Diversity Within the Wildlife Profession in Alaska

Jackson Magie
Department of Biology & Wildlife

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.

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.

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.

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.

Literature Cited