

**Wildlife Management and Research**

**FY2023 Request: \$24,000,000**

**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:** Eddie Grasser

**Estimated Project Dates:** 07/01/2022 - 06/30/2027

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**Brief Summary and Statement of Need:**

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

<b>Funding:</b>	<u>FY2023</u>	<u>FY2024</u>	<u>FY2025</u>	<u>FY2026</u>	<u>FY2027</u>	<u>FY2028</u>	<u>Total</u>
1002 Fed	\$18,000,000						\$18,000,000
Rcpts							
1024	\$6,000,000						\$6,000,000
Fish/Game							
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$24,000,000</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$24,000,000</b>

<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"/> Ongoing
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
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

**Prior Funding History / Additional Information:**

- Sec11 Ch1 SLA2021 P104 L33 HB69 \$10,000,000
- Sec1 Ch3 SLA2019 P4 L16 SB19 \$3,200,000
- Sec1 Ch19 SLA2018 P5 L26 SB142 \$20,000,000
- 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

Past capital project reference numbers include: FY2015 - 58645, FY2012 - 53833 & 41452, FY2008 - 43393, and FY2007 - 42114.

**Project Description/Justification:**

Due to increased gun and ammunition sales, the funds from Federal Aid (Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration) continue at an unprecedented rise. This past year, collections increased 65% over the previous already high year. As recently as 2012, the Pittman-Robertson amount to Alaska was \$15 million, the average

over the last five years totaled approximately \$30 million, and yet this year Alaska will receive \$46.4 million. To fully obligate those increased federal dollars, this project will use those funds and will prevent their reversion.

A 25 percent match is required from non-federal sources. Fish & Game Fund will be used as match, and the department will also seek other non-federal sources to meet the federal grant management guidelines.

**Aircraft hangars - \$4 million:** Aircraft hangars are needed in Nome and Fairbanks to protect and store State of Alaska owned and operated aircraft. Both locations experience long periods of severely inclement weather, and Nome has recently lost one aircraft due to wind damage. Hangar storage in both locations would greatly improve flight efficiency related to pre and post flight, save on maintenance costs, and eliminate the need to provide after hours staff availability to protect and monitor aircraft during windstorms.

**Infrastructure to Support Wildlife Management - \$6 million:** It is vital for the division to maintain its human presence in remote areas of the state close to the wildlife resource and the people who depend on it. However, recruiting and retaining biologists in remote Alaska has become increasingly difficult. The Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) has struggled for over a decade to recruit and retain qualified biologists in rural Alaska and have determined that in places such as King Salmon, Dillingham, Nome, Kotzebue, Barrow, and Prince of Wales Island, finding available and adequate housing is a significant hurdle. This project allows DWC to purchase, build, or repair housing in areas of the state where housing is a barrier to recruit or retain employees, or where temporary housing is needed to facilitate wildlife management work. In addition, this project would fund construction of a heated storage building to house agricultural equipment at the Creamer's Refuge in Fairbanks.

**Wildlife Management and Research - \$6 million:** While Alaska's constitution and management track record has ensured that wildlife management is sustainable, efforts continue to undermine the State's management. Work is needed to clearly document the sustainability and success of Alaska's wildlife management. Where DWC staff resources are limiting, the division will partner with cooperators to address these needs. Potential partners include the Alaska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Alaska Department of Fish & Game Gene Conservation Laboratory, the University of Alaska, nonprofit hunting conservation organizations, and others.

New developments in genetics and other fields show promise for improving and offering alternatives for the delineation and assessment of wildlife populations. Target species include moose, caribou, wolves, bears, sheep, small game, and waterfowl where existing monitoring techniques are not adequate or changing environmental conditions (e.g., snow cover) are hampering surveys. Funds will also be used to stretch dollars previously appropriated to enable critical research on subsistence needs and that inform ESA decisions. Inadequate information typically results in stronger regulatory protection measures, which in many instances may provide little to no conservation benefit to the species.

**Habitat Enhancement - \$3 million:** This funds projects to improve habitat quality for moose populations by increasing quality and quantity of forage as well as assess the efficacy of habitat treatments. In many areas across the state habitat can be improved through mechanical means and fire management to stimulate new growth of hardwood species preferred by moose and other game species. In some places, such as the Kenai Peninsula, moose populations declined because available forage grew out of reach. In places like the Matanuska Valley Moose Range, the land has not had recent fire or silvicultural activity to stimulate hardwood regeneration. With a planned prescribed fire regime aspen regeneration can be managed over this landscape to maintain variable aged stands that benefit moose over decades, along with grouse. Through coordination with our state and federal partners, new and existing projects can expand to improve the quality and quantity of moose forage in all seasons. Communities also benefit from this type of management where forest 'fuels' are reduced to limit the impact of wildland fire. Hardwood management near homes and neighborhoods limits fire's intensity to allow fire fighters time for suppression.

**Photocensus - \$2 million:** Photocensus is a high priority and is key in determining harvestable surplus in some of the most important Intensive Management caribou populations in the state. In 2016, DWC purchased two customized digital aerial camera systems for caribou photocensus surveys. Current staff have worked to expand the use of the camera systems to species other than caribou and have successfully used the systems to survey bison both for enumeration and some preliminary work on composition. This project allows us to broaden the photocensus program to other species through research and development (sheep, moose, muskox, seals etc.) and to take full advantage of the available capabilities of the system to generate a wide range of mapping products. It also allows for upgrades to cameras in one system from 100 megapixel to 150 megapixel models; development of survey design/techniques for other species; integration of deep learning/artificial intelligence technology to automate counting processes; and software and hardware maintenance including long-term data storage solutions to address current limit of network based storage on local servers.

**Data Management, Analytics Improvements, and Infrastructure - \$1 million:** This project allows for improvements to data management and data analysis systems. The division has a large number of applications, databases, and tools used for data storage, data management, data analysis, and regulatory/statutory compliance. Over time, ad-hoc tools have been developed across the division, many of which use outdated software, are poorly documented, and difficult to maintain.

This project would take a division wide approach to data management and analysis allowing better reliability and greater insight into field data collection, biological samples, wildlife management, and regulatory data. A previous project provided funding for development of hunt management, demographic matching, and hunt eligibility systems. This project will address development of data management, data warehouse, and data analysis systems that are reliable, supportable, maintainable, and accessible. These tools will allow biologists, managers, and other staff insight into division data that they currently do not have allowing them to better fulfill the division's mission.

**Shooting Ranges - \$.5 million:** Participation in hunting has been steadily declining nationally since the 1980s. As revenue from hunters and shooters is the primary funding for wildlife conservation both nationally and the decline in participation poses an increasing threat to wildlife conservation. Nevertheless, in Alaska, existing ranges have experienced significant increases in use and participation over the last several years. This project would allow the department to enhance existing facilities to provide more shooting access and opportunities and provide additional funding to support increasing requests from private ranges and organizations to enhance private range development and improvement. Shooting range development and improvement will provide the public with enhanced opportunities to develop and/or improve their skills to locate and secure natural wild food for their families providing for themselves and the communities where they live.

**Equipment - \$.75 million:** This project will fund needed 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. The funds will be used across the state to support moose, caribou, musk ox, bear, sheep, deer, furbearer, waterfowl, and outreach projects.

**Habitat conservation - \$.75 million:** To conserve important fish and wildlife habitats and to assure public access and uses such as hunting, trapping, and wildlife viewing.