAC Dec. 17, 2021

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Helen Cold

COOPERATORS:

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Authorities: 2 CFR 200.328
2 CFR 200.301
50 CFR 80.90

I. PROGRESS ON PROJECT OBJECTIVES DURING PERFORMANCE YEAR

OBJECTIVE 1:

Harvest Survey Expansion: Harvest surveys will be increased to implementation in 8 communities surveyed twice in 4 years. Household harvest surveys include questions about the number of caribou harvested, harvests by sex, location, timing, and participation in hunting for caribou.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Study communities for year 2 harvest survey implementation were chosen with input with DWC collaborators at the beginning of the project. However, the previously identified study

community of Kiana was ultimately replaced by the alternate community of Deering. The final study communities for year 2 harvest survey implementation included the Unit 22 community of Shishmaref and the Unit 23 communities of Deering, Noatak, and Kobuk. Division staff conducted approval meetings with tribal governments in the winter of 2020, and although all communities granted approval, due to the onset of the COVID pandemic surveys and interviews were postponed for spring of 2020. In preparation for the 2021 study year (year 2 of surveys), ADF&G Subsistence staff developed an alternative survey instrument that was more user-friendly and would allow for a wider variety of implementation strategies, including surveys over the telephone, completion by local research assistants (LRAs), or self-reporting by households themselves. Surveys took place in selected study communities from April to July 2020. Local COVID mandates prevented Division staff from traveling to communities to work directly with LRAs. Instead, harvest surveys were either implemented telephonically or conducted by LRAs in each study community who were remotely trained by Division staff. A census was attempted in each community. Surveys were scanned and copies emailed to division staff during fieldwork, and hard copies of completed surveys were mailed back to the Fairbanks office upon completion of the survey effort in each community. Upon receipt, surveys were sent to Information Management staff for data entry and analysis. Data analysis was conducted in the fall of 2021 and is ongoing, but draft results are anticipated by the end of the year. The second round of data collection for these communities will occur in year 4 of the project. Originally, the division anticipated conducting surveys in all 8 study communities during the spring of 2021; however, because of continuing complications with COVID and the need to implement an altered survey tool, division staff instead chose to request a no-cost extension for the project and postpone the second round of surveys for Golovin, Shungnak, Selawik and White Mountain until the spring of 2022.

Information gathered in each of the 8 study communities represents an expansion of an existing harvest monitoring program within the range of the WAH. The goal of this project is record interannual variation of harvesting patterns in each study community, and data gathered in years 1 and 2 will provide valuable comparison to the future harvest survey effort conducted in Golovin, Selawik, Shungnak, and White Mountain in spring 2022, and Shishmaref, Deering, Noatak and Kobuk in 2023. The collected data will also provide a point of comparison with historical harvest data collected prior to the beginning of this project and may allow for the identification of harvest trends over time. Additionally, a comparison of household harvest survey data to existing harvest permit data will give managers insight into permitting compliance. Costs of the harvest survey activity to date have been within the allotted budget. Because year 1 data collection was condensed, and year 2 data was collected remotely, the cost of field trips was lower than expected.

OBJECTIVE 2:

Caribou Local and Traditional Knowledge: As a part of the survey effort, Division of Subsistence staff will conduct key respondent interviews with knowledgeable subsistence users in each study community. This effort will allow for an assessment of observed changes to the herd over time, including the health and abundance of the resource, migratory patterns, and changes to harvest location, timing, and effort. Key respondents will also be asked to provide

perspectives on the management of the herd and regulatory issues, which will give managers valuable feedback.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

As mentioned above, fieldwork for year 2 communities occurred in Shishmaref, Deering, Noatak and Kobuk from April to June of 2021. Because surveys were all conducted remotely, and ethnographic interviews are usually most successful when completed in person, division staff were unable to conduct interviews with key respondents during those efforts. However, after surveys were completed, staff remained in contact with study communities to monitor local travel mandates and wait for an appropriate time to visit the community. The community of Kobuk allowed for travel from division staff in September of 2021, and a total of 4 ethnographic interviews were conducted. In December of 2021, staff were able to travel to Deering and conduct 5 ethnographic interviews. Shishmaref and Noatak both advised division staff that visiting the community was not yet advisable, and interviews would have to be postponed until a later date. Interviews from Kobuk and Deering are currently undergoing transcription and analysis. Division staff will remain in contact with the communities of Noatak and Shishmaref, and interviews will take place when travel by division staff can be cleared by local governments in those locations.

OBJECTIVE 3:

Outreach efforts: After each round of surveying, Division of Subsistence and DWC staff will return to study communities with the draft data results in order to review the data with tribal councils and residents. Harvest estimates from survey data will be presented alongside RC800 and RC907 permit data. These outreach meetings will open a dialogue between ADF&G staff and subsistence users about the importance of the permit, potential impediments to accessing or filling out permits, and will allow for a dialogue between subsistence users and managers.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

All four year 1 communities chose to hold data review meetings remotely via teleconference due to safety concerns surrounding the ongoing COVID pandemic. These meetings were held between August-October of 2021. For year 2 communities, draft data is anticipated for December 2021, and community review meetings are planned for the spring of 2022. These meetings can be held in-person or remotely depending on community preference. These meetings will be instrumental in helping to understand documented harvest data as well as providing a vital avenue for outreach to support the harvest permitting program.

During travel to the communities of Kobuk and Deering, division staff were able to interact with key respondents during interviews and with many other community members in informal conversations. The physical presence of division staff allowed residents to pose questions about the project and receive answers in real time, and informational flyers on the project were distributed in both locations. In Deering, at the request of the high school and kindergarten teachers, staff spoke to students about the research project, the work the division does, and

engaged students in a discussion about the role subsistence resources play in their communities and the lives of their families.

OBJECTIVE 4:

Publication of results: After receipt of harvest data, ethnographic interviews, analysis of the data, and review with tribal councils, a final report will be published for each year of the project.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Division staff have completed a draft report of year 1 data which includes a summary of harvest quantities, timing, location, and sharing data for each study community and an incorporation of preliminary ethnographic data. Data review meetings were recently completed for all year 1 communities, and staff are currently working to edit the report draft and incorporate ethnographic data prior to publication of the report.

Staff have begun a draft report for year 2 data and will continue working to incorporate survey and ethnographic data as they are analyzed. Before completion of the draft, division staff hope to be able to visit Noatak and Shishmaref to conduct ethnographic interviews in order to provide additional context to survey data for those locations. Staff will present preliminary data to tribal councils upon completion of analysis before report finalization and publication.

II. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON PROJECT TO DATE.

As no survey or ethnographic data was collected in 2020, and survey and ethnographic data for 2021 are still preliminary and undergoing further analysis, results are not yet available for review.

III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS.

The impact of COVID-19 has impacted project timelines. Year 2 data collection was scheduled to begin in March 2020 and was initially delayed as the pandemic situation progressed. Because of the need to postpone fieldwork for 1 year, the PI is requesting a 1-year no-cost extension for the project (see section V).

Statewide mandates limited (and sometimes continue to limit) travel between communities in Alaska, and data collection was postponed until 2021. Although division staff were able to conduct surveys using a modified survey instrument during the spring of 2021, travel mandates continue to create challenges in completing ethnographic interviews and conducting additional outreach efforts. Staff are working with each study community to build flexibility into reaching

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project goals, primarily by being available to do fieldwork when ever-changing travel mandates allow for division staff to visit locations and doing remote work when that is not possible.

IV. PUBLICATIONS

There are currently no publications available for this project. Data for the 2018-2019 survey year has been reviewed by all surveyed communities, and the draft report is undergoing final edits prior to publication.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

The PI requests that this project receives a 1-year no-cost extension, for an amended end date of June 30, 2024. Travel restrictions stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic prevented division staff from conducting surveys in the spring of 2020, and in many locations have prevented ethnographic interviews from taking place. However, staff were able to conduct the interviews previously scheduled for 2020 in 2021 and expect the remainder of the project will progress similar to the previously outlined schedule, just moved forward by one calendar year.

Prepared by: Helen Cold

Date: 12/16/2021