Annual Report to the Alaska Board of Game on Intensive Management for Moose with Wolf, Black Bear, and Grizzly Bear Predation Control in Game Management Unit 19A

Prepared by the Division of Wildlife Conservation
February 2020

1) **Description of IM Program[1] and Department recommendation for reporting period.**

A) **This report is an <u>annual</u> evaluation for a predation control program authorized by the Alaska Board of Game (Board) under 5 AAC 92.123**

B) **Month this report was submitted by the Department to the Board:**

February 2020 annual report.

C) **Program name**: Unit 19A wolf and bear predation control program (Fig. 1).

D) **Existing program** has **an associated Operational Plan.**

E) **Game Management Unit fully or partly included in IM program area:** Unit 19A.

F) **IM objectives for moose population size of** 7,600–9,300 **and a harvest of** 400–550 **moose.**

G) **Month and year the current predation control program was originally authorized by the Board:** March 2004. **Indicate date(s) if renewed:** March 2009; Modified March 2012; February 2014.

H) **Predation control is** currently active (wolf control) and inactive (bear control) **in this IM area**.

I) **If active, month and year the current predation control program began:** December 2004 for wolves, July 2012 (regulatory year 2012) for bears.

J) **A habitat management program funded by the Department or from other sources is currently active in this IM area:** No.

K) **Size of IM program area (square miles) and geographic description:** Unit 19A is 9,972 mi^2.

L) **Size and geographic description of area for assessing ungulate abundance:** The Wolf Control Focus Area (WCFA) is 3,905 mi^2; Unit 19A Bear Control Focus Area (BCFA) is 534 mi^2.

M) **Size and geographic description of area for ungulate harvest reporting:** WCFA is 3,905 mi^2.

N) **Size and geographic description of area for assessing predator abundance:** WCFA is 3,905 mi^2; Unit 19A Bear Control Focus Area (BCFA) is 534 mi^2.

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[1] For purpose and context of this report format, see *Intensive Management Protocol, section on Tools for Program Implementation and Assessment*

O) **Size and geographic description of predation control area:** WCFA is 3,905 mi^2 for wolves ; BCFA is 534 mi^2 for bears.

P) **Criteria for evaluating progress toward IM objectives:** moose abundance and harvest.

Q) **Criteria for success with this program:** BCFA abundance=2.0 moose/mi^2 (~1,100 moose); and WCFA harvest=120 moose.

R) **Department recommendation for IM program in this reporting period**: Continue program **(details provided in section 6).**
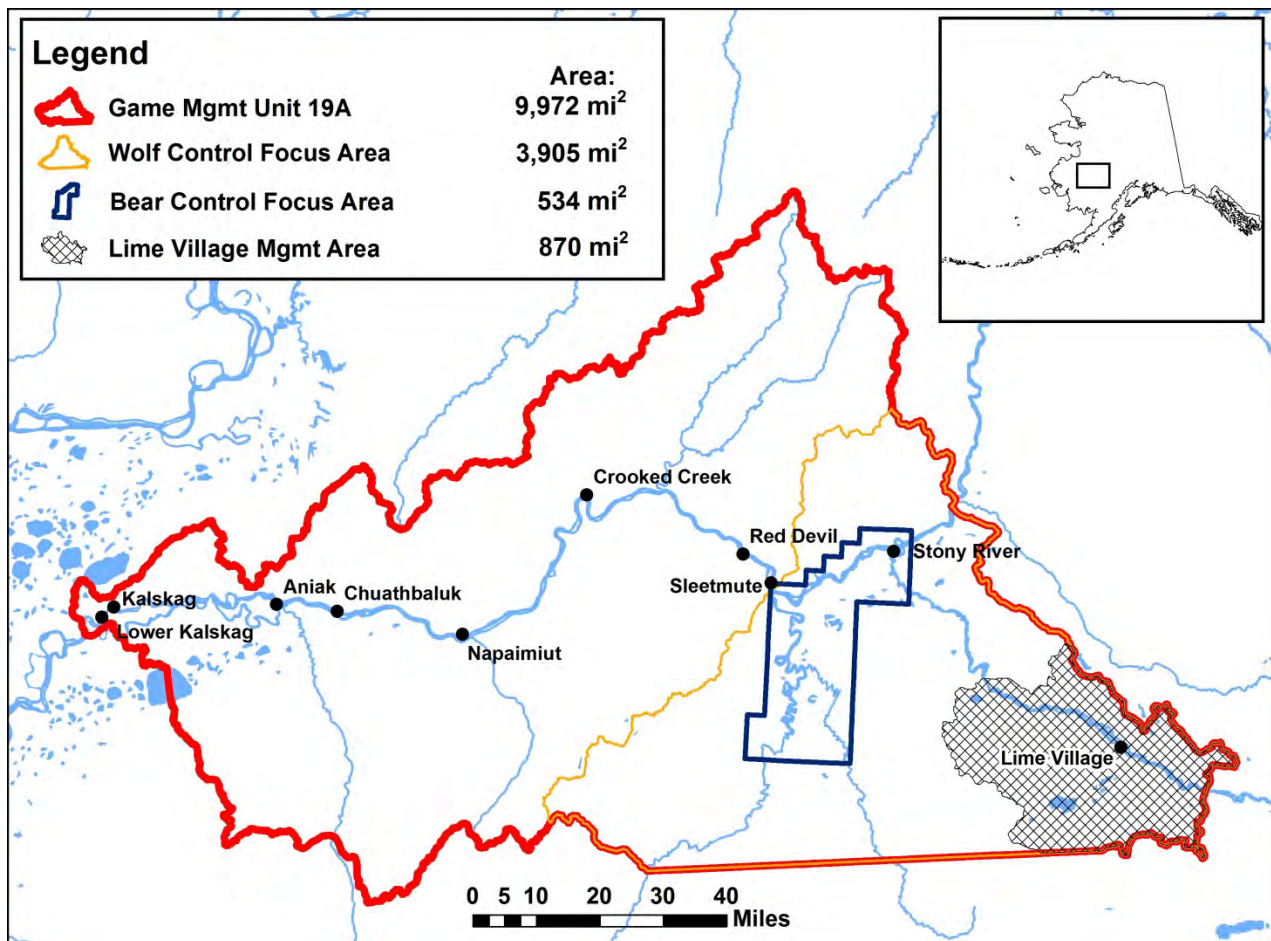

Figure 1. Unit 19A intensive management area and wolf and bear control focus areas.

2) **Prey data**

Date(s) and method of most recent abundance assessment for moose: March 2017 Geospatial moose population estimate (GSPE) in WCFA and BCFA.

Compared to IM area, was a similar trend and magnitude of difference in abundance observed in nearby non-treatment area(s) since program inception: Non-treatment area not established.

Date(s) of most recent age and sex composition survey: November 2019, east-west line transects in Holitna-Hoholitna Drainages.

Compared to IM area, was a similar composition trend and magnitude of difference in composition observed in nearby non-treatment area(s) since program inception: Non-treatment area not established.

Table 1. **Moose abundance, age and sex composition in Wolf Control Focus Area (<u>WCFA</u>) or Bear Control Focus Area (BCFA) since program implementation in year 1. Regulatory year is 1 July to 30 June (e.g, Regulatory Year 2004 is 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005).**

Period	Regulatory Year	Abundance (variation)[a]	Composition (number per 100 females)[b]		
			Calves	Bulls	Total n
Year 1	2004	WCFA: 1,085 moose (± 17%; 90% CI)	--	--	--
Year 2	2005	--	24	8	307
Year 3	2006	--	--	--	--
Year 4	2007	WCFA: 1,703 moose (± 28%; 90% CI)	45	35	200
Year 5	2008	--	27	34	124
Year 6	2009	--	36	51	129
Year 7	2010	WCFA: 1,666 moose (± 36%; 90% CI) with scf[c]	19	48	212
Year 8	2011	--	31	38	164
Year 9	2012	--	--	--	--
Year 10[d]	2013	BCFA: 798 moose (±13.6%; 90% CI) with scf[c]	50	55	244
Year 11	2014	--	--	--	--
Year 12	2015	--	--	--	--
Year 13	2016	BCFA: 728 moose (±11%; 90% CI) with scf[c] WCFA: 2,030 (±11%; 90% CI) with scf[c]	55	58	273
Year 14	2017	--	34	36	300
Year 15	2018	--	40	52	343
Year 16	2019	--	21	40	275

[a]February-March GSPE surveys are observable moose, not corrected for sightability unless denoted with scf (with sightability correction factor).
[b]November line transect surveys conducted within the BCFA.
[c]Sightability Correction Factor.
[d]GSPE conducted in BCFA only.

Describe trend in abundance or composition: Moose densities are still low but have improved since control began in RY04.

Table 2. Moose harvest in Wolf Control Focus Area (WCFA) since program implementation in year 1 to year 14. Regulatory year is 1 July to 30 June (e.g, Regulatory Year 2004 is 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005).

Period	Regulatory Year	Reported Harvest		Total harvest	Other mortality[a]	Total
		Male	Female			
Year 1	2004	37	--	37	--	37
Year 2	2005	42	--	42	--	42
Year 3	2006	1[b]	--	1	0	1
Year 4	2007	2[b]	--	2	0	2
Year 5	2008	1[b]	--	1	4	5
Year 6	2009	1[b]	--	1	1	2
Year 7	2010	3[b]	--	3	0	3
Year 8	2011	2[b]	--	2	2	4
Year 9	2012	2[b]	--	2	0	2
Year 10	2013	3[b]	--	2	1	3
Year 11	2014	2[b]	--	2	3	5
Year 12	2015	3[b]	--	3	5	8
Year 13	2016	2[b]	--	2	1	3
Year 14	2017	2[b]	--	2	2	4
Year 15	2018	0[b]	--	0	2	2
Year 16	2019[c]	9	--	9	--	9

[a]Mortuary harvest; other permitted harvest
[b]Hunting season closed, except within the Lime Village Management Area
[c]Preliminary results

Describe trend in harvest: Declined due to hunting season closure in most of the WCFA

Describe any other harvest related trend if appropriate: None

3) Predator data

Wolves

Date(s) and method of most recent spring abundance assessment for wolves in the WCFA: March 2019, department survey.

Date(s) and method of most recent fall abundance assessment for wolves in the WCFA: None.

Other research or evidence of trend or abundance status in wolves: Pre-control wolf estimate was modeled at 75 wolves in the WCFA.

Table 3. Wolf abundance and removal in Wolf Control Focus Area (WCFA) since program implementation in year 1. Removal objective is to reduce wolf numbers as low as possible in the WCFA and to maintain 25–30 in all of Unit 19A to ensure wolves persist in the unit. The fall regulatory year 2014 modeled wolf population estimate for all of Unit 19A is 88-118. Regulatory year is 1 July to 30 June (e.g, Regulatory Year 2004 is 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005).

Period	Regulatory Year	Fall abundance[a]	Harvest removal Trap	Harvest removal Hunt	Dept. control removal	Public control removal	Total removal	Spring abundance
Year 1	2004	--	3	0	0	40	43	--
Year 2	2005	43–45	2	0	0	36	38	5–7[b]
Year 3	2006	--	0	0	0	7	7	--
Year 4	2007	27	0	3	0	12	15	12[b]
Year 5	2008	--	1	0	0	19	20	--
Year 6	2009	--	0	0	0	2	2	--
Year 7	2010	30	1	0	0	10	11	19[b]
Year 8	2011	21	0	0	0	8	8	13[c]
Year 9	2012	24	2	0	0	0	2	22[c]
Year 10	2013	32	2	0	0	6	8	24[c]
Year 11	2014	27	4	1	0	2	7	20[c]
Year 12	2015	--	2	0	0	0	2	--
Year 13	2016	--	1	0	0	14	15	--
Year 14	2017	--	2	0	0	1	3	--
Year 15	2018	70	2	0	0	8	10	60[b]
Year 16	2019[d]	--	0	0	0	0	0	

[a]Calculated by subtracting total removal from WCFA spring abundance during each RY.
[b]Abundance based on aerial reconnaissance survey.
[c]Abundance based on private pilot and department biologist observations.
[d]Preliminary data.

Black Bears

Date(s) and method of most recent spring abundance assessment for black bears in the BCFA: May 2013, based on removal estimator.

Date(s) and method of most recent fall abundance assessment for black bears in the BCFA: None.

Other research or evidence of trend or abundance status in black bears: Estimated population of 2,500–3,000 black bears in Unit 19A. Based on research results from 19D, black bears have likely recovered to precontrol numbers. Request for funding has been made to reassess black bear numbers in the BCFA.

MILLER S., G.C. WHITE, R.A. SELLERS, H.V. REYNOLDS, J.W. SCHOEN, K. TITUS, V.G. BARNES, JR., R.B. SMITH, R.R. NELSON, W.B. BALLARD, AND C.C. SCHWARTZ. 1997. Brown and black bear density estimation in Alaska using radiotelemetry and replicated mark–resight techniques. *Wildlife Monographs* 133.

BOUDREAU T.A. 2005. Units 19, 21A and 21E black bear management report. Pages 218–222 *in* C. Brown, editor. Black bear management report of survey and inventory activities 1 July 2001–30 June 2004. Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Project 17.0. Juneau, Alaska.

Table 4. **Black bear abundance and removal in Bear Control Focus Area (BCFA) since bear control was implemented in Year 9. Removal objective is to reduce bear numbers as low as possible within the BCFA when control is active. The spring regulatory year 2012 estimated black bear population for all of Unit 19A is 2,500–3,000. Regulatory year is 1 July to 30 June (e.g. Regulatory Year 2004 is 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005).**

Period	Regulatory Year	Spring abundance (95% CI)	Harvest removal[d]		Dept. control removal		Total removal	Fall abundance
			FA[a]	SP[b]	FA[a]	SP[b]		
Year 9	2012	92–102[c]	0	1	0	84	85	12
Year 10	2013	--	0	0	0	54	54	--
Year 11	2014	--	0	0	0	0	0	--
Year 12	2015	--	2	1	0	0	3	--
Year 13	2016	--	2	0	0	0	2	--
Year 14	2017	--	0	0	0	0	0	--
Year 15	2018	--	0	0	0	0	0	--
Year 16	2019[e]	--	0	0	0	0	0	--

[a]Fall
[b]Spring
[c]Independent bears
[d]sealing not required
[e]Preliminary data

Brown Bears

Date(s) and method of most recent spring abundance assessment for brown bears in the BCFA: May 2013, modeled based on known bear densities in similar habitats.

Date(s) and method of most recent fall abundance assessment for brown bears in the BCFA: None.

Other research or evidence of trend or abundance status in black bears: Estimated population of 200 brown bears in Unit 19A is based on known bear densities in similar habitats in other game management units in Interior Alaska.

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Table 5. **Brown bear abundance and removal in Bear Control Focus Area (BCFA) since bear control was implemented in Year 9. Removal objective is to reduce bear numbers as low as possible within the BCFA when control is active. The Spring regulatory year 2012 estimated brown bear population for all of Unit 19A is 200. Regulatory year is 1 July to 30 June (e.g. Regulatory Year 2004 is 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005).**

Period	Regulatory Year	Spring abundance (95% CI)	Harvest removal		Dept. control removal		Total removal	Fall abundance
			FA[a]	SP[b]	FA[a]	SP[b]		
Year 9	2012	10–15[c]	0	0	0	5	5	--
Year 10	2013	--	0	0	0	10	10	--
Year 11	2014	--	0	0	0	0	0	--
Year 12	2015	--	0	0	0	0	0	--
Year 13	2016	--	0	0	0	0	0	--
Year 14	2017	--	0	0	0	0	0	--
Year 15	2018	--	0	0	0	0	0	--
Year 16	2019[d]	--	0	0	0	0	0	--

[a]Fall
[b]Spring
[c]Based on known bear densities in similar habitats
[d]Preliminary data

4) Habitat data and nutritional condition of prey species

Where active habitat enhancement is occurring or was recommended in the Operational Plan, describe progress toward objectives: No active habitat enhancement.

Table 6. Nutritional indicators for moose in Wolf Control Focus Area (WCFA) since program implementation. Regulatory year is 1 July to 30 June (e.g, Regulatory Year 2004 is 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005).

Period	Regulatory Year	Twinning Rate % (*n*)
Year 1	2004	43% (7)
Year 2	2005	--
Year 3	2006	64% (11)
Year 4	2007	75% (4)
Year 5	2008	--
Year 6	2009	--
Year 7	2010	--
Year 8	2011	--
Year 9	2012	56% (41)
Year 10	2013	63% (48)
Year 11	2014	--
Year 12	2015	--
Year 13	2016	--
Year 14	2017	65% (40)
Year 15	2018	

5) Costs specific to implementing Intensive Management

Table 7. Unit 19A cost ($1,000 = 1.0) of agency salary based on estimate of proportional time of field level staff and cost of operations for intensive management activities (e.g., predator control or habitat enhancement) performed by personnel in the Department or work by other state agencies (e.g., Division of Forestry) or contractors in Unit 19A beginning in year 7.

Period	Fiscal Year[a]	Predation control[b] Time[c]	Predation control[b] Cost[d]	Other IM activities Time[c]	Other IM activities Cost[d]	Total IM cost	Research cost[e]
Year 7	2011	0.4	3.5	5.2	47.2	50.7	0.0
Year 8	2012	0.5	3.9	2.0	31.8	35.7	0.0
Year 9	2013	9.7	408.7	2.0	29.2	437.9	0.0
Year 10	2014	17.3	260.3	0.6	41.8	302.1	0.0
Year 11	2015	1.4	11.4	0.4	5.0	16.4	0.0
Year 12	2016	1.4	9.5	0.4	5.0	14.5	0.0
Year 13	2017	1.4	9.5	1.0	88.5	98.0	0.0
Year 14	2018	0.1	1.1	0.9	14.1	15.2	0.0
Year 16	2019	0.5	4.3	5.3	169.0	173.3	0.0

[a]Fiscal year (FY) is 1 July to 30 June but the year is one greater than the comparable regulatory year (e.g, Fiscal Year 2011 is 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011).
[b]State or private funds only.
[c]Person-months (22 days per month)
[d]Salary plus operations. Beginning in Fiscal Year 2019, Other IM activities includes normal survey and inventory work, which is typically more robust in an IM program than standard survey and inventory work.
[e]Separate from implementing IM program but beneficial for understanding of ecological or human response to management treatment (scientific approach that is not unique to IM).

6) Evaluation for program renewal following Year 16 (February 2020) and Department recommendations for Unit 19A.

Has progress toward defined criteria been achieved? Moose densities are still low, but increasing in the WCFA.

Has achievement of success criteria occurred? No, the population and harvest objectives have not been met.

Recommendation for IM program: Continue.

Rationale for recommendation on overall program: Moose numbers have improved slightly in the WCFA since IM began in 2004. In regulatory year 2019 a limited hunt opened in Unit 19A remainder for the first time since 2005 to take advantage of the small harvestable surplus that is now available. This predation control program expires June 30, 2020 and will be reevaluated at the Region III Board of Game meeting in March, 2020.