

**State of Alaska**  
**FY2017 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>.)

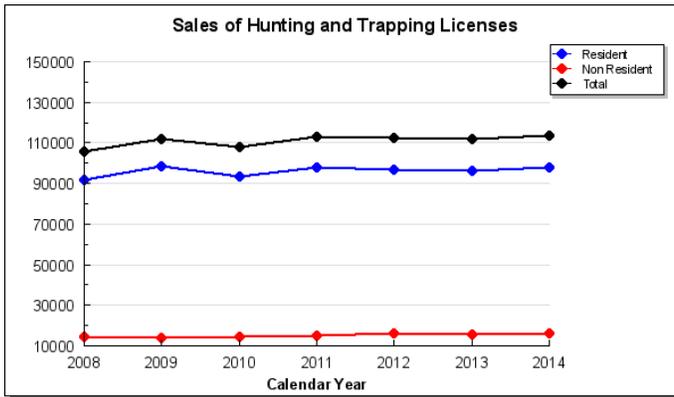
**Core Services**

- 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.

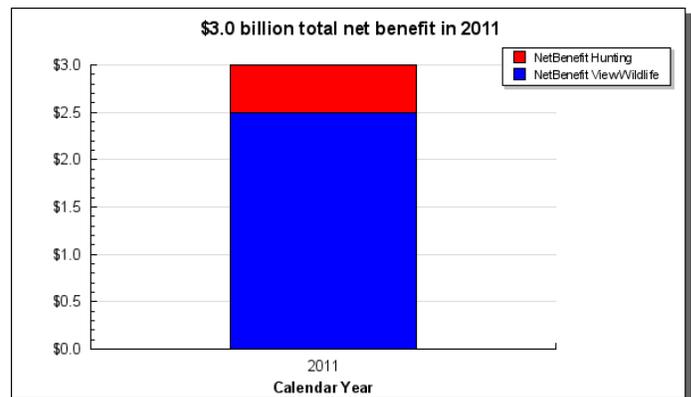
**Measures by Core Service**

(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 2015**

**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. 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.

### **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, and the state is now fighting an appeal by the FWS to that ruling. Research collected by the state also played a key role in the recent decision to not list the yellow-billed loon on the Arctic Coastal Plain, the southeast Alaska Pacific herring, and the Kittlitz's murrelet as endangered species, with the loon and murrelet conducted by the division's TED program. 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 delisting of humpback whales was petitioned for by the state and is underway with a formal proposal from National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and the state 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 Fish and Game as the lead agency in charge of the restoration, management, and harvest of these animals. During spring 2015, 130 wood bison were shipped from Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center in Portage to grass meadows 4 miles north of Shageluk, Alaska along the Innoko River. In March, 50 adult cows and 50 young animals were shipped via truck to Anchorage, then via cargo aircraft to Shageluk (400 mi). In May and June, 30 adult bulls were shipped via truck from Portage to Nenana, then barged from Nenana to the meadows 4 miles north of Shageluk (1000 mi). It was a monumental achievement that no bison were injured or killed in transport. After release the bison have explored vast areas of their new habitat, but remain in the high quality habitat predicted- another huge success. Some bison were lost to natural factors in the wild, and some were born, keeping the total number stable for this first season in the wild.

### **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. To this end we are enhancing our positive working relationship with the North Slope Borough in areas like Western Arctic caribou herd harvest management, ice seal monitoring, and polar bear research.

### **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. Work is being initiated this year to assess disease presence and prevalence in sheep populations statewide. Research focusing on rams was initiated in 2013 in the Chugach and will be expanded to other ranges as funds allow to inform decisions about population management and hunting opportunity. The division also worked with the Board of Game and researchers at University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) to identify the key issues and concerns (through a user survey conducted during the summer of 2014). The final survey report by UAF was presented at the Board of Game meetings in February and March 2015. During the

winter of 2015-16 the division is assisting the Board of Game to address many of these issues with the creation of a statewide Sheep Working Group made up of Fish and Game Advisory Committee members, guide representatives, sheep hunter advocacy groups, and others. Based on input from users and others gathered at the 2015 Board of Game meetings, the division has begun a comprehensive review of sheep plans from the mid-1970s and current sheep survey and inventory reports in preparation for the development and writing of several 5-year operational plans for sheep management. These new plans will include a 5-year report of the previous management and research activities and a 5-year plan for future activities and direction.

### **Management of the Southern Alaska Peninsula Caribou Herd**

Hunting opportunity was restored to the Southern Alaska Peninsula caribou herd in the form of a limited Tier II hunt in 2013. 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 - 2010. Herd size has doubled in size and continues to grow as a direct result of these efforts. The department has a proposal in this Board cycle to further increase hunting opportunity through a general hunt for residents and non-residents.

### **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 Alaska Wolf Research**

To inform intensive management work and a pending ESA petition the division has continued efforts to obtain a population estimate for wolves on Prince of Wales and associated islands using state-of-the-art DNA methods. 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. The USFWS is now completing their ESA 12-month finding to determine if wolves in Southeast Alaska merit listing given issues associated with Tongass forest management, road management and wolf harvest levels. That decision is due in December 2015. The division has been, and will continue to be actively engaged in this issue in close cooperation with the USDA Forest Service – Tongass National Forest. Based on our review of the status of wolves and forest management in Southeast Alaska, the Department concluded that wolves in Southeast Alaska should not be listed under the ESA however the federal government is currently considering an ESA listing request for the Alexander Archipelago wolf in Southeast Alaska.

### **Threatened, Endangered and Diversity Program (TED)**

The TED 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), and leverages funding for State of Alaska priorities by coordinating with conservation partners (federal, state, academic, industry, Alaska Native, and private stakeholders). The TED 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 such as: 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; and research on Alaska's bats given new ESA listing petitions related to massive bat die-offs in eastern North America associated with a fungal disease, White Nose Syndrome. This bat work will likely demonstrate that the ecology and threat to bats in Alaska differs from the Eastern US and lumping Alaska's bats into those pending ESA petitions is not necessary.

The TED program is the clearinghouse for all ESA activities for the state and as such it also consolidates comments for petitions like that for yellow cedar in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources. The ESA and associated policies are complex, and the TED program within the division provides the necessary state expertise to deal with the federal agencies (USFWS and NMFS) that implement ESA.

## **Hunter Education, Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation**

The division offers quality hunter education and training throughout Alaska. Many of the hunter education programs are designed to recruit and retain new hunters into the shooting sports and preserve our hunter heritage. A focal area for the division is the development of youth and women in order to successfully create lifelong hunters and pass on the hunter heritage to the next generation. Programs such as the Becoming an Outdoors Woman Program, Youth Conservation Camps, Youth Shooting Leagues, and the National Archery in the Schools Program promote hands-on learning of outdoor skills that include the shooting sports, game care, conservation, and archery. These efforts are intended to recruit new hunters and foster an awareness, respect, and enjoyment of Alaska's wildlife resources. These programs are run in cooperation with the Outdoor Heritage Foundation of Alaska and other non-government organizations. The popularity of these hunter education programs continues to grow on a statewide level.

## **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 management and/or habitat enhancement towards the goal of increased ungulate harvest. The division will continue to work with the Board of Game 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 sometimes 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 appropriations to continue these programs over the next few years, we will be challenged to implement them by a) inability to hire and retain new staff as PCNs are reduced within the department, and b) a lack of state matching funds to capture the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration funds apportioned to Alaska.

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.

### **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 Endangered Species Act (ESA) which federalizes the species, 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 Fish and Wildlife Service (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. The division currently houses the department's Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and Access Defense Programs to assist in retaining state management authority and address federal overreach.

This program relies on funding through unrestricted general funds to staff resources when litigation is necessary. In 2016, the general fund support for the program was reduced by \$382,500. Further general fund reductions to this program will further reduce and eventually eliminate the division's ability to respond.

### **Threatened, Endangered and Diversity (TED) Program**

Increasing numbers of petitions are being filed to list Alaska species under the federal Endangered Species Act (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 and provide information on species targeted for listing to ensure that species or habitats are not unnecessarily listed or designated under the federal act and to minimize economic impacts when species are listed.

The division has reorganized TED program staff under a single umbrella to gain efficiencies and leverage expertise. The State Wildlife Grant Program – a federal program generally focused on non-hunted species – is housed in the TED program and it requires the state to provide matching funds. As most species that are likely to be petitioned for listing under the ESA are non-hunted, this research is critical to the State's success at fending off unwarranted listings and habitat designations. In 2016, a general fund reduction was implemented to reduce ESA funding and this year more cuts are proposed to the Diversity projects within the program. Due to the non-hunted nature of the species researched by this program, the division is unable to use license fee revenue as the required state match. Cuts to the unrestricted general fund match will reduce research for these species with the greatest conservation need.

The ESA program within the division is the state of Alaska clearinghouse for all matters that are ESA related. This includes those issues that impact fisheries, forestry, oil/gas, and other resource development projects. We support legal challenges to unjustified listings or habitat designations and work closely with the Department of Law. This program has been successful in proving the applied wildlife science to avoid ESA listings in Alaska and also focuses on recovery of listed species with the goal of delisting.

#### **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. The lead data processing manager has been on the division's leadership team for over a year now. This position coordinates the development of data management methods needed to more effectively manage wildlife and harvest databases, drawing permits, research, and Geographic Information System (GIS). The division continues to develop a GIS information database to inform proposed resource development activities.

#### **Arctic Caribou Management**

The Western Arctic and Teshekpuk caribou herds have undergone declines while the Central Arctic herd is stable and the Porcupine herd is stable or increasing. In the past 2 years, some hunting restrictions were implemented for the Western Arctic herd and the Teshekpuk herd. The Porcupine caribou herd is cooperatively managed with Canada by an International Cooperative Agreement. The Division of Wildlife Conservation's contributions to monitoring and assessing the population dynamics of the Porcupine Herd are key to ensuring responsible harvest management of this International resource.

### **Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2017**

The division's primary federal funding source is from an annual apportionment of Wildlife Restoration funds apportioned to the state annually and requires a 25% non-federal match. This match is largely achieved using license/tag fee revenue and general funds. While the majority of the general fund reductions for FY2015 and FY2016 were absorbed by increasing the use of these federal funds, we are reaching the end of our capacity to shift costs to this fund source because we are currently using all available license/tag revenue received annually. There are also projects which are ineligible for Wildlife Restoration funds such as the Threatened, Endangered, and Diversity Program, law enforcement and regulatory activities including Board of Game functions.

In FY2015, the division received unallocated general fund reduction in the amount of \$220,000. This cut resulted in a reduction to the division's ability to complete annual survey and inventory activities for wildlife management throughout the state and forced the division to find alternate funding sources for the Walrus Islands Sanctuary at Round Island.

In FY2016, the division further reduced general fund receipts in the amount of \$732,600. A portion of this reduction was absorbed through elimination of the Wildlife Viewing Program, retirement of long term staff, position adjustments and maximizing available federal funding. The impact of these reductions is further discussed in the Key Challenges sections titled *Ensure the State's Right to Manage* and *Threatened, Endangered and Diversity Program*.

Among the proposed FY2017 reductions, division leadership salaries will be shifted to use federal receipts with license revenue or general fund as match and will reduce the ability of leadership staff to respond to activities not eligible for reimbursement by these fund sources including Endangered Species Act (ESA) petitions. Additional reductions will reduce research on non-game species of greatest conservation need; reduce office staff that support wildlife management activities and further reduce the division's ability to complete statewide annual survey and inventory activities for wildlife management; impact funding for refuges and special use areas throughout the state as well as reduce funding for work on access and defense, education, and criminal justice planning. To the extent possible, the division will make reductions to programs with the least impact on the resources and the public.

Contact Information
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**Wildlife Conservation  
RDU Financial Summary by Component**

*All dollars shown in thousands*

	FY2015 Actuals				FY2016 Management Plan				FY2017 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
<b>Formula Expenditures</b> None.												
<b>Non-Formula Expenditures</b>												
Wildlife Conservation	6,085.2	7,618.9	17,517.6	31,221.7	4,272.9	8,777.4	21,826.7	34,877.0	3,144.9	8,777.4	22,468.5	34,390.8
WC Special Projects	1,364.0	2,551.2	7,104.5	11,019.7	1,255.4	2,482.2	8,886.7	12,624.3	1,255.4	2,482.2	8,886.7	12,624.3
Hunter Ed Public Shooting Ranges	0.0	900.2	0.0	900.2	0.0	528.2	382.5	910.7	0.0	528.2	382.5	910.7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7,449.2</b>	<b>11,070.3</b>	<b>24,622.1</b>	<b>43,141.6</b>	<b>5,528.3</b>	<b>11,787.8</b>	<b>31,095.9</b>	<b>48,412.0</b>	<b>4,400.3</b>	<b>11,787.8</b>	<b>31,737.7</b>	<b>47,925.8</b>

**Wildlife Conservation**  
**Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component**  
**From FY2016 Management Plan to FY2017 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>
<b>FY2016 Management Plan</b>	5,528.3	0.0	11,787.8	31,095.9	48,412.0
<b>Adjustments which continue current level of service:</b>					
-Wildlife Conservation	-769.8	0.0	0.0	641.8	-128.0
<b>Proposed budget decreases:</b>					
-Wildlife Conservation	-358.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	-358.2
<b>FY2017 Governor</b>	<b>4,400.3</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>11,787.8</b>	<b>31,737.7</b>	<b>47,925.8</b>