

Chapter 1: Introduction

Anchorage is a city with abundant wildlife, including hundreds of moose and both black and brown bears -- animals that no other cities of 260,000 people can boast as their own. Extensive natural areas in and around the city provide habitat for these and other species, including Dall sheep, mountain goats, wolves, wolverines, coyotes, lynx, beavers, bald eagles and other raptors, loons, swans and other waterfowl, shorebirds, and numerous species of migratory and resident songbirds. Marine mammal species, including beluga whales, are also present in the nearby waters of Cook Inlet.

These distinctive wildlife populations offer outstanding recreational opportunities to Anchorage residents and visitors, contributing to a quality of life unmatched in urban areas across the nation. Many of these species are also valued as symbols of wild Alaska, and most Anchorage residents have some appreciation for the wildlife that live here. Wildlife is truly an integral part of the Anchorage community.

As Anchorage continues to grow, however, interactions between wildlife and people are also increasing, leading to some conflicts. Burgeoning moose populations present hazards to drivers on slick winter roads, they can damage considerable amounts of landscaping and gardens in summer, and they may become dangerously aggressive towards humans in certain situations. Similarly, geese and other waterfowl damage lawns, ball fields and golf courses, and present risks to aircraft. Attracted to food sources available in human environments, bears, coyotes and wolves also pose increasing risks to people or their pets, or become “nuisance” animals, some of which are killed by residents or authorities each year.

In addition to conflicts between people and wildlife, growth in Anchorage has also diminished or degraded some types of natural habitat and increased lawn and other “urban habitats,” changing wildlife population levels, wildlife behavior, or relationships between wildlife species. Wildlife dependent upon freshwater wetlands, for example, have decreased in the past several decades, while increased populations of exotic species such as starlings and pigeons may out-compete or spread disease among native bird species.

The obvious management goal is to enhance the benefits of wildlife while minimizing wildlife-related problems. However, this can be challenging. Urban settings provide uneven patterns of land use and wildlife habitat, and the actions of different landowners, government agencies, and the public may have profound effects on wildlife populations and behavior. In addition, there is considerable diversity of opinion among urban residents about how people should live with wildlife. As Anchorage continues to grow, changes in wildlife habitat and species are inevitable; the challenge is to manage that change so that both people and wildlife benefit.

This plan is the first step in trying to meet this challenge. Offering a broad vision for wildlife management in Anchorage, the plan is a pioneering attempt to coordinate and integrate decisions by local, state, and federal government. Initiated by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the plan has been developed by a team of people from a variety of local, state, and federal agencies with wildlife responsibilities, as well as people from other wildlife-related interest groups and the general public. The plan outlines general wildlife management goals for the Municipality, and then identifies actions and policies that may help Anchorage residents enjoy and minimize problems with the city’s wildlife.



WILLIAM GOSSWEILER

Why does Anchorage need a wildlife plan?

While many cities have wildlife management issues, few have developed comprehensive plans addressing multiple species. Although some people question the need to formally coordinate wildlife decision-making in Anchorage, there are several compelling reasons for this planning effort.

Wildlife are a valued part of Anchorage life. A recent survey of Anchorage residents suggests that wildlife makes Anchorage “interesting and special,” even if it causes some problems. There is probably no other large city in North America with similar populations of large animals and diverse migratory birds. This plan is a pioneering attempt to ensure that a large and growing city can enjoy and maintain its wildlife.

Development and human population growth have decreased some kinds of wildlife habitat. Anchorage has grown dramatically in the past few decades, and this growth has resulted in considerable loss of open space and wildlife habitat. Well over half of the area’s wetlands have been lost to development since the 1950s, there has been considerable loss of spruce forest, and riparian, or streamside, areas have also been degraded from pollution and development. A plan is needed to identify and protect the important habitat that remains, including tracts of undeveloped natural areas and the corridors that link them.

Increasing demand and funding for wildlife recreation. Demand for wildlife-related recreation opportunities has been increasing in recent years, and a significant increase in federal funding for these appears likely. Cities with developed plans will be poised to capture and efficiently use these funds.

Development favors certain generalist species that out-compete others or become nuisance wildlife. Increased development has created new ecological niches that favor generalist species (e.g., pigeons, starlings, Canada geese, gulls and feral rabbits) that do well in urban settings. Some of these species out-compete native species, or amass in numbers that create conflicts with people.

Increased human-wildlife conflicts. There have been increasing human-wildlife conflicts in Anchorage as more people, more development, and increasing numbers of some wildlife species (particularly moose, bears, and geese) share the same environment. Potential actions to address some of these issues (e.g., hunts, lethal responses) are controversial, while others require coordinated public efforts to be effective (e.g., education programs to minimize bear or geese attractants, or landscaping that reduces nuisance wildlife situations).

Need for coordinated wildlife management. There are multiple agencies in Anchorage with wildlife-related responsibilities, or whose decisions affect wildlife-related problems. Coordination between them is currently *ad hoc*. Wildlife do not recognize agency jurisdictions or land management boundaries, so what happens in one part of the city can affect how wildlife behave somewhere else. The plan provides a formal mechanism for developing a consensus vision and coordinating actions. The public does not care how agencies divide wildlife responsibilities, but they do care that those responsibilities are met. This plan can help.

Need to develop and share wildlife information. Planning efforts provide an impetus to collect, organize, and share wildlife information that is crucial to making good resource decisions.

Integration with the Municipality's Comprehensive and Open Space plans. The Municipality is in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan, as well as the affiliated Parks, Recreation and Greenbelt Plan, which will affect a number of land use patterns and policies in the area. This is an excellent opportunity to integrate wildlife concerns into that effort. It is proposed that this plan be adopted as a part of the Comprehensive Plan.

Need for a long-term vision for wildlife. If government is going to be an agent for positive change, it needs to avoid the "tyranny of small decisions." This requires a formal process that can be used to develop a broad vision, set long term goals and objectives, and collaborate with the wide range of wildlife interests present in a large city. This planning effort provides such an opportunity.



ALASKA DEPT. OF FISH & GAME

Plan Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to outline wildlife management goals and objectives, and identify priority actions that can be taken by local, state, and federal agencies to enhance the benefits of wildlife to the community while minimizing human-wildlife conflicts.

The plan is a “vision” document that attempts to outline common goals for Anchorage wildlife management. However, it is important to recognize that the plan will not be the final word on Anchorage wildlife decision-making. Instead, the plan is intended to provide a framework for agency-specific decisions. Specific tasks in the plan include:

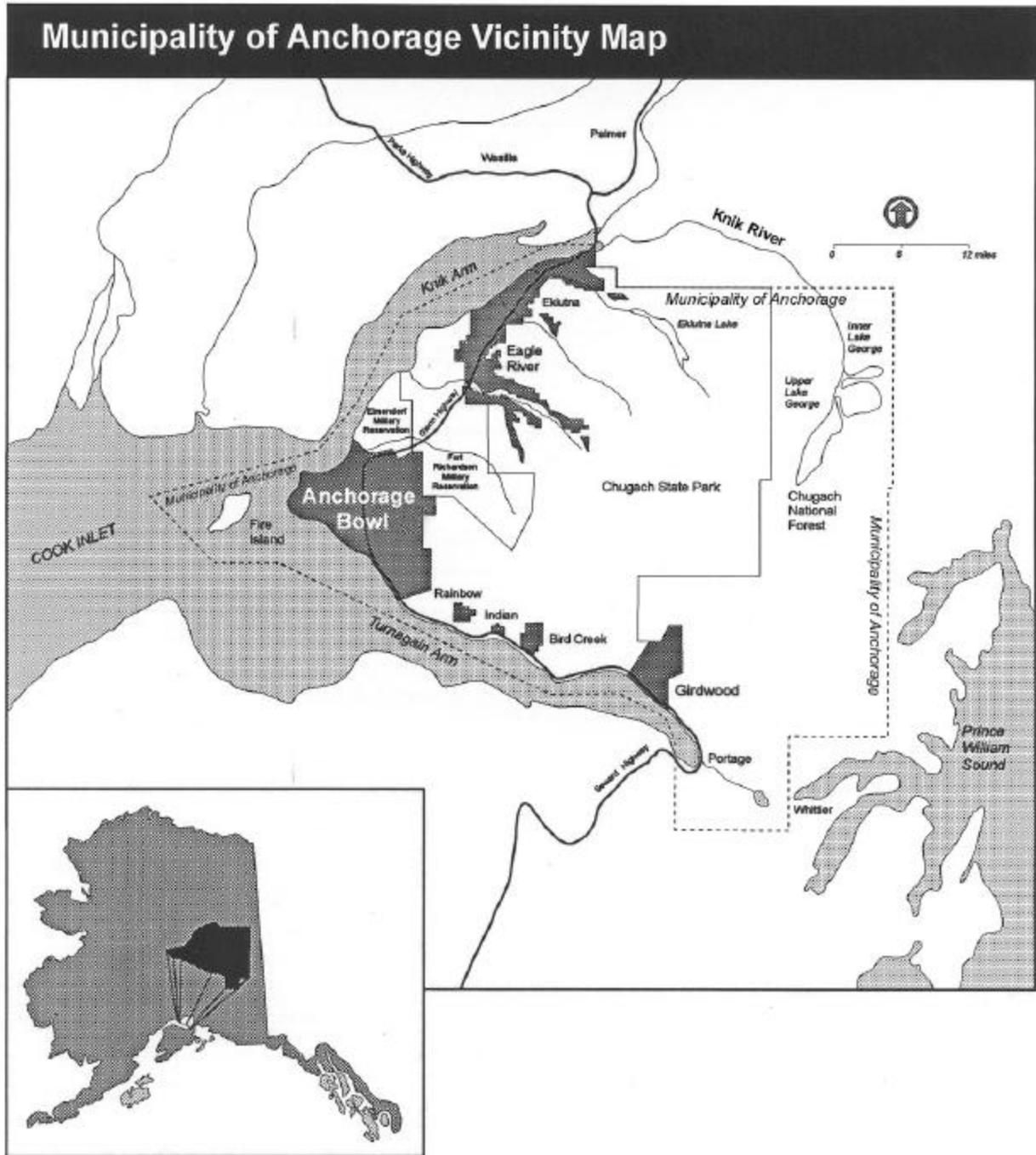
- Develop population goals for different wildlife species.
- Review actions that could reduce or enhance populations out of step with those levels.
- Develop thresholds for acceptable wildlife conflict levels and identify actions to minimize conflicts.
- Outline wildlife conflict response policies.
- Recommend a process for prioritizing desirable wildlife habitat to be conserved on public land.
- Develop/prioritize actions to encourage private land owners to protect critical habitat on their lands.
- Develop/prioritize projects that would increase wildlife recreation or education opportunities.

The plan is being developed by multiple agencies and interest groups, each with their own missions, regulations, policy guidelines, and bureaucracies. As a result, the plan will not be a legally binding list of agency policies and projects. Many actions in this plan will require greater specificity, the approval of other governmental agencies, and environmental compliance analysis before they can be implemented.

Instead, this plan should be considered a collaboratively developed “to do” list. After the plan is adopted, it will be up to Anchorage’s individual agencies and groups, as well as the public, to implement the actions identified and prioritized in these pages.

Geographic Area

The plan addresses the entire Municipality of Anchorage from the Knik River to Portage. This area includes Elmendorf Air Force Base, Fort Richardson, and Chugach State Park. However, the plan often focuses on wildlife issues in the Anchorage Bowl and other developed areas (e.g., Eagle River/Chugiak, Girdwood). The map on the following page shows the geographic boundaries of the plan.



Map 1. Anchorage and the Anchorage Bowl. The plan addresses the entire Municipality, but focuses on issues in the Anchorage Bowl and developed areas such as Eagle River/Chugiak and Girdwood. (Map courtesy of Municipality of Anchorage.)

Plan Limitations

As discussed above, the plan will not be legally binding. It is simply a collaborative attempt to identify the major wildlife management priorities in Anchorage. Because it covers the full range of wildlife management issues in the city, the plan is also limited in the level of specificity it provides for many actions or policies. Most actions in the plan will need to be developed in greater detail to assess public support, legal and physical constraints, potential environmental impacts, financial costs, and agency responsibilities.

The plan also limits its focus to terrestrial wildlife, and does not address fisheries and marine mammals. Parts of the plan, however, will address opportunities to integrate fish and wildlife management in Anchorage, in keeping with the principles of ecosystem management.



WILLIAM GOSSWEILER

Relationship of This Plan to Other Plans

This plan is designed to complement and complete the Municipality's Comprehensive Plan and the associated Parks, Recreation and Greenbelt Plan. In order to avoid duplicating the work being done in those efforts, this plan generally does not comment on detailed land use decisions and specific open space priorities. However, it does establish wildlife-related goals and objectives, and a list of recommended actions designed to be incorporated in the Municipality's plans. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) developed among the agencies (provided at the end of this plan), formally describes agency perspectives toward plan recommendations. Additional discussion of the Parks, Recreation and Greenbelt Plan is also provided in the Chapter 6 discussion of habitat actions.

This plan also supports actions associated with several other wildlife-related planning efforts already underway within Anchorage (e.g., the Anchorage Waterfowl Working Group; the planning and fund-raising effort to build the Potter Marsh Nature Center), or wildlife-related planning efforts which have been completed for other significant land tracts in the Municipality (e.g., Fort Richardson, Elmendorf Air Force Base, Chugach State Park, or BLM's Campbell Tract). In no case does this plan intend to duplicate or supplant those efforts, which are typically more detailed. When we have included information about those efforts or actions, our intent is to provide support for them, or help explain how they can be integrated into the city's larger wildlife management context.

Finally, as discussed under plan limitations, this plan does not address Anchorage fisheries management, which is covered by a series of other plans and documents. Accordingly, this plan supports several existing policies, including: the existing river and lake stocking plan (currently undergoing environmental review), the "natural rebuilding" salmon stocking plan for Chester Creek (as advocated by community councils), the general ADF&G policy addressing illegal introductions of northern pike or aquarium fish into area lakes and streams, and fishing regulations developed through the Board of Fish. In a few cases, however, this plan does identify areas where wildlife and fisheries management could be integrated to a greater extent. For example, this plan includes actions concerning the protection of loon and other bird nesting areas from lake users (including anglers, boaters, and photographers), and the need to educate recreation users about bear hazards along salmon streams. While fisheries in the Anchorage area might also benefit from a parallel effort that coordinated local, state, and federal planning, this is a lower regional priority for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, which would be the logical agency to lead such an effort.

Organization of this Document

The plan is divided into six chapters. **Chapter 2** summarizes **the planning process**. This describes the history of the planning effort, lists the involved agencies and interest groups, and reviews how the public was invited to participate. This chapter also details a list of “planning principles” that were used to guide decision-making in the plan.

Chapter 3 presents the **goals and objectives** of the plan. These are broad, value-based statements about the importance of wildlife in Anchorage and how it should be managed. These goals and objectives form the foundation of the plan.

Chapter 4 describes **the state of the Municipality’s wildlife in 1999**. It begins with a list of wildlife issues and describes area wildlife species, including estimated current population levels and planning team consensus about preferred population levels (or ranges). This chapter also provides some information from a recent survey of Municipality residents about wildlife issues, characterizing the state of public attitudes toward wildlife. Finally, the chapter ends with some wildlife conflict statistics and identifies standards that define acceptable levels of conflict.

Chapter 5 describes recommended **actions and policies** related to **wildlife population management and wildlife conflict responses**. It begins with separate sections on moose, bears, geese, and feral animal population management; it then defines conflict response policies (what is done after certain types of human-wildlife conflicts occur).

Chapter 6 describes forty **actions to enhance wildlife benefits or prevent wildlife conflicts**. This includes longer descriptions of a “top twenty-five” actions and shorter descriptions of fifteen other supported but lower priority actions. The top priority actions are grouped by the general goals they are designed to address, and short prefaces to these groups suggest how they can be integrated to achieve desired objectives. The chapter concludes with actions considered but rejected.

Finally, the **Memorandum of Understanding** closes out the document, identifying the public agencies and interest groups that are signatories to the plan, and formally describing their intention to help implement the plan as funding and other constraints allow.



JULIE WHITTAKER

Appendices list references, a list of wildlife species in Anchorage, a summary of wildlife population estimation methods, and a listing of acronyms used in this plan. Maps of critical habitat and wildlife concentration areas are published separately for the Municipality’s Parks, Recreation and Greenbelt Plan.