

Introduction

Diversity refers to differences among individuals, including their race/ethnicity, gender, age, religion, and culture. This is especially important in professions in order to broaden viewpoints and create an inclusive and equitable society that values and respects all individuals, regardless of their differences (Hofhuis et. al. 2016). In Alaska, the department of Fish and Game has been determined to have one of the lowest levels of diversity compared to every other major department in the state. The Alaska Chapter of The Wildlife Society asked if UAF could help explore diversity. The goal of this research project was to build an accurate understanding of diversity in the wildlife profession to identify areas which can be improved upon. I predicted that the agencies and non-governmental organizations would have similar levels of diversity to the department averages, and diversity would be higher at lower-level positions, as companies are likely trying to increase diversity levels as times are changing.



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Methods

Different private and public agencies and organizations specializing in wildlife-related work in Alaska were asked to share publicly-available data on their own employees' race/ethnicity (organized between either White/Caucasian or BIPOC [Black, indigenous, or person of color]), gender, age, and position. These agencies and organizations providing data include the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Alaska Biological Research, National Park Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, and The Nature Conservancy. The data was organized through Microsoft Excel, sorted by the previously mentioned parameters, and broken down by job level.

Literature Cited

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Swartz TH, Palermo A-GS, Masur SK, and Aberg JA. 2019. The Science and Value of Diversity: Closing Gaps in Our Understanding of Inclusion and Diversity. Journal of Infectious Diseases. 220:33-41.

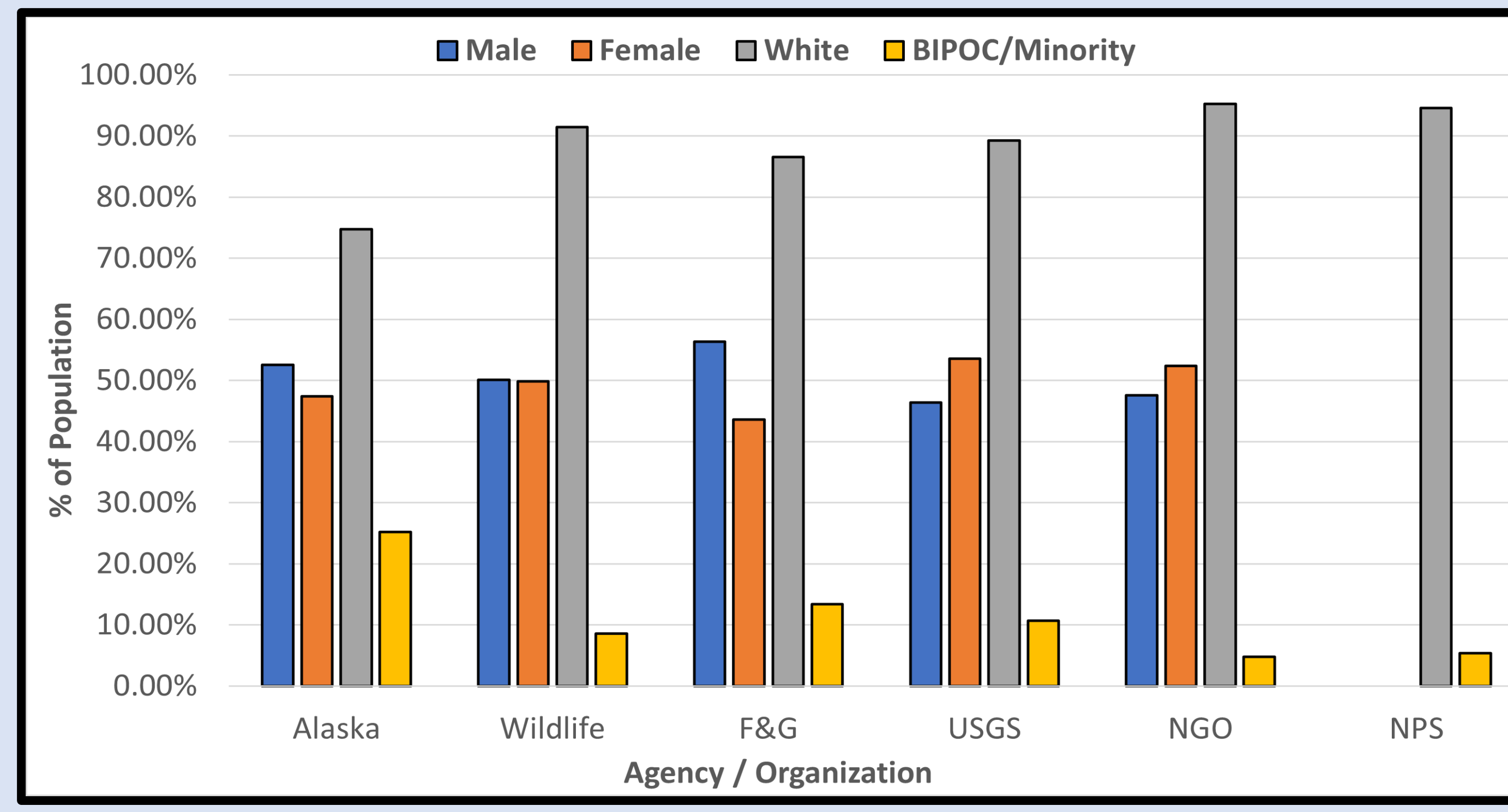


Figure 1. Levels of Diversity in Alaska from different agencies and organizations. Agencies from left to right are the Alaska state average, the wildlife profession average, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (F&G), the U.S Geological Survey (USGS), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), and the Alaska National Park Service (NPS).

Figure 2. Levels of Diversity at different agencies broken down by position level. Entry level is defined as being GS-8 (General Schedule) and below, mid-level between GS-9 and 11, and senior level is GS-12 and above. Federal agencies (USGS, NPS) provided GS level, NGO gave general position categories.

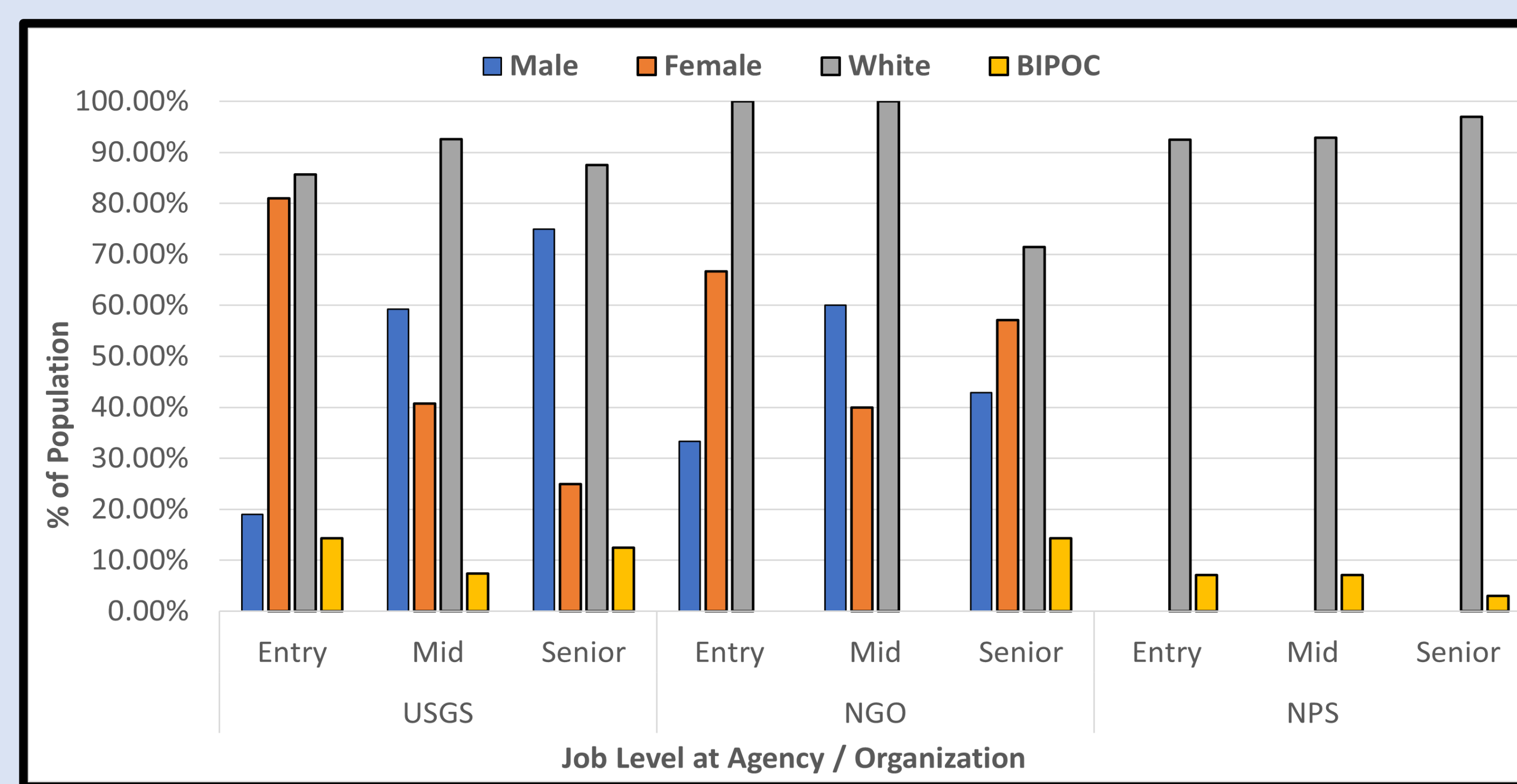
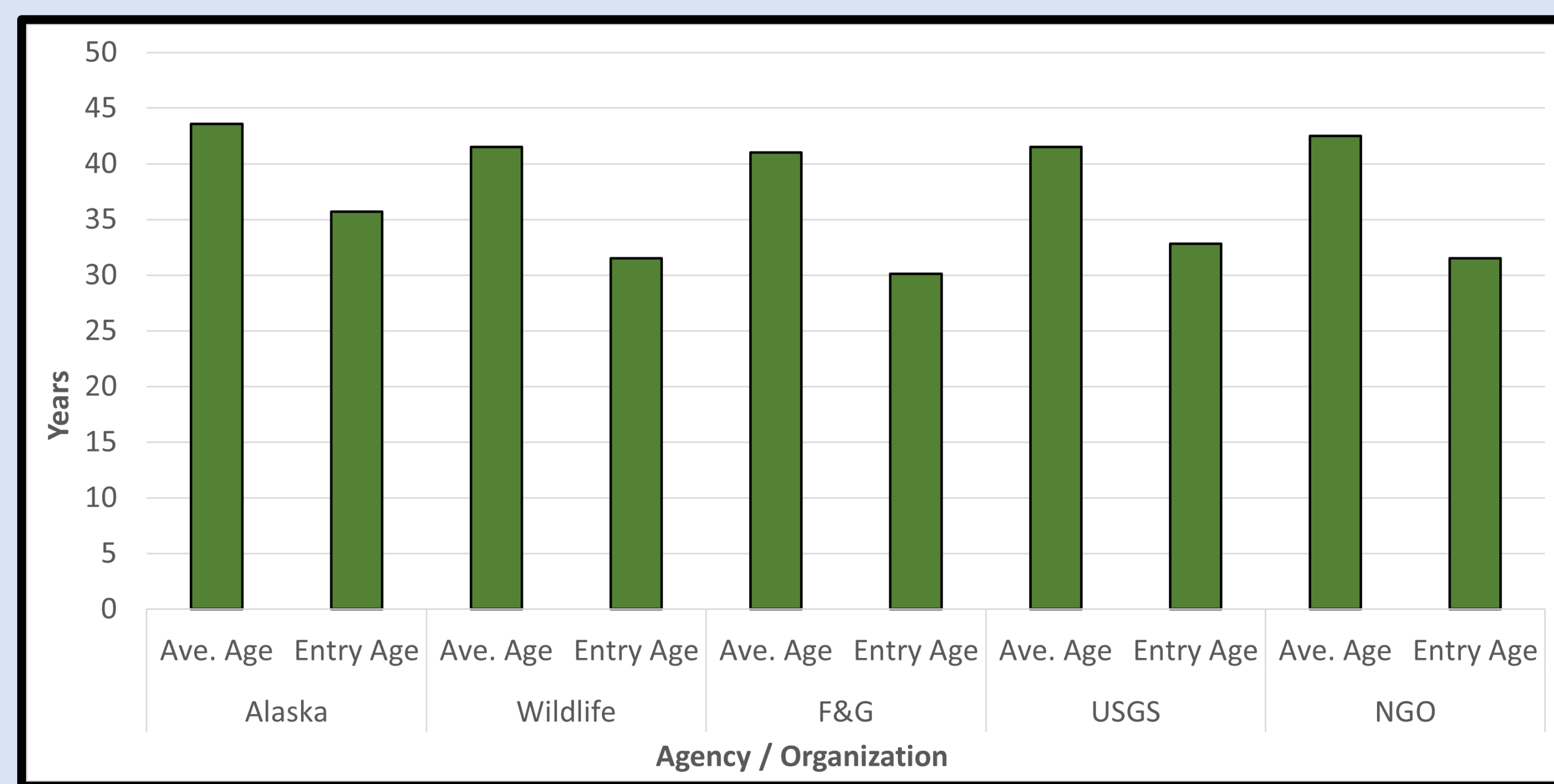


Figure 3. Average ages in each wildlife agency compared to average age at an entry-level position. Entry-level positions are defined as being a general schedule 8 (GS-8) and below.



Results

Pooling demographic data from the wildlife profession, as well as related agencies and organizations, the diversity within the wildlife profession does not match the overall Alaska population. All the agencies and organizations have significantly lower race/ethnicity diversity compared to the state average at around an 18% difference. Figure 2 shows the same data from Figure 1 broken down by position level and shows how varying levels of diversity are at different positions. There are no major discrepancies in race/ethnicity distributions, being mostly even throughout. There were gender differences, with a much higher distribution of women in entry-level positions. In figure 3, every agency has an average of around 10 years in difference between average and new hire age, showing that wildlife agencies provide opportunities to new workers in the profession.

Discussion

This research has provided novel and helpful insight into the overall levels of diversity in the wildlife profession in Alaska. Many companies, businesses, and governments strive to have diversity levels that match that of their own state or country to promote equality and give a chance to those underrepresented (Swartz et. al. 2019). Alaska should strive to make its workforce reflect that of its own population to improve workplace diversity (Farrel 2018). There is not, however, a decreasing level of diversity as job position increases, which is a good sign of a lack of bias and more of a show of low data numbers. Another important factor in ensuring fair and equal opportunities is incorporating diverse ages into the workforce (Bashir et. al. 2021). Making certain that the ages of new hires are considerably lower than individuals with medium to high levels ensures that new hires into the workforce can provide valuable insight from a different perspective. This is something that each of the agencies covered well, providing opportunities to new workers in the profession.



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Conclusion

Looking at the results it can be concluded that agencies in the wildlife profession carry significantly lower levels of diversity compared to the state average. This research could be improved upon by including more data, as many of the agencies that we reached out to for data were unable to provide it. This research can also be further built upon by documenting diversity records over a period of years to examine what direction the levels of diversity are headed in, and to see what areas specifically need to be improved upon. Other than that, this research project gave me the opportunity to learn more about the reality of trying to gather and organize data from many collaborators in a way that has never been done before, and the challenges that come alongside it. I also learned a valuable lesson about the uncertainty of depending on others for data can be (contacting the companies), and the reality of how underrepresented many groups are in the workplace.