



NEWS RELEASE



Alaska Department of Fish and Game

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2022 GMU 2 Wolf Season Announced

CRAIG, Alaska – Biologists with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service, will close the state and Federal hunting and trapping seasons for wolf in Game Management Unit (GMU) 2 (Unit 2 in the Federal regulations) at 11:59 pm on December 15, 2022. State and Federal trapping seasons will open November 15, 2022.

Background

Following a two-year public process, in 2019 ADF&G changed the wolf harvest management strategy for GMU 2. Since 1997 harvest had been managed using a quota calculated as a percentage of the most recent population estimate. The new strategy annually adjusts season length to achieve a level of harvest that maintains the wolf population within a fall population objective range of 150–200 wolves established by the Alaska Board of Game. ADF&G worked with the USFS, Fish and Game Advisory Committees, the Alaska Board of Game, the Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, and trappers to develop this new strategy that provides trappers with the flexibility and responsibility they desired while sustainably managing harvest of this wolf population.

ADF&G, with support from the Forest Service and Hyaburg Cooperative Association (HCA), annually estimates GMU 2 wolf abundance using a DNA-based mark-recapture technique. In fall 2021, ADF&G and HCA collected wolf DNA samples using hair traps within the same large study areas used in 2016-2020. However, in late November deep snow began inhibiting access to some areas and fewer samples were collected than in recent years. Tissue collected with the consent of trappers from 97% of harvested wolves also provided DNA for the population estimate.

Interpreting Estimates and Harvest

Field and lab work for each estimate take about 10 months to complete, so the current year's management is based on the previous year's estimate. For fall 2021 ADF&G estimated the GMU 2 population to be within the range of 216 to 332 wolves (95% confidence interval) with a point estimate of 268 wolves. Within that range of plausible values, ADF&G bases harvest management on the point estimate because that is the value most likely to be correct

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given the data collected that year. However, ADF&G recognizes that the true number of wolves is likely to be somewhat higher or lower than the point estimate and encourages the public to focus on long-term trends in abundance and harvest, rather than on year-to-year changes in estimates. Those trends indicate the population is stable and that harvest is being sustainably managed.

The 2021 point estimate of 268 wolves is lower than the 2020 estimate of 386 wolves and statistically similar to the 2019 estimate of 316 wolves. A recent analysis by ADF&G found that when fewer data are available for estimates, estimates tend to be biased low. Fewer samples were collected in fall 2021 than in 2020, and that could account for the lower 2021 estimate. A lower estimate could also result from a lower wolf population. ADF&G will continue monitoring the trend of this population.

Wolves can be aged by development of a foreleg bone, and trappers are asked to provide ADF&G with one foreleg bone from each harvested wolf. In 2021 trappers provided leg bones from 38 of 66 harvested wolves. Of those 81% were pups, 10% were yearlings, and 8% were 2 years old or older. Although that was only a partial sample, it indicates the wolf population remains productive and resilient to harvest. ADF&G concludes that the 2021 population estimate is plausible and in fall 2022 the GMU 2 wolf population remains stable and sustainable.

Sealing Requirements

State sealing regulations for wolves harvested in GMU 2 require that all hides must be sequentially numbered by the hunter or trapper, the hunter or trapper must call the ADF&G Ketchikan office at (907) 225-2475 within 7 days of take to report the date and location of take, and all hides must be sealed within 15 days of take. These regulations were designed to provide more precise data for managers to use when calculating population estimates.

Federally qualified users harvesting wolves on Federally managed land in GMU 2 may also seal wolves under Federal subsistence regulations. Federal sealing regulations were recently updated and now require wolves harvested in GMU 2 to be sealed within 15 days of take and that hides be sequentially numbered and marked with the date and location of take by the trapper. All GMU 2 trappers are also encouraged to provide foreleg bones and small samples of tissue and hide from each harvested wolf to ADF&G or designated sealers. Hide and tissue samples provide DNA for the population estimate. Foreleg bones help document that GMU 2 wolves remain productive.

Fall 2021 Harvest Management

Most GMU 2 wolves are taken by trapping, so harvest management focuses on adjusting the length of the trapping season. Setting harvest season length involves considering a variety of biological factors and regulatory guidance. Since first implementing the current harvest management strategy, harvest rate (wolves harvested per day of trapping season) has averaged 2.6 wolves/day and ranged from 2.1 to 3.2 wolves/day. Assuming the average harvest rate, about 81 wolves will be harvested during a 31-day trapping season with a potential range of 65 to 99 wolves. ADF&G will monitor harvest during the season but believes that a 31-day season will result in a sustainable level of harvest.

Please call the ADF&G Ketchikan area office at 907-225-2475 for more information. For more information from the USDA Forest Service, please call Tongass Subsistence Coordinator Robert Cross at 907-723-8653. Maps of Federal lands within GMU 2 are available at Forest Service offices. Maps and additional information on the Federal Subsistence Management Program can be found on the web at <http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/index.cfm>.

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