



NEWS RELEASE



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Wolf harvest season announced for GMU 2, new process explained

CRAIG, Alaska – Biologists with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), announce that the state and federal hunting and trapping seasons for wolf in Game Management Unit (GMU) 2 will close at 11:59 pm on Jan. 15, 2020.

Management of wolf harvest on Prince of Wales and associated islands, collectively known as GMU 2, was based on a harvest quota and in-season harvest monitoring prior to 2019. When harvest approached the quota, ADF&G and the USFS would close the season by emergency order. This strategy resulted in unpredictable and often short trapping seasons. Trappers noted this strategy limited their flexibility to plan, and at times, has forced them to go out in unfavorable weather conditions to close their traplines in compliance with emergency orders.

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 a new strategy that would provide the flexibility and responsibility the trappers desired while sustainably managing harvest of this high-profile, wolf population.

The new strategy manages harvest of GMU 2 wolves by adjusting trapping season length based on ADF&G's most recent wolf population estimate and its relation to the established population objective. At their January 2019 meeting in Petersburg, the Alaska Board of Game altered harvest regulations to implement this strategy by establishing a GMU 2 wolf population objective of 150-200 wolves, endorsing ADF&G's harvest management plan, and aligning the opening dates for the state and federal trapping seasons (Nov. 15).

In August of this year, the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB) approved a temporary special action request by the Southeast Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council to remove regulatory language referencing "a combined Federal-State harvest quota" for wolves in Unit 2 for the 2019-2020 regulatory year. The board also changed the wolf sealing period, the ADF&G monitoring process of placing a tag or seal on harvested animals, in Unit 2 to within 30 days of the end of the season. These FSB actions will promote coordinated management of wolves between ADF&G, and hunters and trappers using the new harvest strategy.

The new harvest management strategy is based on estimating the abundance of GMU 2 wolves. Because dense forest cover makes estimating wolf numbers from aerial surveys impractical, ADF&G, with support from the USFS, estimates wolf abundance in GMU 2 using a DNA-based mark-recapture technique. In fall 2018, ADF&G used the same large, northern and central Prince of Wales Island study area as in 2014-2017. ADF&G also collaborated with the Hydaburg Cooperative Association (HCA) and the Nature Conservancy (TNC) to establish an additional study area, monitored by HCA and TNC staff, adjacent to the southern and western boundary of the original study area. This collaboration expanded the study area to approximately 80% of Prince of Wales Island and over 60% of the land area of GMU 2.

Data collected from October through December 2018 resulted in a GMU 2-wide population estimate of 170 wolves, with high confidence that the actual number of wolves in GMU 2 prior to the autumn 2018 hunting and trapping seasons was within the range, 147 to 202 wolves. This is the most current population estimate. The autumn 2018 estimate was lower than estimates in fall 2016 (231 wolves) and fall 2017 (225 wolves), but well within the population objective range of 150-200 wolves established by the Board of Game. Under the new harvest management plan, when the most current population estimate (170) is within the objective range (150-200) the trapping season may be up to two months long.

The new wolf harvest strategy, built on the cooperative spirit among the ADF&G, the Federal Subsistence Board, and GMU 2 hunters and trappers, offers the full two months of wolf trapping opportunity allowed under the management plan for the 2019-2020 season. State and federal trapping seasons will both open on Nov. 15, 2019, and close on Jan. 15, 2020. The federal wolf hunting season in GMU 2 opened on Sept. 1, 2019, but the state wolf hunting season will not open until Dec. 1, 2019. State and federal GMU 2 wolf hunting seasons will also close on Jan. 15, 2020. Hunters and trappers are reminded that the goal of the new GMU 2 wolf harvest management strategy is to maintain the fall wolf population within the range of 150-200 wolves.

Please call the ADF&G Ketchikan area office at 907-225-2475 for more information. For more information from the U.S. Forest Service, please call District Ranger Scot Shuler at 907-826-1600. 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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