

State of Alaska FY2023 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>.)

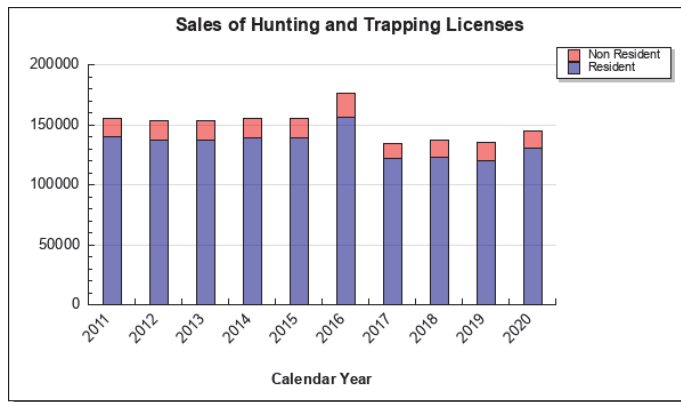
Core Services

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

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.



Major RDU Accomplishments in 2021

Defending Against Federal Erosion of State Management Authority

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and Access Defense programs, and the Threatened, Endangered, and Diversity Program (TED), and Marine Mammal Program (MM) are cost effective approaches to federal management issues. The ANILCA Program asserts and defends the authority of the department for management of fish and wildlife on all lands in Alaska and maintains public access and use of federal public lands. The Access Defense Program researches and asserts ownership of state waters, submerged lands, and RS 2477 Trails to maintain public access to state lands and fish and wildlife resources. The TED and MM programs works to conserve wildlife species before they become threatened or endangered, to recover species already imperiled, and to keep common species common. The programs administer the State's response to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) by providing resources, expertise, and coordination among agencies (e.g., Department of Law and Department of Natural Resources) with the goal of conserving wildlife and avoiding unwarranted regulations. The division will continue its efforts to provide information, challenge unwarranted actions, and conduct needed research. Last year's major successes by these programs include the following:

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service made not warranted findings for listing the tufted puffin and the Lake Iliamna seal (respectively) under the ESA based in considerable part on the best available information provided by the division. In no small part because of the diligent work of the division to avoid unwarranted actions under the ESA, it has now been almost ten years since a new species was listed under the ESA in Alaska.
- Based on comments from the division and other Alaskans, the National Marine Fisheries Service final

designation of critical habitat for humpback whales off the coast of Alaska was only about half the size as originally proposed. While the designation is still far larger than appropriate, the substantial reduction in area designated as critical habitat is an important reduction of unnecessary regulation.

- The division helped the Alaska Oil and Gas Association in its multi-year effort with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to establish a regulation for the incidental take of polar bear and walrus under the MMPA. While the regulation was established in early August and has enabled the continuation of oil and gas activities on the North Slope, the regulation is resulting in additional problems (see challenges section).
- In coordination with other State agencies, the ANILCA program helped to submit concerns to the Bureau of Land Management on the Bering Sea Western Interior Resource Management Plan and successfully reversed in the Record of Decision actions impacting the State's rights and management authorities.
- Worked with the Department of Law to continue to challenge the "Kenai Rule" through legal appeal to allow hunter access and maintain the State's authority to manage brown bear take within the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and prevent the rule from being applied on other federal lands.
- Assisted Department of Law and Department of Natural Resources with research used to assert ownership and management of state waters and submerged lands including work on an IBLA decision appeal for the Kuskokwim River which resulted in a partial approval of the State's Recordable Disclaimer of Interest.

COVID-19 Pandemic Response

The division continued to adapt to be able to continue to provide a high level of public service as well as to conduct research and management activities despite COVID-19 challenges. Adaptations included shifting many educational events to online only, offering some registration hunt permits online that were previously available only in-person, and allowing bear baiters to register bait stations online instead of in person. Since many rural communities adopted COVID-19 travel restrictions that prohibited visitors from entering their town without permission; the division advised hunters to take a picture of themselves at the airport, send it in, and staff would issue permits to the hunters. Staff even hand-delivered certain registration permits to hunters traveling through several rural airports so they could get their permits without leaving airport property. In addition, at the direction of the Board of Game (BOG), hunters with spring 2020 bear permits were allowed to transfer those permits to future hunting seasons if they desired. The department implemented the BOG action in 2021 and will continue to do so until the last hunt for transferred permits occurs in Spring 2022. Managers and researchers continued to implement COVID-19 protocols to enable field activities to continue including being particularly sensitive to heightened concern about virus spread into rural Alaska communities.

Food for Alaskans

It is estimated that Alaskans have harvested approximately 6,200 moose, 21,000 caribou, and 10,000 deer annually in each of the last few years. Residents account for about 90% of the moose, over 90% of deer, and 97% of caribou harvested in Alaska annually. This yields roughly 4 million pounds of moose, 3.5 million pounds of caribou, and 680,000 pounds of deer for Alaskan tables.

Key RDU Challenges

Recovering from COVID-19 Pandemic

Sales of licenses and tags to nonresidents is a significant source of revenue into the Fish and Game Fund. Fewer hunters traveled to Alaska during the first summer of the pandemic which impacted nonresident license revenue in FY2020 but it began to rebound in FY2021. To provide for an additional source of state match for federal dollars, the division conducted a pilot big game raffle in FY2021 and expect to further develop that revenue source in the coming year.

Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act Challenges

Various federal actions related to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) will continue to threaten the state's authority to manage and are impacting the state's ability to develop its resources. The division will continue its efforts to provide information, challenge unwarranted actions, and conduct needed research. Current major challenges include the following:

- Polar bears on the North Slope are protected under the ESA and MMPA. While new regulations for incidental take were promulgated in August that enable continued oil and gas activities on the North Slope, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s implementation of those regulations is unnecessarily constraining well managed activities that do not pose a threat to polar bear populations. The problem stems from the Service using poor assumptions to fill information gaps in a model that results in considerable overestimates of incidental take.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service will be making ESA listing decisions for species that occur in Alaska (two bumblebees, a bat, a lemming, and a sea star) as well as the population of wolves in Southeast Alaska. While populations of all but one of these species appear robust and healthy in Alaska, a positive listing decision for any of them would add considerable regulatory burdens and costs and degrade the state’s management authority.
- The National Marine Fisheries Service rejected the State of Alaska’s petition to delist a species numbering in the millions, Arctic ringed seals, from under the ESA. The division is working with the Department of Law to challenge this inappropriate decision.

Federal Subsistence Process Challenges

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game serves all Alaskans by managing wildlife populations for a variety of uses and users groups. Federal subsistence regulations, applicable on federally managed public land, serve only a portion of Alaska residents (those that are federally-qualified hunters and trappers). Staff expend a significant amount of energy and time reviewing federal wildlife proposals, providing analyses and comments to 10 federal Regional Advisory Councils, Office of Subsistence Management, and the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB) to ensure accurate and reliable harvest, effort, and wildlife population data. In recent years the FSB has adopted numerous regulations restricting access and bag limits for non federally-qualified hunters and trappers. Division staff continue to engage in the federal regulatory process and yet anticipate continued regulatory actions that will limit use of wildlife resources on federally managed land to federally-qualified hunters and trappers.

Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2023

The division is monitoring its federal Pittman-Robertson obligations closely to be sure that no dollars are reverted. A sufficient safety margin was established that will ensure that unspent FY2022 funds will be available for appropriation in FY2023. Funds will not be reverted into federal coffers.

Contact Information
Contact: Eddie Grasser, Director Phone: (907) 267-2339 E-mail: eddie.grasser@alaska.gov

**Wildlife Conservation
RDU Financial Summary by Component**

All dollars shown in thousands

	FY2021 Actuals				FY2022 Management Plan				FY2023 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	1,708.0	12,534.1	27,793.5	42,035.6	2,665.4	16,663.8	43,076.2	62,405.4	1,716.9	16,848.7	43,338.2	61,903.8
Hunter Ed Public Shooting Ranges	0.0	555.4	443.1	998.5	7.7	477.0	662.5	1,147.2	0.0	481.0	651.5	1,132.5
Totals	1,708.0	13,089.5	28,236.6	43,034.1	2,673.1	17,140.8	43,738.7	63,552.6	1,716.9	17,329.7	43,989.7	63,036.3

Wildlife Conservation
Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component
From FY2022 Management Plan to FY2023 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>
FY2022 Management Plan	2,673.1	0.0	17,140.8	43,738.7	63,552.6
Adjustments which continue current level of service:					
-Wildlife Conservation	-948.5	0.0	184.9	262.0	-501.6
-Hunter Ed Public Shooting Ranges	-7.7	0.0	4.0	-11.0	-14.7
FY2023 Governor	1,716.9	0.0	17,329.7	43,989.7	63,036.3