

State of Alaska
FY2015 Governor's Operating Budget

Department of Fish and Game
Wildlife Conservation
Results Delivery Unit Budget Summary

Wildlife Conservation Results Delivery Unit

Contribution to Department's Mission

To conserve and enhance Alaska's wildlife and habitats and provide for a wide range of public uses and benefits.

Results

(Additional performance information is available on the web at <https://omb.alaska.gov/results>.)

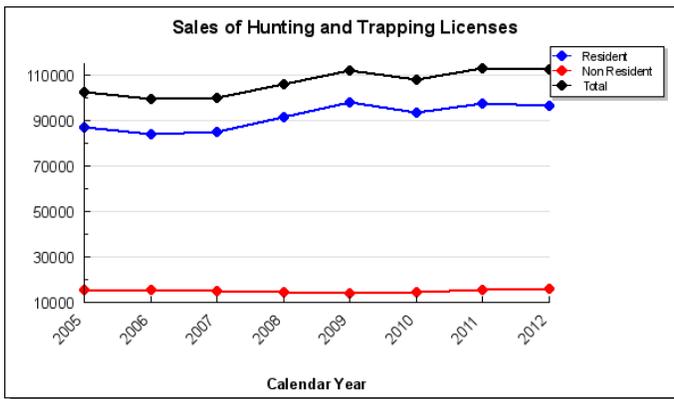
Core Services

- Maintain and enhance opportunities to hunt, trap, and view wildlife.
- Provide opportunities for Alaskans to gain knowledge of and appreciation for Alaska's wildlife, its management, and ways to safely and ethically interact with wildlife.

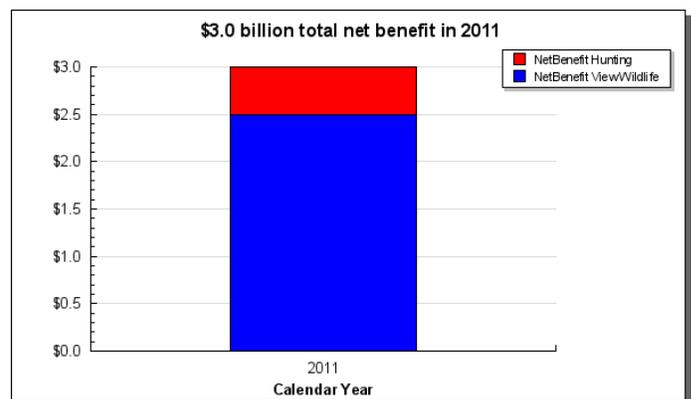
Measures by Core Service

(Additional performance information is available on the web at <https://omb.alaska.gov/results>.)

1. Maintain and enhance opportunities to hunt, trap, and view wildlife.



2. Provide opportunities for Alaskans to gain knowledge of and appreciation for Alaska's wildlife, its management, and ways to safely and ethically interact with wildlife.



Major RDU Accomplishments in 2013

Intensive Management

The division is currently implementing intensive management programs aimed at increasing caribou or moose numbers in Game Management Units (GMU) 9, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 24 and 25 and considering programs in

GMUs 1 and 3. The division has allocated funds to support intensified field monitoring and research to document population parameters to support, sustain, and defend existing and new intensive management programs in the face of ongoing opposition and litigation. A combination of intensive management programs, modification of fire suppression policy (i.e., "let burn" policies) to promote habitat restoration, and antlerless harvest seasons for moose in subunits 20A, 20B, and 20D resulted in elevated harvests that produced 27% of the total reported state-wide moose harvest over the past three hunting seasons.

Kenai Peninsula Intensive Management

The division, in conjunction with the Board of Game (BOG), has implemented a multi-faceted approach to improve moose populations on the Kenai Peninsula. The comprehensive moose research program continues to help the division better understand productivity and survival characteristics of the population. Work with Kenai Native Association and a capital improvements project grant has successfully enhanced over 80 acres of over-mature moose habitat on the northern Kenai Peninsula. Expansion of research efforts within the Moose Research Center has helped to better understand how moose respond to various habitat treatments on the Kenai. A wolf control program on portions of the northern Kenai Peninsula outside of the National Wildlife Refuge has been initiated to evaluate its effectiveness in reducing moose mortality. Work has continued with the Department of Transportation and non-governmental organizations to reduce moose-vehicle collisions along major transportation corridors.

Endangered Species

The division continues to support several legal challenges to unjustified Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing decisions, critical habitat designations, or regulatory actions. The state won a major lawsuit overturning the designation of critical habitat for polar bears on Alaska's North Slope. The decision to list the bearded seal as a threatened species despite acknowledged current stock health based solely on speculation using 100 year forecast models was also challenged. Research collected by the state also played a key role in the recent decision to not list the Kittlitz's murrelet as an endangered species. Research studies have also been initiated for several listed or candidate species including yellow-billed loons, Steller sea lions, beluga whales, polar bears, Southeast wolves, Pacific walrus, and ice seals. Data from these studies will be used to inform ESA decisions or, when necessary, legal challenges. The state successfully petitioned the federal government to delist the eastern population of Steller sea lions, and is working on petitions to request delisting of the humpback whales and spectacled eider.

Cooperation with Private Land Managers

In general, working relationships with private land managers have been improving in recent years. Work is being done on several fronts toward improving wildlife populations on Native lands for the benefit of shareholders as well as the general public. These advances are challenging at times due to the diverse nature of the various tribes and corporations in the state and because of the complex relationships within individual Boards and other entities. Engaging in constructive dialog has helped these parties to recognize that the department seeks common goals and that effective partnerships can be established.

Arctic Caribou Management

For the first time in decades, the division completed photo censuses of all four of Alaska's arctic caribou herds in one month (Western Arctic, Teshekpuk Lake, Central Arctic and Porcupine). Good weather and the availability of a second aerial photo aircraft enabled staff to do the necessary aerial photography and aerial survey work during July 2013. The Porcupine Herd in particular has been problematic for the division in past years to complete. Staff is currently counting the photos with a goal of having caribou herd census estimates available for the upcoming 2014 BOG meetings in Kotzebue and Fairbanks.

Management of the Porcupine and Fortymile Caribou Herds

Canadian plans to severely restrict harvest of the Porcupine herd were averted a little over one year ago when division staff was able to complete a photocensus under difficult conditions to verify the previous conclusion that harvest restriction was not necessary at the time. Harvest of the Fortymile herd has been increased incrementally for several years as a result of wolf control and simultaneously managing for modest harvest levels and herd growth. This has resulted in an incremental increase in harvest while at the same time increasing the number of animals in the herd.

Sheep Management and Research

Sheep research projects have recently been initiated in the Chugach and Brooks ranges. Population declines appear to be the result of habitat and weather issues rather than predation. Additional work is slated to assess disease presence and prevalence in sheep populations statewide, and to investigate appropriate harvest levels and bag limits.

The division is also working with the BOG to identify the key issues and concerns (through a user survey) and move forward with addressing recurring regulation proposals. The results of this survey and information gathering will inform the BOG of the user's specific issues and levels of concern regarding sheep management. With this, they hope to resolve some long-standing and lingering issues.

Southeast Mountain Goat Research and Management

Recent research has shown that mountain goats are more sensitive to mortality factors and possible overharvest than previously known. In Region I, vulnerabilities include high female harvests, helicopter skiing, helicopter flight seeing, hydroelectric construction, road construction, and impacts from severe winter weather. During the past year, staff in the region continued to study mountain goats in a number of areas across the region, including the Haines area, the mountains along the east side of Lynn Canal, Baranof Island, and the Cleveland Peninsula. Data is being gathered on home range size, seasonal movement patterns, habitat use, sightability of goats during surveys, survival and causes of mortality, and fecundity. During the past year, staff from Regions I and II collaborated on a safe and successful mountain goat capture and radiocollaring project on Kodiak Island. Data from that project as well as data collected throughout Southeast Alaska are valuable for planning purposes associated with the myriad of issues that affect goat populations. As with other divisional successes, the success of these efforts was the direct result of close working relationships between managers and researchers, and the ability to work across regional boundaries.

Southeast Alaska Brown Bear Population Estimation

During the past year, Region I staff fulfilled the goal of collecting data to estimate numbers of brown bears in the Yakutat area (GMU 5). This effort, which employed new, state-of-the-art techniques, was a huge success. Analyses of the data are currently underway and promise to provide a very accurate estimate of bear numbers in that part of the region and enable us to establish sustainable harvest levels. Estimation of Yakutat-area brown bear numbers completes the Region's long-term efforts to secure estimates from across the panhandle, from GMU 4 (Admiralty, Baranof, and Chichagof islands), to the mainland (Unuk River, Bradfield Canal, Berners Bay). Data from these efforts are being used to ensure long-term sustainability of brown bears in the region.

Southeast Alaska Wolf Research

Region I continues efforts to obtain population estimates for wolves in GMU 2, an area where wolf harvests are managed as a percentage of the estimated population size. As with the Region's bear work, new techniques are being employed to collect accurate population information.

Initiation of Operational Planning

The Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) recently adopted a Science Plan to guide its research activities. The second step of this process is initiation of operational and biometric planning towards better documentation, review and data storage for research and selected management projects within the division. The division is currently working on an Operational Planning Policy and dedicating additional staffing to implement this policy.

North Slope Geographic Information System (GIS) Pilot Project

A pilot project to map and display summary caribou information using a web-based GIS application was initiated this fiscal year. To date, baseline GIS maps of caribou summer grounds and migratory routes have been developed. These products are being used to inform caribou management decisions and to identify potential impacts and mitigation options associated with resource development projects.

Hunter Recruitment

The department has implemented a wide range of efforts aimed at passing on hunting heritage. The department held events such as Conservation Camp (Fairbanks) and Outdoor Youth Day (Anchorage) that provide outdoor skills training to young people including tracking, wildlife identification, shooting skills, archery and other related topics. These efforts are intended to recruit new hunters and raise the interest level of others. Related programs such as BOW (Becoming and Outdoors Woman), NASP (National Archery in the Schools Program), SCTP (Scholastic Clays Target Program), and the Explore Bowhunting Program are similarly very popular.

Wildlife Collisions Work Group

The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) and Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to guide interactions related to highway design, construction and maintenance. Under this MOU, a work group was formed to identify and describe specific strategies

to plan and design mitigation measures and techniques that can be implemented very early in the planning and design phase of highway corridor infrastructure projects.

Alaska Natural Resource and Environmental Literacy Plan

A revised draft has been completed based on comments received on the first draft. The plan provides a road map for integrating natural resource and environmental education, including active outdoor learning, into school curricula. It also provides opportunities to use local expertise, incorporate indigenous knowledge and culture, support thematic teaching by integrating subjects, and align with STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) national and state initiatives. Strategies supporting the plan's five goals will be implemented over the next five years - with preliminary work beginning in 2014 - as approval, funding, and staff resources are able to support it. Staff from the Department of Education & Early Development and ADF&G will continue to provide organizational leadership and successful implementation will require the contribution of diverse individuals and entities throughout Alaska. Financial and in-kind support for the implementation of the plan will come from grants, collaboration, and partnerships among Alaska's school districts, organizations, agencies, and businesses.

Public Outreach

DWC's outreach and education programs have been strengthened with additional capacity. Duties for two existing positions were modified and now the division has a statewide education coordinator and also an information officer whose duties include coordination of division-wide communications. That additional capacity has resulted in the dissemination of a broader spectrum of DWC news and information products, including more proactive news releases; develop communication plans for key issues; send out additional targeted mailings, including products such as Interior Alaska Moose News and drafts of others including The Comeback Trail: News of the Fortymile Caribou Herd and Kenai Peninsula Moose News; produce another edition of the kids magazine Alaska's Wild Wonders; make additional and continued improvements to existing products and programs; complete additions to the series of wildlife viewing community brochures (adding Kodiak, Cold Bay, Unalaska, Cordova, Valdez, and Whittier to the arsenal of the existing nine for Southeast Alaska communities). Improvement in project planning (determining which outreach tool to use for which purpose) and evaluation of products and programs continues.

Economic Contribution of Alaska's Wildlife

The final report on this study will be presented to the BOG in March 2014. The core data for this economic analysis came from six different surveys conducted in 2012 that elicited information from about 7,000 Alaskans and 2,000 visitors on their expenditures in 2011 for hunting and viewing trips. The surveys showed that wildlife contributes significantly to Alaska's economy and also to residents' well-being and visitors' reason for coming to Alaska. In 2011, hunting- and viewing-related expenditures in Alaska totaled \$3.0 billion. Among other findings, the surveys revealed high satisfaction among both resident and visitor hunters and viewers; 65% of Alaskans report that wildlife's contribution to their quality of life is either extremely or very important; and that both residents and visitors report being willing to pay more for their hunting and viewing trips than they actually paid.

Key RDU Challenges

Game Management and Hunting Opportunities

As Alaska's population increases and redistributes, the division is experiencing increasing demands on wildlife populations (particularly moose, caribou and deer) for hunting, especially those in close proximity to Alaska's urban centers. Towards a goal of increasing hunting opportunities, the division developed an Intensive Management Protocol to implement Alaska's Intensive Management Law (AS 16.05.255). These programs involve predator and/or habitat manipulation towards the goal of increased ungulate production. The division will continue to work with the BOG to develop biologically sound and cost effective intensive management programs to enhance numbers and distribution of important ungulate herds under the Intensive Management Protocol for identified ungulate populations failing to meet established regulatory management objectives focused on human use. While costly, these programs have shown clear benefits and as allocated capital improvement projects expire over the next several years new funds will be needed if these programs are to continue. Without these programs, hunting opportunities will likely be reduced, with commensurate reduction in the amount of meat harvested for human use.

A key research challenge in the next year will be to transition from film-based aerial photography to digital based photography as film-based equipment becomes obsolete and unavailable. Failure to address this challenge will result in more conservative management of Alaska's caribou herds which may result in reduced harvest opportunities for caribou.

While moose, caribou and deer management remains a focus, the division also manages a wide range of other wildlife species important to hunters and other users. For many of these species (e.g., sheep, goats, bears, and small game) sufficient information is not being collected to ensure maximum productivity and sustained yield. Means to increase knowledge of these species towards increasing use opportunities is being explored.

Passing on the heritage of hunting in a changing world dominated by electronic media is also a challenge. The division provides hunter training with a focus on hunter recruitment. While hunter training is an important element of hunter recruitment, the division is also working with the BOG to turn these trained people into successful lifetime hunters. One focal area is the development of additional youth hunting opportunities that have reasonable expectations of success and participation. Such efforts will help ensure that hunter heritage is passed on to the next generation.

Ensure the State's Right to Manage

The division has traditionally filled the role as the principle manager of wildlife in the state. In recent years this role has been eroded by a variety of threats including precautionary listing of species under the ESA, restrictions to state wildlife management activities on federal lands, pre-emption of state regulations on federal lands, and establishment of new federally-led planning initiatives such as Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC) that cover state lands – to name a few. This past fiscal year the division assumed oversight of the department's Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and Access Defense Programs.

Federal land managers are becoming more confrontational as they increasingly exert themselves into wildlife management decisions. Refusal to allow intensive management actions, including habitat enhancement and predator management, on National Park and Refuge lands has jeopardized the effectiveness of efforts to rebuild ungulate populations in many parts of the state and has forced the department to be more aggressive in management actions on other lands. Increased wildlife research and management activities on and adjacent to federal lands by federal agents that are contrary to agency goals are also occurring.

Endangered Species

The listing of species as threatened or endangered under the federal ESA and associated designations of critical habitat, when unjustified, can have significant and unnecessary adverse economic impacts on Alaska. The division will continue to collect information on species targeted for listing to ensure that species or habitats are not unnecessarily listed or designated under the federal act. The division supports legal challenges to unjustified listings or habitat designations. The division also focuses on recovery of listed species with the goal of delisting these species.

Ensuring Responsible Resource Development

The division's ability to maintain sustained yields of wildlife is directly related to the ability of Alaska's land and water resources to support these populations. Alaska has an excellent track record of responsible resource development. To ensure this track record continues it will be important to bring scientifically credible information to inform resource development activities. Towards this end, the division works closely with development interests and other agencies to effectively identify and mitigate possible effects of development. As more development projects are proposed it will be necessary to collect and incorporate needed research to inform these project's permitting and management decisions.

Data Management

The backbone of the division's management program is data. As the program has increased, the data management program has struggled to keep up with newly collected information and new technology. To address this, a lead data management supervisor is being added to the division's leadership team. This position will coordinate hardware and software purchases needed to more effectively manage wildlife and harvest databases, drawing permits, research, and GIS. A GIS information database is currently being developed that can inform proposed resource development activities.

Access

Alaska has a limited road system, and as a result much of Alaska has limited accessibility to hunting. The division is working with land owners and managers to improve access for hunters. This involves working with the Department of Natural Resources and private landowners to responsibly open lands. This potentially includes trailhead and trail

construction or improvements, road building, runway construction, etc. It also involves working with private land owners to improve access to their lands in a manner that addresses trespass issues.

Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2015

Spending authority increases of \$1 million federal will allow the division to keep pace with field research activities toward harvest management and population assessment objectives in FY2015. A stronger emphasis on science based management and internal review of research objectives will be highlighted, and science staffing for biometric review and accountability will be enhanced.

Contact Information
<p>Contact: Doug Vincent-Lang, Acting Director Phone: (907) 267-2339 Fax: (907) 267-2433 E-mail: douglas.vincent-lang@alaska.gov</p>

**Wildlife Conservation
RDU Financial Summary by Component**

All dollars shown in thousands

	FY2013 Actuals				FY2014 Management Plan				FY2015 Governor			
	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds
Formula Expenditures None.												
Non-Formula Expenditures												
Wildlife Conservation	7,175.8	7,456.5	15,547.0	30,179.3	6,647.7	8,868.8	18,267.4	33,783.9	6,333.7	8,857.3	19,066.7	34,257.7
WC Special Projects	1,003.7	2,031.1	6,956.6	9,991.4	1,342.8	2,254.9	8,669.2	12,266.9	1,462.0	2,473.4	8,810.3	12,745.7
Hunter Ed Public Shooting Ranges	0.0	787.0	0.0	787.0	0.0	856.5	0.0	856.5	0.0	855.2	0.0	855.2
Totals	8,179.5	10,274.6	22,503.6	40,957.7	7,990.5	11,980.2	26,936.6	46,907.3	7,795.7	12,185.9	27,877.0	47,858.6

Wildlife Conservation
Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component
From FY2014 Management Plan to FY2015 Governor

All dollars shown in thousands

	<u>Unrestricted Gen (UGF)</u>	<u>Designated Gen (DGF)</u>	<u>Other Funds</u>	<u>Federal Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds</u>
FY2014 Management Plan	7,990.5	0.0	11,980.2	26,936.6	46,907.3
Adjustments which will continue current level of service:					
-Wildlife Conservation	-186.4	0.0	-11.5	-200.7	-398.6
-WC Special Projects	173.7	0.0	218.5	141.1	533.3
-Hunter Ed Public Shooting Ranges	0.0	0.0	-1.3	0.0	-1.3
Proposed budget decreases:					
-Wildlife Conservation	-127.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	-127.6
-WC Special Projects	-54.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	-54.5
Proposed budget increases:					
-Wildlife Conservation	0.0	0.0	0.0	1,000.0	1,000.0
FY2015 Governor	7,795.7	0.0	12,185.9	27,877.0	47,858.6