

Don't starve our game managers

Nonresident hunters cover research and management costs



Virgil Umphenour

Community Perspective

The current discourse about resident and non-resident hunters, and who should have priority, needs to be looked at objectively. In a majority of cases, the nonresident hunter is associated with the Alaska guiding industry, so I will address that aspect.

The guiding industry, like the commercial fishing industry, is an important economic entity for the state. Professional guide personnel, transporters, sporting goods stores, aviation entities, game processors, food banks, taxidermists, wildlife managers, etc., all prosper from the nonresident hunting and guiding industry.

To summarily argue that Alaska residents should have priority in harvesting game is short-sighted.

An Alaska resident pays \$25 for a hunting license and can harvest moose, caribou, sheep, goat, black bear, and grizzly bear. This is all for a mere \$25 license — the Alaska resident pays no tag fees to hunt the state's big game animals (the exceptions are musk ox and brown bear).

Alaska is the only state west of the Mississippi that has this policy.

So who foots the bill for wildlife management?

The majority of the state's own dollars spent on hunting management budget come from the sale of hunting licenses and tags. Now remember that residents do not pay tag fees.

The state uses this money to match federal dollars. In the 1930s, the U.S. Congress passed the Pittman-Robertson Act. This bill placed a tax on all ammunition, guns, archery equipment, etc. The money from this federal tax matches three dollars for every one dollar that the state collects for licenses and tags.

For example: A non-resident sheep hunter pays \$85 for a license and \$425 for a sheep tag. This totals \$510.

The Pittmann-Robertson money from the federal government match is three times \$510, or \$1,530.

Hence, \$1,530 plus \$510 is \$2,040 flowing into the state's coffers for wildlife management programs.

If this same out-of-state hunter also buys a moose tag (\$425), wolverine tag (\$175), caribou tag (\$325), wolf tag (\$30), the match grows larger.

In each case, the moose tag brings the state \$1,700, the wolverine brings \$700, the caribou brings \$1,300 and the wolf brings \$120.

Add all that up, with the sheep tag and license, and it comes to \$5,860.

This is one heck of a deal, and it funds a substantial percentage of our wildlife management program.

Now what could happen if we did not have sufficient money to effectively manage our wildlife programs and do the scientific research on our wildlife populations (both predator and prey)?

Managers would be forced to manage conservatively.

The bottom line could well be shorter seasons and fewer permits for both resident and nonresidents.

We are all aware of the value of the commercial fishing industry to Alaska. It is time that we give the commercial guiding industry and the nonresident hunter the appreciation they deserve in contributing to both our growing economy and wildlife management.

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Editor