

Wildlife Management, Research and Hunting Access

FY2019 Request: \$10,000,000

Reference No: 60594

AP/AL: Appropriation

Project Type: Research / Studies / Planning

Category: Natural Resources

Location: Statewide

House District: Statewide (HD 1-40)

Impact House District: Statewide (HD 1-40)

Contact: Bruce Dale

Estimated Project Dates: 07/01/2018 - 06/30/2023

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Brief Summary and Statement of Need:

This multi-year project designates significant short-term investments in the wildlife management infrastructure to use a dramatic increase in available federal Pittman Robertson Wildlife Restoration funding. The project enables the department to plan for targeted wildlife management, research, equipment, and hunter access improvements.

Funding:	<u>FY2019</u>	<u>FY2020</u>	<u>FY2021</u>	<u>FY2022</u>	<u>FY2023</u>	<u>FY2024</u>	<u>Total</u>
1002 Fed Rcpts	\$6,000,000						\$6,000,000
1024 Fish/Game	\$4,000,000						\$4,000,000
Total:	\$10,000,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$10,000,000

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State Match Required	<input type="checkbox"/> One-Time Project	<input type="checkbox"/> Phased - new	<input type="checkbox"/> Phased - underway	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On-Going
25% = Minimum State Match % Required		<input type="checkbox"/> Amendment	<input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health Bill	

Operating & Maintenance Costs:

	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Staff</u>
Project Development:	0	0
Ongoing Operating:	0	0
One-Time Startup:	0	0
Totals:	0	0

Prior Funding History / Additional Information:

- Sec8 Ch1 SLA2017 P91 L17 HB57 \$12,000,000
- Sec1 Ch38 SLA2015 P4 L30 SB 26 \$12,250,000
- Sec1 Ch18 SLA2014 P52 L25 SB 119 \$4,000,000
- Sec1 Ch5 SLA2011 P83 L7 SB 46 \$2,225,000
- Sec1 Ch5 SLA2011 P83 L20 SB 46 \$720,000
- Sec4 Ch30 SLA2007 P93 L8 SB 53 \$2,000,000
- Sec1 Ch82 SLA2006 P70 L29 SB 231 \$1,600,000

Due to increased gun and ammunition sales, the Federal Aid (Pittman Robertson-Wildlife Restoration) balance continues to remain high. The funding increases we are seeing continue to be unprecedented. The apportionment to Alaska for 2017 (SY18) was \$33M, 2016 was \$29.5M and 2015 it was \$34.6M. As recently as 2012, the WR amount to Alaska was \$15M. Wildlife Conservation wants to avoid reverting monies back to the federal government so we are planning projects to avoid any reversion.

Project Description/Justification:

Strong gun and ammunition sales nationally have led to increased federal excise tax collections. The federal taxes for wildlife conservation are distributed to states, and Alaska receives the maximum

apportionment. In most cases, federal-aid projects are funded 75% federal and 25% Fish and Game (F&G) funds. If a project is not fully-eligible for federal reimbursement, additional F&G funds will be used.

It is anticipated that the excise tax funds will eventually level off at a higher number compared to the historical average. However, it is unknown where the higher level will be. In the interim, a plan has been developed to use the capital budget to utilize these funds and prevent their reversion to the federal government.

Based on past experience, we anticipate that the excise tax funds will level off at a higher number. However, we are unsure where that higher level will be. In the meantime, we have developed a plan based on use of the capital budget to expend these funds to prevent their reversion and fulfill commitments made to the constituent groups who successfully lobbied for additional hunting license fees.

Hunter Access – \$4 million: Limited access to hunting grounds results in crowding in accessible areas and has been identified as a constraint to new participation in hunting. Focused use of trails, including legal easements through native corporation lands, can also result in degraded fish and wildlife habitat. This project will construct new or improve existing hunter access across Alaska including land purchases and/or public access easements as necessary. We will partner with the Departments of Natural Resources (DNR) and Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF) and possibly other agencies and organizations to improve existing and establish new access on state and, where possible, federal and private lands. Projects will be identified using existing state priorities. A vetted list of future projects has not been developed. The projects being analyzed for suitability include hunter access development and improvement projects along the Dalton and Denali Highways, Willow Mountain Critical Habitat Area trail repairs and improvements, Upper Chena Dome trailhead and access trail enhancement, Chicken – Franklin Trail RS2477 access, and others. Because Pittman-Robertson funds can be dedicated to trail and access improvements for hunting, these projects and others around the state have and will continue to provide an opportunity to use the currently available federal dollars to enhance public hunting access for Alaskans.

Research and Management – \$4 million: Increasingly, federal agencies are completely dropping or reducing their contribution to baseline wildlife surveys across our state; instead redirecting their funds into landscape planning efforts. This is leaving significant gaps in our research efforts. This project would provide funds to continue to replace lost federal funding by allowing the State to fully fund these surveys. Target species include moose, caribou, wolves, bears, sheep, small game and waterfowl. A portion of this project will also fund continuation of a wildlife genetics program as new developments in the genetics field show promise in the area of population delineation and assessment.

The state needs to continue to develop new survey techniques for moose, sheep and bears. Traditional moose surveys techniques have been hampered by incomplete snow cover during key survey time periods (November and December). Without new techniques, moose hunting opportunity will need to be managed more conservatively, and the state will have increasing difficulty preventing the loss of state management authority on federal lands, such as Unit 23. Similarly, bear populations have been difficult to assess despite increasing demand for bear hunting opportunity and pressure from outside entities suggesting that the State is too aggressive with its management of bears and wolves.

Data Management Improvements and Equipment – \$1 million: This project will allow for improvements in Division data management such as the WinfoNet. WinfoNet is a collection of applications, databases and tools Division staff utilize for data storage and management. The division began using WinfoNet in 2000 and while new development and maintenance occurs regularly, many components need evaluation and upgrading. Many components were built in outdated software with poor documentation which makes the systems unreliable and lacking capability to provide modern customer service features.

A previous project provided funding for development of a Harvest Management System, demographic matching, and hunt eligibility systems. This project will address development of permitting systems and harvest reporting systems that are reliable, user friendly, and accessible to digital devices such as phones and tablets.

Field Equipment – \$1 million: This project funds needed field equipment around the state and includes snow machines, ATVs, small boats and outboard motors, radio telemetry collars, trailers, trucks and spectrometers and other necessary field equipment. This equipment supports multiple federal-aid projects. Equipment replacement is currently behind schedule and there is a high need for new equipment to support field operations. The funds will be used across the state to support moose, caribou, musk ox, bear, sheep, deer, furbearer, and waterfowl projects.