

**State of Alaska
FY2016 Governor Amended 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.>)

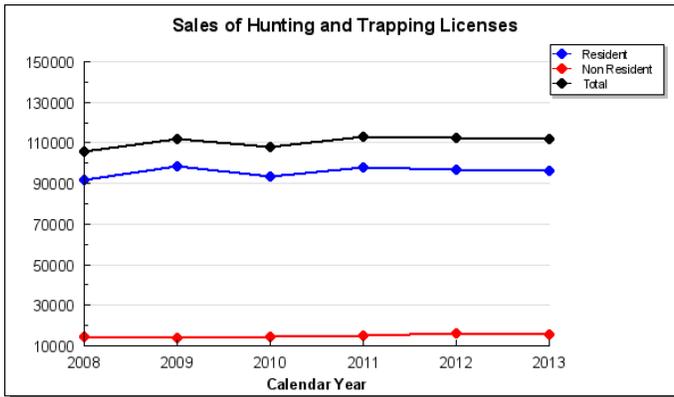
Core Services

- 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.

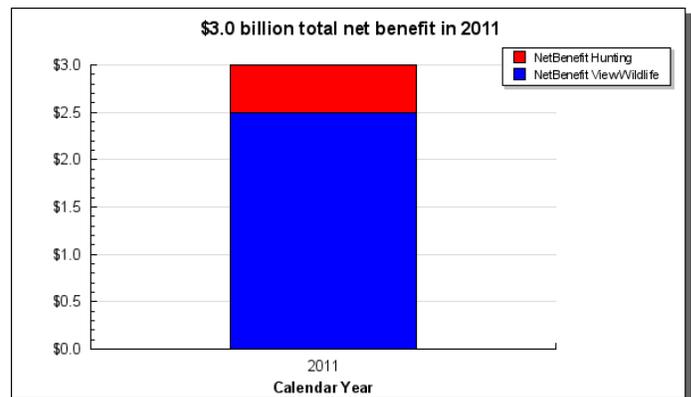
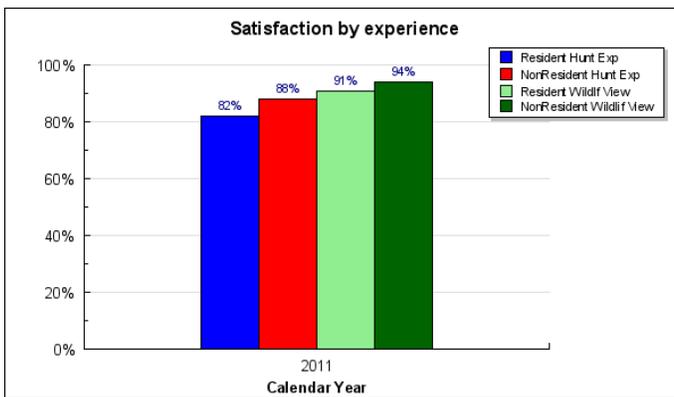
Measures by Core Service

(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 2014

Intensive Management

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

habitat data was recently initiated as part of approved IM programs in GMUs 1 and 3, along with preliminary assessments using remote trail cameras, of wolf numbers and distribution in a portion of GMU 1A. Further, efforts to develop a DNA-based approach to estimating deer abundance, which is important in light of the need to assess success in meeting IM deer population objectives, were expanded. Preliminary results have proven to be quite promising. 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.

Photocensus Equipment

Under an existing CIP appropriation and grant from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the department is in the process of purchasing new digital photocensus equipment and software to census caribou and other wildlife species. This should significantly improve our capacity to assess caribou and other wildlife populations.

Endangered Species

The division continues to support several legal challenges to unjustified ESA listing decisions, critical habitat designations, or regulatory actions. The state won a major lawsuit overturning the designation of the threatened listing for the Beringia Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of bearded seal. Previously, the state won a major lawsuit overturning the designation of critical habitat for polar bears. Research collected by the state also played a key role in the recent decision to not list the yellow-billed loon and southeast Alaska Pacific herring as endangered species. The state succeeded in establishing authorization for a non-essential experimental population of wood bison, which will potentially allow for hunting opportunities in the future. Research studies have also been initiated for the listed portion of the northern sea otter and continue for several listed or candidate species including 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 submitted a petition to request delisting of humpback whales and continues to work on a delisting petition for the spectacled eider.

Wood Bison Restoration

The wood bison restoration project moved into implementation mode after the USFWS and the State of Alaska agreed to the conditions of a precedent-setting federal regulation specifying Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) as the lead agency in the restoration and management of these animals. The Non-Essential Experimental Population designation includes provisions that protect other land uses and developments that are in the best interest of the people of Alaska.

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. This year we signed a cooperative agreement with Koniag Regional Native Corporation on Kodiak to respect each other's responsibilities and roles in managing corporate lands on Kodiak and to work together to find ways to benefit shareholders, the general public, and the animals that utilize those lands.

Economic Contribution of Alaska's Wildlife.

The final report on this study was presented to the Board of Game (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' reasons 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.

Sheep Management and Research

The division has made significant progress in sheep research and management. Sheep demography research is continuing in the Chugach and Brooks ranges. Abundance surveys were completed in the western Brooks Range in combination with NPS. High levels of natural mortality caused by severe winter weather with icing conditions were documented in the Baird, De Long, and Schwatka mountains. Additional work is being initiated in the current fiscal year to assess disease presence and prevalence in sheep populations statewide. This project will begin in the Talkeetna Mountains in March 2015 and then expand to other mountain ranges and herds in subsequent years. Research focusing on rams was also initiated in 2013 in the Chugach and will be expanded to the Wrangells beginning in 2015 to inform decisions about population management and hunting opportunity. The division is also working with the BOG to identify the key issues and concerns (through a user survey conducted during the summer of 2014) 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. The division will report to the BOG and continue to monitor populations.

Fortymile Caribou Herd in Eastern Interior Alaska

Harvest of the Fortymile herd has been increased incrementally for several years partially as a result of wolf control and simultaneously managing for modest harvest levels that promote herd growth. This has resulted in an incremental increase in harvest while at the same time increasing the number of animals in the herd.

Management of the Southern Alaska Peninsula Caribou Herd

Hunting opportunity has been restored to the Southern Alaska Peninsula caribou herd in the form of a limited Tier II hunt. Hunting was closed in 2007 after a survey documented a rapid decline in the herd's population size and very poor calf survival and recruitment. Population size and calf recruitment improved rapidly after wolf control was initiated on the calving grounds in 2008. Herd size has doubled and continues to grow as a direct result of these efforts. The herd is now able to sustain a limited harvest by hunters who successfully apply for the state's Tier II subsistence hunt, which opened in 2013.

Kenai Peninsula Moose

The Funny River fire burned large portions of the central Kenai Peninsula (GMU 15B) providing the largest alteration of moose habitat on the Kenai in almost 50 years. We are initiating moose research programs to document how moose and their predators respond to the fire both in the short-term and in the long-term. This program supplements similar research projects that are already underway on the other parts of the Kenai (15A and 15C), as well as active management programs that were initiated on the northern Kenai (15A) in 2013 that included habitat improvement and predator reductions.

Southeast Mountain Goat Research and Management

Recent research has shown that mountain goats may be more sensitive to mortality factors and possible overharvest than previously known. 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, Regions I and II collaborated to create an updated booklet for hunters to use in differentiating male from female goats in the field. The booklet, with an associated online quiz, was posted for public use on the department's web site. The information has already proven successful in helping hunters target male goats, which has direct consequences for maintaining sustainable populations of mountain goats. The success of these efforts has been 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, the division continued efforts to collect data for estimating the numbers of brown bears in the Yakutat area (GMU 5). This effort, which has employed new, state-of-the-art techniques, has been 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

To inform IM work and a pending ESA petition the division has continued its efforts to obtain a population estimate for wolves in GMU 2, an area where wolf harvests are managed as a percentage of the estimated population size. New techniques have been developed and employed to collect accurate population information. An updated assessment of GMU 2 wolves, including a fall 2013 population estimate, was recently published in a report. Work continues to improve and refine estimation techniques, with the goal of implementing the approach across a larger part of the Southeast panhandle in the future. We also provided funding for work by the University of Alaska that showed that wolves in Southeast Alaska are not a separate sub-species. Based on this information the department concluded that wolves in Southeast Alaska should not be listed under the ESA. The federal government is currently considering such a request.

Southeast Black Bear Research

Region I completed field work related to data collection of habitat use, movements, and distribution of black bears on Prince of Wales Island in GMU 2. Data are now being analyzed and will be used to ensure sustainable populations of black bears in the GMU and will also help inform future land use practices in the GMU.

North Slope Geographic Information System (GIS) Pilot Project

A pilot project to map and display summary caribou information using a web-based GIS application is now underway. The initial focus is on mapping important areas used by North Slope caribou (Western Arctic, Teshekpuk, Central, Porcupine herds) because of their importance to hunters, high public interest, and oil and gas development across the Slope. This past year more detailed analysis of two caribou herds, Western Arctic and Teshekpuk, were completed that show a 10 year history of seasonal distribution and annual 'heat maps' indicating areas of high use. Eventually, the division plans to have similar maps statewide. These landscape level products are being used to inform caribou management decisions and to identify potential impacts and mitigation options associated with resource development projects. The mapping products will be available for data downloads as a coarse-scale aid to Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and industry in their pre-planning, while at the same time protecting the department's use of the detailed location data, per statute.

Wildlife Diversity Program

The division's Wildlife Diversity Program is a pro-active, cost effective approach to the ESA, intended to prevent wildlife species from becoming threatened or endangered in the first place. The program focuses federal State Wildlife Grant funds on wildlife species which are ineligible for traditional sources of funding (Pittman-Robertson, Fish and Game Fund, ESA Section 6), and leverages funding for State of Alaska priorities by coordinating with conservation partners (federal, state, academic, industry, Alaska Native, and private stakeholders). The Diversity Program conducts and coordinates applied research on key species to provide critical information on potential ESA candidates, inform state regulatory policy on management issues concerning protected migratory and other special status species, and to continue to conserve our state's diverse wildlife heritage for future generations of Alaskans. Last year the Diversity Program had a variety of projects including: the first successful satellite telemetry study of adult Alaskan golden eagles to inform state responses to federal permitting and regulatory rule changes that may impact state discretion in development and project permitting; a study demonstrating that conditions in the Alaska breeding grounds of the rusty blackbird are likely not contributing to that species 90% decline elsewhere; research on Alaska's bats in preparation for forthcoming ESA listing petitions related to massive bat die-offs in eastern North America associated with a new fungal disease, White Nose Syndrome; and a Citizen Science Program that in 2014 reached over 2400 adults and children from Kotzebue to Yakutat with 170+ public presentations on Alaska's less known wildlife.

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), Families Afield, 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 done in cooperation with the Outdoor Heritage Foundation of Alaska and other Non-Governmental Organizations such as Becoming and Outdoors Woman (BOW), National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP), Scholastic Clays Target Program (SCTP), and the Explore Bowhunting Program are similarly very popular.

Wildlife and Highways Work Group (WHWG)

The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and the Department of Fish and Game signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2013 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. This group has also been working with public information staff from both agencies to produce joint news releases regarding issues of mutual concern such as identification of possible wildlife and vehicle collision areas and corridor maintenance projects that address driver visibility and reduce forage available to moose in highway right-of-ways. Recently, there have been collaborative efforts to enhance and add language to the DMV Driver's Manual to address and educate drivers about vehicle-wildlife collisions and how to avoid them.

Public Outreach

The division'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 Unit 18 Moose Hunt Area Poster, Proper Salvage and Meat Care Rack Card, Rural Bear Aware Poster, Trap Safety for Pet Owners, 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.

Key RDU Challenges

Game Management

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 and landowners 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. Without these programs, hunting opportunities will likely be reduced, with commensurate reduction in the amount of meat harvested for human use. While we have secured funds through previous capital improvement program grants to continue these programs over the next several years, we will be challenged to implement them due to limited staff growth.

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 are being explored.

Hunter Heritage

Passing on the heritage of hunting in a changing world is 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. We are also partnering with the Outdoor Heritage Foundation of Alaska and other Non-Governmental Organizations to provide a wide range of outdoor camp and skill activities.

Ensure the State's Right to Manage and Federal Overreach

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. Federal land managers are becoming more aggressive and 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 Service (NPS) park and preserve lands and USFWS 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. Also, the USFWS and NPS recently pre-empted valid state hunting regulations based on ethical and natural diversity considerations. This is affecting general and subsistence hunting opportunities. Increased wildlife research and management activities on and adjacent to federal lands by federal agents that are contrary to agency goals are also occurring, as well as shutting off of state research on federal lands.

Endangered Species

Alaska has seen increased petitions to list species under the federal ESA. 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.

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 DNR and private landowners to responsibly open lands. It also involves ensuring that federal lands remain open as mandated under several federal laws. We are working with DNR and DOT on trailhead and trail construction or improvements, road building, runway construction, etc. This also involves working with private land owners to improve access to their lands in a manner that addresses trespass issues.

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 integrate existing species information (abundance and distribution) as well as to collect and incorporate new research to inform these project's permitting and management decisions. In some cases this may require additional state positions if major new development projects are proposed.

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 was 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.

Arctic Caribou Management

The Western Arctic and Teshekpuk caribou herds are undergoing declines while the Central Arctic and Porcupine herds are stable. The division will report to the BOG and prepare Intensive Management Feasibility Assessments to evaluate management options to preserve hunting opportunity and provide conservation of the declining herds. Canadian plans to severely restrict harvest of the Porcupine herd were averted two years ago when division staff was able to complete an aerial photocensus under difficult conditions to verify the previous conclusion that harvest restriction was not necessary at the time.

Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2016

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 FY2016. 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
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**Wildlife Conservation
RDU Financial Summary by Component**

All dollars shown in thousands

	FY2014 Actuals				FY2015 Management Plan				FY2016 Governor Amended			
	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	6,878.9	7,622.3	17,192.7	31,693.9	6,138.7	8,812.3	19,266.7	34,217.7	5,064.0	8,394.9	22,209.2	35,668.1
WC Special Projects	1,291.9	2,242.8	6,634.3	10,169.0	1,437.0	2,473.4	8,610.3	12,520.7	1,465.3	2,482.2	8,676.8	12,624.3
Unallocated Reduction	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hunter Ed Public Shooting Ranges	0.0	871.0	0.0	871.0	0.0	900.2	0.0	900.2	0.0	910.7	0.0	910.7
Totals	8,170.8	10,736.1	23,827.0	42,733.9	7,575.7	12,185.9	27,877.0	47,638.6	6,529.3	11,787.8	30,886.0	49,203.1

Wildlife Conservation
Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component
From FY2015 Management Plan to FY2016 Governor Amended

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>
FY2015 Management Plan	7,575.7	0.0	12,185.9	27,877.0	47,638.6
Adjustments which continue current level of service:					
-Wildlife Conservation	-1,074.7	0.0	-417.4	1,942.5	450.4
-WC Special Projects	28.3	0.0	8.8	66.5	103.6
-Hunter Ed Public Shooting Ranges	0.0	0.0	10.5	0.0	10.5
Proposed budget increases:					
-Wildlife Conservation	0.0	0.0	0.0	1,000.0	1,000.0
FY2016 Governor Amended	6,529.3	0.0	11,787.8	30,886.0	49,203.1