

State of Alaska FY2024 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>.)

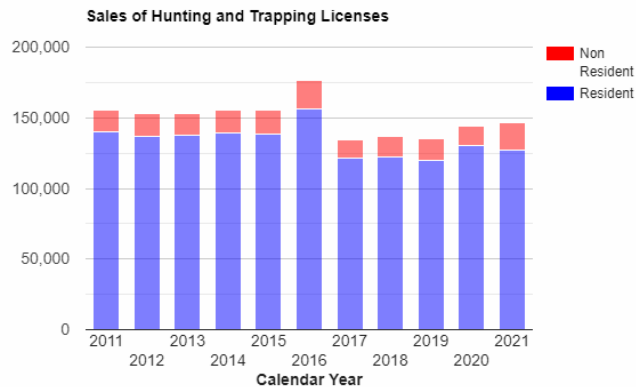
Core Services

- 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 2022

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 pushing back on federal erosion of state management authority. The ANILCA Program asserts and defends the authority of the department for management of fish and wildlife on all lands in Alaska and works to maintain public access and use of federal public lands. The TED and MM programs work 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 (including the 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:

- Successfully fought off an effort to include caribou as a species listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which would have dramatically affected the ability for many Alaskans

- and non-residents to harvest and transport caribou.
- Worked with the Department of Law to:
 - Defend the Incidental Take Regulation for polar bears on the North Slope that is necessary for oil and gas activities and operations.
 - Start challenging expansive ESA Critical Habitat designations for ringed seals and bearded seals.
 - Uphold recent ESA regulatory changes that helped avoid unnecessary regulatory constraints on economic activities.
- Produced, with western state partners, a key manuscript that emphasizes how little brown bats response to White-nose Syndrome will likely be very different in western states compared to eastern states. Bats in western states will likely not be as seriously impacted as in the east, which has implications for the pending ESA listing determination for the species across its North American range.
- Assisted Department staff in addressing Migratory Bird Treaty Act regulations for prescribed fires for wildlife habitat enhancement, and incidental take regulations.
- Actively engaged on numerous ongoing issues to address federal overreach and the ability of the state to manage its resources, including on wolves in Southeast Alaska, whales, the sunflower sea star, lemmings, and bumblebees.

Pandemic Response

The division continued to adapt to provide a high level of public service as well as to conduct research and management activities despite ongoing COVID-19 challenges. Many In-person services resumed (e.g., Hunter Education; permit issuance; Advisory Committee, Alaska Board of Game, and general interest meetings). However, COVID-19 mitigation measures were necessary in most instances. The division continued to offer events online when able, 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. A department Mobile App was released to the public which further enhanced the divisions public service, it also provided another option for our constituents to get most of the department's products that were previously only available in-person. Managers and researchers used COVID-19 protocols to enable field activities to continue (e.g., field work, survey and inventory, wildlife viewing), including being particularly sensitive to heightened concern about virus spread into rural Alaska communities. Overall, the need to adapt to pandemic conditions did not impact the division's work on core mission tasks, and it also resulted in additional tools to better serve the public and wildlife resources.

Food for Alaskans

It is estimated that Alaskans have harvested approximately 16,000 Sitka black-tailed deer, 7,000 moose and over 21,000 caribou in each of the last few years. Residents account for about 90% of the moose and deer harvest and 97% of caribou harvest in Alaska annually. This yields roughly 554,000 pounds of deer, 4 million pounds of moose and 3.5 million pounds of caribou for Alaskan tables.

Hunter Access Program

The division continued to develop and fund hunter access projects across the state, continuing to implement a more robust process to solicit projects throughout the state. Projects are cooperative efforts with state, local, and private organization partners. Project ideas and grant applications are submitted online via a new portal (www.hunteraccess.adfg.alaska.gov). This provides members of the public, conservation organizations, and other user groups an opportunity to identify access needs and to submit applications for projects with matching funds. The program improves opportunities for hunting, trapping, and other wildlife recreation by developing or improving public access across the State; maximizes efficient use of federal funds through public and private partnerships for meeting program match requirements; and improves outreach with public and private hunting, trapping, and other wildlife recreation organizations.

Wood Bison Restoration

Wood bison, native to Alaska, had been missing from the state for over 100 years. In 2015 ADF&G established the only wild wood bison population in the USA by releasing bison along the Innoko River. In August 2022, ADF&G increased that population by releasing 28 yearlings. The 28 yearlings were part of a group of young bison imported from Canada in early 2022. As of September 2022, there are more than 150 bison in the herd, further toward the goal of establishing a huntable population in years to come. ADF&G is cooperating with the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center and the University of Alaska Fairbanks to hold some wood bison in captivity in order to increase populations in the future.

Key RDU Challenges

Limited State General Funds for Increasing Expenses

General funds allocated to the division have declined by 80% over the last decade (down from \$8.6M to \$1.7M now). The bulk of these funds are match for other federal dollars and cover activities ineligible to be paid for with Pittman-Robertson or Fish and Game funds, including work on ESA species, marine mammals, and outreach on those subjects. When insufficient general funds are available for match, which is the case now with so few general fund dollars in the division's budget, staff seek match from partners which often results in prioritizing work important to partners rather than work of higher priority for the state.

Decreased general fund dollars have also forced the elimination of outreach to a broader constituency, including wildlife viewers, segments of the population that are increasingly diverse and disconnected from fish and wildlife resources. This disconnection makes our jobs as wildlife managers more difficult. The future of wildlife conservation rests on our ability to gather support and participation from a wider swath of the public.

Employee recruitment and retention

Like all state agencies, the division is facing increasing difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. Needs are particularly acute in rural Alaska but extend to all locations and job classes. This is not only making it hard to fill critical roles, it also forces existing staff to fill multiple roles and assume new and challenging responsibilities. While there are currently no specific budget requests to address this need, it is one of the most critical needs facing the work of wildlife conservation.

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. Large information gaps and poor assumptions are affecting permitting by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This is threatening to disrupt oil and gas operations despite those activities not posing a threat to the sustainability of polar bear populations when managed appropriately.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service will be making multiple ESA decisions on petitions from third parties to list species and designate critical habitat from bumblebees and lemmings to wolves and whales. The State is now also facing new ESA listing petitions for a species of algae and a species of sea star.

Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2024

In Federal fiscal year 2022, the Pittman-Robertson federal apportionment increased \$16 million over the prior year. These federal funds require 25% state match. To fully use the federal dollars in the operating grants, an increase is requested from the Fish and Game fund.

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
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**Wildlife Conservation
RDU Financial Summary by Component**

All dollars shown in thousands

	FY2022 Actuals				FY2023 Management Plan				FY2024 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	3,190.0	13,764.8	29,825.2	46,780.0	1,755.3	17,066.5	43,710.4	62,532.2	3,083.2	19,478.8	44,172.4	66,734.4
Hunter Ed Public Shooting Ranges	7.7	396.4	576.1	980.2	0.0	483.7	659.5	1,143.2	0.0	487.3	734.0	1,221.3
Totals	3,197.7	14,161.2	30,401.3	47,760.2	1,755.3	17,550.2	44,369.9	63,675.4	3,083.2	19,966.1	44,906.4	67,955.7

Wildlife Conservation
Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component
From FY2023 Management Plan to FY2024 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>
FY2023 Management Plan	1,755.3	0.0	17,550.2	44,369.9	63,675.4
Adjustments which continue current level of service:					
-Wildlife Conservation	25.9	0.0	242.2	462.0	730.1
-Hunter Ed Public Shooting Ranges	0.0	0.0	3.6	11.0	14.6
Proposed budget increases:					
-Wildlife Conservation	1,302.0	0.0	2,170.1	0.0	3,472.1
-Hunter Ed Public Shooting Ranges	0.0	0.0	0.0	63.5	63.5
FY2024 Governor	3,083.2	0.0	19,966.1	44,906.4	67,955.7