

ALASKA BOARD OF GAME  
Policy: #82-31-GB

ALASKA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PLANS  
SPECIES MANAGEMENT POLICIES  
WOLF MANAGEMENT POLICY  
December 1980  
Supplement on Wolf Population Control  
December 1982

The purpose of this supplement is to amplify the Board's policy on wolf management, particularly in relation to population manipulation of wolves. In adopting "Species Management Policies on Wolves," the Board of Game recognized the need for ongoing responsible wolf management to maintain viable wolf populations and to help maintain viable ungulate populations upon which wolves are largely dependent. The Board also recognized that when substantial conflicts arise between humans and wolves over the use of prey, wolf populations may have to be managed more intensively and human use of prey further regulated to minimize such conflicts.

The "wolf management policy" noted the Department's management responsibilities when such circumstances arise.

Under some conditions, it may be necessary to virtually eliminate human use of prey species and greatly reduce wolf numbers to aid recovery of low prey populations or to arrest undesirable reductions in prey populations. Wolf population control programs are presently the most effective means to reduce wolf numbers, and have been implemented in several areas after Department and public review and approval.

Wolf/Human Use Conflicts

Substantial conflicts may exist between wolves and humans when priority human uses cannot be reasonably satisfied because of predation by wolves while maintaining prey populations on a sustained yield basis. In such situations, wolf population control may be contemplated. Specific circumstances where conflicts arise are:

1. the estimated prey population is not sufficient to support both the wolf predator population and the human use objectives;
2. prey populations are declining because of human use and predation by wolves;
3. prey population increase objectives are not being attained;
4. human use objectives are not being attained.

Wolf Population Control

The purpose of wolf population control is not to eradicate wolf populations.

Wolf control is the planned, systematic regulation of wolf numbers to achieve a stated lower population level using aerial shooting, trapping, or other methods which may not normally be allowed in conventional public hunting and trapping. Under no circumstances will wolf populations be eliminated or reduced to a level where they will not be able to recover when control is terminated.

The manipulation of wolf numbers as a result of conventional hunting and trapping seasons, techniques, and bag limits is not considered control. Conventional hunting and trapping are the preferred means of using harvestable surpluses of wolves and of reducing wolf numbers if necessary.

Wolf control should be done only where prey population objectives, human use objectives, and wolf population objectives have been established; where predation by wolves is in conflict with the priority human uses or other management objectives; and where conventional hunting and trapping cannot significantly alter wolf numbers.

Wolf management objectives may entail widely different levels of wolf population control. In the most extreme circumstances it may be necessary to temporarily remove a high percentage of a wolf population to allow rapid recovery of prey populations. In other situations it may be necessary to remove by control programs only a relatively small percentage of wolf populations to allow prey increases or meet human use objectives.

Current wolf population control work in GMU 20A has provided information on what responses can be expected from moose populations which are supporting different wolf population levels. If there are 20 or less moose per wolf, the moose population will decline. Between 20 and 30 moose per wolf, the moose population may decline if other adverse conditions occur, such as a severe winter. If there are 30 to 50 moose per wolf, the moose population will stabilize, and possibly increase if food and other factors are favorable. When there are 50 to 100 moose per wolf, the moose population will increase unless or until a very serious mortality factor, such as a very severe winter takes effect. These relationships are viewed only as guidelines, however, because ecological conditions vary considerably in different situations.

There are several general situations when the combination of circumstances described above suggest the possibility of wolf control:

1. hunting by people is the highest priority use of prey species in the area;
2. prey populations have been reduced to or are held at levels well below estimated carrying capacity of the habitat by predation;
3. prey populations are below levels that could reasonably satisfy priority human uses;
4. adequate control of predation cannot be attained by manipulation of hunting and trapping seasons and bag limits;

5. the human use objectives for prey populations approved by the Department and the Board of Game cannot be obtained because of predation by wolves.

Whenever wolf population control is necessary the Board will favor and promote an effective control effort by the public. Experience has shown that in most cases a joint effort by the public and the Department has been most effective. However, the Board recognizes that there are areas and situations where the public cannot effectively or efficiently control predation and that the Department may under its own authority and responsibilities conduct the necessary wolf population control activities. Such situations arise in part because public effort to take wolves tends to diminish before an adequate level of population control is achieved.

In areas where wolf reduction is being conducted, ungulate and wolf surveys should be made at least once a year in control areas to provide estimates of population sizes, productivity, mortality factors, and distribution of the respective populations.

#### Public Use of Wolves

Whenever wolf population control is necessary it shall be the Board's intent to allow the public maximum benefit from the taking of wolves.

- A. Hunting and trapping seasons will be liberalized primarily within the season when wolf pelts are prime and the maximum economic benefit will accrue from the removal of wolves. Hunting and trapping will not be allowed from May through July.
- B. The use of poisons to kill wolves is inhumane and potentially wasteful. It will not be allowed.
- C. The shooting of wolves from a helicopter by the public will not be permitted.
- D. The Commissioner may issue permits to shoot wolves from an airplane as part of a population control program authorized to address one or more of the general situations described earlier under "Wolf Population Control". The conditions for taking wolves under terms of such a permit are specified in the trapping regulations, Chapter 84 Article 1, 5 AAC 84.030(4). Taking wolves under terms of such a permit is not considered recreational or trophy hunting, and therefore permits will not be issued to nonresidents of the State of Alaska.
- E. The pelts of wolves taken under predation control programs must be salvaged according to the existing laws and regulations covering the salvage and waste of game animals.
- F. Methods and means will be liberalized where possible within the concepts of the humane taking of wolves and equity of allocation among the using public.

G. The mandates of the Constitution of the State of Alaska and the Alaska Statutes necessitate that predator and prey populations be managed for maximum use consistent with the public interest.

#### Management Alternatives

Management practices affecting ecosystem elements other than wolf population control may help reduce or eliminate the need for predator control programs in some circumstances.

##### A. Enhance Habitat

Habitat can be managed to enhance carrying capacity for many species in many ecological situations. Substantially higher prey populations may support both wolf populations which are essentially unregulated and desired levels of human use.

Long-term habitat enhancement is preferred to wolf control in situations where improving the habitat of prey species will reduce or eliminate wolf/human conflicts.

##### B. Reduce Habitat Loss

For species like caribou, goat, and sheep, habitat improvement may be impractical or impossible. By reducing or precluding habitat deterioration or loss, populations may be able to maintain their maximum size within limits dictated by weather conditions, disease, accidents, or other uncontrollable factors. During periods of favorable conditions, prey populations may be sustained or grow without benefit of a predator control program if habitat quality, quantity, and accessibility are not impaired.

##### C. Restrict Human Use of Prey Species

If human use of prey species is effectively restricted, the fate of prey populations would then depend largely upon ecological events including the effects of development projects on habitat quality, quantity, or accessibility and on animal movements and susceptibility to accidents, pollution, or other mortality factors. However, given the extremely high value placed on human use of prey species, in most situations the option of dramatically reducing or eliminating human use of prey species for an extended period of time is not recommended.

##### D. Predation by Other Carnivores

Predation by carnivores other than wolves may contribute substantially to prey population problems and the apparent wolf/human conflicts. Brown/grizzly bears and black bears may have a major influence on prey populations in some areas. Black bears and grizzly bears are used as human food in many areas of the State; therefore, liberal regulations to allow their taking will be favored to ameliorate the conflicts between predation and the human use of prey species. In unusual circumstances, control of bear populations may be considered.

E. Wolf Transplants

Wolf transplants are generally not considered an effective population control technique. However, if a transplant will be beneficial in both the removal area and the receiving area, transplants may be undertaken or permitted.

F. Increase Trapping Take of Wolves

Extensive trapper education programs which emphasize wolf trapping and snaring should be instituted. In certain Canadian provinces where such a program has been instituted, the take of wolves by trappers has substantially increased. Trappers potentially benefit from the training by diversifying their catches, increasing their income, and stabilizing year-to-year variations in income which commonly occur when fur prices or species abundance fluctuate. A substantially increased take of wolves by trappers could reduce the need for Department funded wolf control programs.


G. Enhancement of Wolf Populations

Situations may arise that make it desirable to encourage or establish increased wolf populations. When prey populations increase beyond optimum population levels, or beyond that level needed for human use, the Board may take regulatory action to reduce human take of wolves. In some cases, the Board may encourage the establishment of wolves in areas where they are absent, when such establishment will be of benefit to human uses and to the prey populations.

Note: This replaces policies 76-5-GB, 76-6-GB, 76-11-GB, 78-18(A)-GB, and 81-28-GB.

ADOPTED: Anchorage, Alaska  
December 5, 1982

VOTE: 6/1

  
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Clint Buckmaster, Chairman  
Alaska Board of Game