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COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

No. 09-18

Status of Intensive Management Programs Reported

The Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) reports progress toward wolf population objectives of most of the six predator management projects in Alaska. Several of the programs are also showing direct benefits to ungulate populations. "We have survey information showing that numbers of moose have increased in the Nelchina Basin, in a portion of the Upper Yukon/Tanana area, and near McGrath," said Division Director Doug Larsen. "When weather cooperates and public participation is facilitated, we are seeing positive results."

Larsen also noted that programs are continuing to be evaluated to identify where changes are warranted. The Alaska Board of Game recently terminated the brown bear control component of the Upper Yukon/Tanana area based on recommendations from ADF&G attributed to low program results. Most projects rely heavily on volunteer permittees, and the cost of fuel has affected participation, resulting in lower numbers of wolves taken in some of the more remote areas.

In two areas, the Board of Game this year authorized Department staff to take wolves from helicopters. In the Southern Alaska Peninsula in Game Management Unit 9, the predator management program is restricted to state biologists. In the Upper Yukon-Tanana area, and in Eastern Alaska (Units 12, 20 & 25), the Board allowed department staff to take wolves when it became apparent that the permit holders were not going to achieve control objectives. The success of these two programs demonstrated that Department staff using helicopters can be a critical factor in attaining predator removal goals.

Although wolves taken by permittees must be reported within a few days of take, other hunters and trappers may not be reported for up to 30 days after the end of the legal season to report their harvests. Final figures will be completely compiled in late July. Population estimates are augmented with reports and sightings of individual wolves and packs shared with the Department by hunters, trappers and others in the field.

Specific project progress is attached to this release.

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Specific Project Progress for ADF&G

Predator Management:

1 July, 2009

Unit 13: The Nelchina Basin wolf management program was begun in 2003 and reauthorized in 2005 to increase the moose population. The spring population objective of 135-165 wolves has been attained for the fourth year in a row. The estimated total take of wolves in the unit from all sources last winter is 114.

Due to rough terrain and thick forests, aerial control measures were used for the entire season. The Nelchina Basin wolf management program is scheduled to continue without changes this fall.

Moose trend count data show an increase in numbers (up roughly 30%) and ratios (calf:cow – 19:100, bull:cow – 35:100) since active wolf management began.

Unit 16: Wolf management in Unit 16, west of Anchorage, was authorized in 2004 to increase moose populations. Although wolves are more wary and more difficult to take, the same-day-airborne program has continued to be successful in reducing the wolf population to desired levels with strong public participation. A total of 41 wolves was taken by permittees, hunters, and trappers. The spring population objective was 22-45

Due to high mortality rates of moose calves, black bear management in Unit 16 was initiated in 2007 and the program was expanded to include foot snaring in the spring of 2009. The preliminary objective is to remove up to 60% of the black bears present in the unit. Based on surveys conducted in the spring of 2007, doing so would require removal of more than 1,000 black bears. In the fall of 2008, 120 black bears were taken through hunting and control. Spring 2008 numbers brought the count to roughly 500 black bears.

Moose calf:cow ratios, survival of adult moose, and moose population size appear to have improved slightly since predator management activities were initiated, however population and harvest objectives are not yet met.

Upper Yukon-Tanana: The wolf management program in all of Unit 20E and portions of Units 12, 20B, 20D and 25C was implemented in 2005 to increase numbers of moose as well as caribou in the Fortymile caribou herd. The number of wolves taken previously fell short of management objectives due to fuel costs and weather conditions. In 2008-09, the Board of Game authorized ADF&G staff to use helicopters. Last winter, permittees, hunters and trappers, and ADF&G staff took 217 wolves, and Department staff estimate that 117 wolves remained in the area at the end of April 2009.

Although the wolf management program was successful this year, growth of the Fortymile caribou herd may be slow due to low calf production. The moose population in southern Unit 20E increased from 2004-2009, and was likely influenced by other factors in addition to wolf

removal. Such factors include weather, habitat change due to fire, and changes in bear distribution

The public aerial program will continue next winter, and, weather and snow conditions permitting, department staff will again augment the project with helicopters if the public is not able to achieve the wolf population objective. Brown bear control in the unit has been ineffective and no bears were taken by permittees last winter. The brown bear control program was suspended by the Board in March 2009.

Unit 19A: The program in the Middle Kuskokwim area was implemented in 2004 to promote growth in the moose population. Wolf population objectives were achieved in early years, but poor weather and poor snow conditions hampered the effectiveness of the permittees in winter 2008-09, resulting in only 26 wolves. Next winter, public aerial measures will be conducted within the Central Kuskokwim Villages Moose Management Area portion (4,000 square miles) of Unit 19A from November 2009 through April 2010. Further removal of wolves by Department staff may be recommended in spring 2010 if public permittees are not successful in reaching population objectives.

Unit 19D East: The 19D East program was implemented in 2003 to increase the moose population. Wolf population objectives have been reached in several of the past years. Last winter's objective was to remove 35-59 wolves in Unit 19D East, and as many black bears and brown bears as possible from a small area immediately surrounding McGrath. Permittees, hunters, and trappers removed 28 wolves, 4 black bears, and 3 brown bears. Department staff estimated that 47-71 wolves remained in the area in spring, 2009. The moose population surrounding the village of McGrath nearly doubled during 2001-2008, despite severe weather conditions during two of the previous six winters.

The public aerial wolf management program will be conducted within the 4,600 square mile Wolf Control Focus Area portion of Unit 19D East next winter. Department aerial removal using helicopters may be recommended for March 2010 if public permittees are not able to reduce the wolf population to the control objective. Changes to the bear reduction program authorized by the Board will take effect in April 2010, including taking brown bears (including sows and cubs), sale of un-mounted, tanned hides, and use of foot snares.

A more detailed summary report of all predator management programs in Alaska will be posted in late July on the Department's website.