

**FEDERAL AID
ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
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**FURBEARER
ANNUAL SURVEY AND INVENTORY**

STATE: Alaska

GRANT AND SEGMENT NR.: W-33-12

PROJECT NR.: 7.0

PERIOD: 1 July 2013 – 30 June 2014

PROJECT LOCATION: Statewide

PROJECT TITLE: The Status of Furbearers and Factors Influencing Their Populations in Alaska

REPORT DESCRIPTION: This performance report describes furbearer survey and inventory activities. Region-wide activities are listed before specific activities by game management unit.

**The Status of Furbearers
and Factors Influencing Their Populations in Region I**

Regionwide Activities

ACTIVITY 1: Prepare triennial furbearer management reports.

Reports are presently being reviewed and edited.

ACTIVITY 2: Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on furbearer management.

Data from furbearer sealing records will be provided to the Alaska Board of Game and Regional Advisory Council at the next regularly scheduled meeting (winter 2015) for the Board during their deliberations on proposals.

ACTIVITY 3: Collect harvest data on beavers, martens, otters, lynx, and wolverines as they are harvested and presented for sealing.

ADF&G Wildlife Conservation staff, AWT Troopers, and designated sealing agents sealed furbearer pelts harvested in the region. Area biologists and other staff tracked harvest trends and collected biological samples opportunistically. Approximately 296 beaver, 4,352 marten 860 otter, 25 wolverine, and 1 lynx were harvested and sealed in the region.

Unit 1A – 475 marten, 77 otter, 38 beaver, 7 wolverine

Unit 1B – 232 marten, 16 otter, 1 beaver, 1 wolverine

Unit 1C – 204 marten, 52 otter, 26 beaver, 6 wolverine

Unit 1D – 215 marten, 3 otter, 9 beaver, 9 wolverine
Unit 2 – 1,068 marten, 472 otter, 165 beaver]
Unit 3 - 239 marten, 57 otters, 55 beaver, 3 wolverine
Unit 4 – 495 marten, 124 otter, 33 beaver – 090914]
Unit 5 – 89 marten, 18 otter, 5 beaver, 3 wolverine

ACTIVITY 4: Use trapper questionnaire, interviews, and other anecdotal information from reliable observers as a basis for determining the status of various furbearer populations.

This was done as opportunities allowed. This type of information helped managers with recommendations about changes to current trapping regulations.

ACTIVITY 5: Monitor the furbearer harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires and contact with trappers and hunters.

This was done as opportunities presented themselves through sealing fur and conversations with trappers and hunters. Efforts were made to improve communication with authorized fur sealers where trappers are using temporary sealing forms that have been incompletely filled out.

The Status of Alaska Furbearers and Factors Influencing Their Population in Region II

Regionwide:

ACTIVITY: Prepare a triennial regional furbearer management report.

Reports were finalized and submitted for publication in 2013. Area staff continue to collect information in preparation for drafting future reports.

ACTIVITY: Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on furbearer management.

Staff routinely interact with federal staff and discuss management of furbearers relative to the respective regulatory systems. Staff prepared information for presentation to the state Board of Game meeting during in 2015.

ACTIVITY : Collect harvest data when pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters.

All furbearers that require sealing in Region II were presented to staff or appointed sealers for information and specimen collection and sealing. See area specific activities for additional information.

ACTIVITY : Monitor the furbearer harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires and contact with trappers and hunters.

These are standard activities accomplished in each office. See Area specific activities.

Activities by Unit:

Unit 6

ACTIVITY : Collected harvest data for 62 marten, 63 beaver, 11 wolverine, 6 lynx, and 197 river otters. These harvests are low for marten, high for lynx and otter, and normal for beaver and wolverine.

ACTIVITY : Conducted river otter latrine surveys in western Prince William Sound. See research performance report for otters in unit 6D.

Units 7&15

ACTIVITY : Collect harvest data when pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters.

Preliminary harvest results by GMU are:

	7	Unit 15A	Unit 15B	Unit 15C	Total
Beaver	20	20	5	28	73
Marten	83	18	0	1	102
Wolverine	6	0	2	8	16
Otter	15	14	2	31	62
Lynx	11	40	18	48	117

ACTIVITY : Conduct wolverine survey. No surveys were conducted due to poor survey conditions.

Unit 08

Activity : *Otter* - During the 2013–14 season, 37 individuals brought in 356 otters for sealing yielding an average of 9.6 otters/person. Otter harvest was comprised of 204 males (57%), 147 females (41%), and 5 of undetermined sex (2%). Local residents comprised most of the harvest (84%), and trapping was the most common method of take (96%). Boats were the most common mode of transportation used (77%), and January was the most successful month (40%). Fifty-four otters (7%) were harvested along the Kodiak road system with the remaining 302 harvested in remote portions of the management area.

Beaver - Seventy-eight beavers were brought in by 18 individuals, yielding an average harvest of 4.3 beavers/person. Local residents comprised most of the harvest (94%), and trapping was the most common method of take (93%). Highway vehicles were the most common method of transportation used (49%), and the harvest primarily occurred during the month of December. Forty-nine beaver (63%) were harvested along the Kodiak road system with the remaining harvested in remote portions of the management area.

Hunter/trapper questionnaire respondents reported increased furbearer populations on Kodiak and surrounding islands. Historical harvest trends indicate consistently low furbearer harvest on Kodiak and the surrounding islands. Similar to other areas, harvest trends on Kodiak Island tend

to fluctuate with oscillations in fur prices and overseas demand as well as weather patterns and fur quality.

Unit 14C

ACTIVITY : Harvest data was collected when pelts were presented for sealing by trappers and hunters. See below:

Harvest of furbearers where sealing is required:

Beaver: 11 harvested; 9 of those killed with depredation permit

Lynx: 6

River Otter: 2

Wolverine: 4

Marten: 2

The Status of Furbearers and Factors Influencing Their Populations in Region III

Regionwide Activities

ACTIVITY 5: Prepare triennial furbearer management reports.

Prepared furbearer management reports.

ACTIVITY 1: Use trapper questionnaires and interviews as a basis for determining the status of various furbearer populations.

Mailed a trapper questionnaire to everyone who purchased a trapping license; interviewed trappers opportunistically.

ACTIVITY 2: Monitor the furbearer harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires and contact with trappers and hunters.

Monitored preliminary harvest of 1,060 lynx, 76 river otter, and 339 wolverine through field observations, fur sealing reports, field observations and contact with trappers and hunters

ACTIVITY 3: Collect harvest information when pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters and analyze harvest data.

Collected data on preliminary harvest of 1,496 furbearers when pelts were presented for sealing by trappers and hunters, and analyzed harvest data.

ACTIVITY 4: Provide furbearer management information to State and Federal regulatory processes.

Provided information to 15 State fish and game advisory committees, the Alaska Board of Game, and 2 Federal regional advisory councils.

ACTIVITY 5: Conduct beaver cache surveys

ACTIVITY 5: Prepare triennial furbearer management reports.

Prepared furbearer management reports.

Activities by Unit

Units 20A, 20B, 20C, 20F and 25C

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct beaver cache surveys in Unit 20B.

Conducted Unit 20B beaver cache survey in October (n = 23 caches).

Unit 20D

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct a hare population trend survey to assess furbearer prey abundance.

Conducted a snowshoe hare population survey and counted 8 hares on the survey route. Data from this survey are used to generate a population index for hares. Survey data suggests the hare cycle remains in the low portion of the population cycle in Unit 20D. The hare population index can be an indicator of furbearer abundance

The Status of Furbearers and Factors Influencing Their Populations in Region IV

Project Location: Game Management Units 9, 10, 11, 13, 14A, 14B, 16, and 17

Regionwide:

ACTIVITY 1: Collect furbearer harvest data when pelts are presented for sealing by trappers and hunters, questionnaires and contact with trappers and hunters.

Unit	Beaver	Lynx	Marten	Otter	Wolverine
<i>Unit 9</i>	3	4	0 ^a	12	25
<i>Unit 10^b</i>	-	-	-	0	0
<i>Unit 11</i>	20	10	N/A ^a	1	11
<i>Unit 13</i>	191	118	N/A ^a	39	59
<i>Unit 14A</i>	52	9	26	18	2
<i>Unit 14B</i>	67	4	38	7	3
<i>Unit 16</i>	108	9	524	38	42
<i>Unit 17</i>	161	19	N/A ^a	50	23

^aMarten sealing is not required in Units 9, 10, 11, 13, and 17.

^bBeaver, lynx, and marten do not occur in Unit 10

ACTIVITY 2: Monitor the furbearer harvest through field observations, fur sealing reports, trapper questionnaires and contact with trappers and hunters.

The annual trapper questionnaire was not completed.

Activities by Unit:

Unit 13

ACTIVITY 1: Conduct aerial and ground transects to determine status and trend of lynx populations.

Lynx transects were flown in Unit 11 and 13 in March 2014.

The Status of Alaska Furbearers and Factors Influencing their Populations in Region V

Regionwide:

Provide information to state and federal regulatory processes on furbearer management.

Area management staff reviewed State and Federal regulatory proposals, attended regulatory process meetings, and presented furbearer information to the State Board of Game, State Fish and Game Advisory Committees, Federal Subsistence Board, and Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils.

Maintain the ability in all units to monitor harvests by collecting data through the furbearer sealing process.

The area offices in Barrow, Bethel, Kotzebue and Nome maintained designated fur sealers in villages in each Game Management Unit to collect harvest information through sealing certificates. Staff supported 29 fur sealers in Unit 18, 17 in Unit 22, 9 in Unit 23, and 6 in Unit 26A.

Monitor harvests through the fur sealing program, fur acquisition reports, the annual hunter/trapper questionnaire, and Community-based Harvest Assessments conducted annually in selected villages.

Unit 18: We analyzed fur sealing data for the RY13 trapping season. With improvement to the reporting process, these preliminary harvests should be very close to the final numbers. The reported harvests are 316 river otters, 248 lynx, and 11 wolverine. The low number of fur sealed in 2013-14 trapping season is related to lower than average snow conditions, a down turn in the fur market, and decreased trapping effort. The presents of a local fur buyer encourages trappers to not only participate in trapping and passing the knowledge of how to trap on to the next generation but also increase the number of people in getting their fur sealed.

Unit 22: The preliminary furbearer harvest based on RY13 sealing certificates indicates 48 lynx were sealed. The breakdown of lynx sealed by subunit is 37 in Unit 22A, 8 in Unit 22B, and 3 in Unit 22C. All river otters were harvested by residents; 5 in 22A, 2 in 22c, and 1 in 22D. Thirty-seven wolverines were harvested by 36 residents and 1 nonresident; 3 in Unit 22A, 12 in Unit 22B, 7 in Unit 22C, 3 in Unit 22D, and 12 in Unit 22E. Community-based harvest assessment surveys were not completed in Unit 22 during the reporting period, however previous harvest surveys show beaver, marten, and red fox are also harvested by Unit 22 communities.

Unit 23: The preliminary harvest reported on RY13 sealing certificates included 27 lynx (12 females, 10 males and 5 unknown); all were taken by Unit 23 residents. Three lynx were snared, and 24 were trapped. One lynx was taken using an airplane and 21 were taken using a snowmachine. Three otters (2 males and 1 females) were taken during this

regulatory year. One otter was taken using an 4 wheeler and 2 were taken using a snowmachine. Two were taken by Unit 23 residents and 1 was taken by a non-local resident. One otter was shot and the other 2 were trapped. Twenty-three wolverines were sealed (10 female and 12 males), Five were taken by ground shooting and 17 by trap, and 1 by snaring. All were taken using snowmachine. Community harvest assessment survey data is not available at this time but usually indicates dramatically higher harvest than sealing records indicate.

Unit 26A: During RY13, 25 wolverines were sealed by 13 residents from Unit 26A. Nineteen wolverine were male and 6 were female; 23 were ground shot and 2 were trapped. Snow machines were used for transportation for all 23, aircraft for 1, and 4 wheeler for 1. One wolverine was harvested in September, 7 in December, 5 in January, 3 in February, 8 in March, and 1 in April. No lynx were sealed in Unit 26A during RY13.

Use public communication and education to obtain better harvest data through increased observance of sealing requirements.

Throughout Region V we communicated with local trappers and hunters to improve harvest reporting through the fur sealing process; explained the importance of harvest reporting at public meetings in villages; prepared newspaper articles explaining the importance of sealing furs to obtain harvest data; and attended meetings hosted by local chapters of the Alaska Trappers Association.

Assess population status and trends utilizing sealing records, track surveys, cache surveys, hunter/trapper interviews and questionnaires, village harvest surveys and observations by staff and the public.

Unit 18: We observed furbearers and furbearer sign opportunistically during aerial and ground based work for other species; and continue to interview trappers, pilots, and others regarding furbearers. Muskrat numbers continue to remain low since the 2009-2010 winter. Lynx numbers and harvest are declining from record highs of 2011 due to decreased abundance of snowshoe hares. Wolverine, river otter, beaver, marten and fox numbers appear to be stable in abundance over the reporting period. Most trappers reported an increase in the amount of mink they encountered but few people reported targeting them.

Unit 22: Preliminary sealing data and anecdotal reports suggest lynx numbers have declined in Unit 22A and 22B. The reported average annual harvest of lynx from RY09 to RY12 is 111 per year (range 83-137) versus the 48 lynx harvested during this period. River otters are believed to be more common than harvest numbers would indicate, but their abundance is unknown. Observations and anecdotal reports suggest wolverines are common throughout the unit and increasing in Units 22D and 22E.

Unit 23: Furbearer populations appeared to be within the range of levels observed in previous years based on sealing records, opportunistic observations of furbearers, contacts with hunter and trappers, and community-based harvest assessments. Lynx population levels appear to be dropping, although their distribution has varied substantially among drainages in recent years. Wolverine numbers appeared to be low throughout Unit 23 during the reporting period however, the higher harvest this year may indicate an increase in abundance.

Unit 26A: Through opportunistic observations of fur bearers and interviews with local residents, we felt that the current population number of wolverines is fairly high and stable, while arctic and red foxes are both in a period of medium population level. Coyotes are rare and river otter densities are very low. Observations made during wildlife surveys, hunter reports, and pilot reports indicate that wolverines appear to be at high numbers. Sealing records and observations during moose surveys indicate that lynx numbers are low, but are probably fairly stable.

Prepare unit summaries of furbearer population status and harvest to be included in the Statewide Trapper Questionnaire report.

Summaries of trapper harvest information and general population status for each game management unit are provided to support annual trapper questionnaire reports.

Develop updated population objectives in consultation with the local public and other agencies.

Furbearer information is available for discussion during Advisory Committee meetings. Beaver populations continue to be considered too high by many members of the public because their dams impede boat passage on creeks and waterways, as well as spawning salmon.

Work with community members in rural locations to keep fur sealing vendors active and up to date with new information.

In Unit 22, fur vendors were contacted to ensure their sealing supplies were adequate. Finding new fur sealers in communities have been on-going efforts so sealing and reporting requirements are met. Public service announcements were sent to communities at the end of the trapping season to remind hunters & trappers to visit their local sealer. In Unit 23, staff traveled to all Unit 23 villages to contact sealing and license vendors.