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STATE OF ALASKA
Steve Cowper, Governor

DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
Don W. Collinsworth, Commissioner

DIVISION OF GAME
W. Lewis Pamplin, Jr., Director
Steven R. Peterson, Research Chief

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Publications Technician
ADF&G, Game Division
P.O. Box 3-2000
Juneau, AK 99802
(907) 465-4190

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ARCTIC OCEAN

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STATEWIDE HARVEST AND POPULATION STATUS

Elk are hunted in Alaska only on Raspberry and Afognak Islands in Unit 8. A new population of 50 elk was transplanted to Etolin Island (GMU 3) this past year. Presently no hunting for elk is allowed in GMU 3. Although some groups of elk in GMU 8 are declining in number, the elk population as a whole continues to be at a relatively high level, with over 1,300 elk present.

Harvest by hunters was relatively high and near established harvest quotas. One hunt was closed by emergency order to prevent overharvesting, and the western Afognak registration hunt was separated from the northwestern Afognak registration hunt to help reduce the harvest in that area. Total elk harvest was 169, including 111 bulls, 48 cows, and 10 of unknown sex.

Donald E. McKnight
Acting Deputy Director

ELK

SURVEY-INVENTORY PROGRESS REPORT

GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT: 8

GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION: Kodiak and adjacent islands

PERIOD COVERED: 1 July 1986-30 June 1987

Season and Bag Limit

See Hunting Regulations No. 27.

Population Status and Trend

The pre hunting-season population of elk on Afognak and Raspberry Islands was estimated to exceed 1,300 animals. Herds on Raspberry Island and western Afognak Island have increased slightly. A stable-to-declining trend was indicated in herds on eastern Afognak Island.

Radio collars were deployed on 8 mature female elk on eastern Afognak Island in 1986, with the objective of improving aerial-survey accuracy and establishing individual herd identities. Initial results indicate that 4 distinct herds occur in the area. The radio-collared animals facilitated locating the herds, but dense timber often precluded accurate aerial counts. A previously suspected decline in elk herds in eastern Afognak Island was verified: from 400 or more in the late 1970's to an estimated 190-230 elk.

Population Composition

Sex- and age-composition surveys were flown in August, and 993 elk were classified in 10 hours: 100 bulls (9%), 628 cows (67%), and 265 calves (24%) (Table 1).

Mortality

Hunters killed 169 elk, including 111 males (66%), 48 females (28%), and 10 elk of unknown sex (6%). Six hundred twenty permittees reported hunting, and 27% were successful.

On northeastern Afognak Island (Registration Hunt 750), 116 hunters reported killing 5 elk, including 3 males (66%), 1 female (17%), and 1 elk of unknown sex (17%). Hunter success was 4%.

On southwestern Afognak Island (Registration Hunt 751), 151 hunters killed 57 elk, including 47 males (82%), 4 females (7%), and 6 elk of unknown sex (11%). Hunter success was 38%. An additional 44 elk (15 males, 22 females, and 7 of unknown sex) were killed in an accidental fall from a cliff near Malina Bay during late October. Although the precise circumstances of the accident could not be determined, it appeared as though the elk fell to their death when they tried to descend a near-vertical cliff while being pursued by hunters. The hunting season was then closed by emergency order on 28 October 1986.

On northwestern Afognak Island (Registration Hunt 752), 243 hunters killed 52 elk, including 31 males (60%), 18 females (35%), and 3 elk of unknown sex (6%). Hunter success was 20%.

On Raspberry Island (Registration Hunt 702), 110 hunters killed 55 elk, including 30 males (55%) and 25 females (45%). Hunter success was 50%.

A minimum of 8 additional elk were illegally killed on Afognak Island in 1986. Hunters were charged with violations in 3 separate incidents. Natural mortality during the 1986-87 winter was apparently light.

Management Summary and Recommendations

The total reported kill of 169 elk in 1986 was less than that of the previous season (200 elk). Hunters afield declined from 765 in 1985 to 620 in 1986. The reduced harvest and hunting pressure in 1986 resulted from (1) shorter seasons and (2) the closure by emergency order of the hunting season on southwestern Afognak.

The designation of northeastern (Registration Hunt 750) and northwestern Afognak Island (Registration Hunt 752) as individual management areas and the subsequent assignment of different hunting seasons to each area (15 September-31 October and 15 September-30 November, respectively) resulted in reduced takes from both areas. An expected increase in hunting pressure in northwestern Afognak as a response to more conservative regulations on the rest of Afognak Island and on Raspberry Island did not occur. Additional harvest could be supported in northwestern Afognak Island, and the lengthening of the hunting season by 1 month is recommended.

On northeastern Afognak where elk numbers have declined, only 5 elk were killed. Conservative regulations should be maintained in this area until an increasing-population trend is evident.

On southwestern Afognak Island (Registration Hunt 751), the documented mortality was 103 elk, or nearly 32% of the 322 elk observed during the 1986 composition count. However, only 26 females were killed, which is well below the female harvest quota of 40. High hunter density probably contributed to the death of 44 elk that fell from a cliff. This hunt has generated considerable public dissatisfaction with the crowded hunting conditions and unethical hunting practices; e.g., herd shooting, harvesting over the limit, and not pursuing wounded animals. It is recommended that permit numbers be limited and that individual hunters be assigned to specific periods in 1987.

The change from a registration to a drawing-permit hunt on Raspberry Island (Hunt 702) provided a more orderly hunt in 1986. Although 49% (27/55) of the kill occurred on opening day, the incidences of herd shooting, party hunting, and wanton wasting of meat were less than those reported in 1985. Public satisfaction with the hunt was generally high. As a prerequisite to continuation of the drawing hunt, I recommend that hunters be assigned to specific hunting periods to reduce hunter density.

PREPARED BY:

Roger B. Smith
Game Biologist III

SUBMITTED BY:

Carl A. Grauvogel
Survey-Inventory Coordinator

Table 1. Elk composition counts in Game Management Unit 8 on Raspberry and Afognak Islands, 1986.

Hunt area	Males	Females	Calves	Calves: 100 cows	Total
Raspberry Island (Hunt No. 702)	24	135	52	39:100	211
N&E Afognak Island (Hunt No. 750)	9	60	25	42:100	94
SW Afognak Island (Hunt No. 751)	52	187	83	44:100	322
NW Afognak Island (Hunt No. 752)	15	246	105	30:100	366
Totals	100	628	265	36:100	993