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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Second Wolf from Chandalar Lake Tests Positive for Rabies**

(Fairbanks) – A second wolf taken in the Chandalar Lake area north of Fairbanks has tested positive for rabies.

The wolf was taken on March 15, 2013 along the north fork of the Chandalar River, northwest of Chandalar Lake. The wolf was caught in a trap and the trapper described it as not responding normally, dull and unaware.

The Alaska State Virology Laboratory in Fairbanks confirmed the results of the ADF&G testing on Wednesday that the wolf was infected with rabies.

The trapper was not directly exposed to the disease from the wolf, but his dogs were. The carcass was fed raw to his dogs while they were camping on the trap line. The dogs are now at his home in Fairbanks, and are thought to be current on rabies vaccinations, but will be given booster shots and put under a quarantine as directed by the State Veterinarian, Dr. Robert Gerlach.

“It’s very dangerous to feed raw carcasses of wildlife, especially carnivores, to pets,” said Dr. Kimberlee Beckmen, Wildlife Veterinarian for ADF&G. “Pets can not only become infected, they can then transmit diseases and parasites to their owners, rabies, tularemia and echinococcus being the most serious.”

In April, a trapper shot an abnormally acting wolf near Chandalar Lake. The wolf tested positive for rabies and the people who had cut their hands during the skinning process were treated for rabies exposure.

State records show that inland from the western and northern coasts of Alaska, rabies had not previously been diagnosed south of the Brooks Range until this year. However, some archived territorial reports did document cases of rabies in fox and dogs in the interior portion of Alaska, so it is possible that rabies has been present in the area but at levels not detected by previous testing. Rabies surveillance has recently been expanded to evaluate wildlife, which will help efforts to determine the prevalence of the disease in wildlife populations.

“Rabies is always present in foxes in the enzootic western and northern coastal portions of Alaska, but we’re still trying to get a clearer picture of the current situation, especially in wolves in the Chandalar Lake area,” said Dr. Beckmen. “We’d really like to hear from the people who have seen wolves or other wildlife acting abnormally in that area. Abnormal behavior can also be caused by diseases other than rabies, such as distemper, so a test of brain tissue is required for a definitive diagnosis of the disease.”

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The public is asked to report any wildlife acting abnormally, especially wolves, wolverines or foxes to the nearest ADF&G office and by sending an email to [dfg.dwc.vet@alaska.gov](mailto:dfg.dwc.vet@alaska.gov). Animals with rabies might be fearless in approaching people, attack inanimate objects, or be unable to run/move normally.

Dr. Beckmen is still collecting samples from the head of any wolves, wolverines, foxes or coyotes taken in the Chandalar Lakes or Forty-mile country if they are brought to the Fairbanks office.

A number of cases of rabies have been diagnosed along the northern and western coasts of Alaska this winter and more cases are expected to be found in arctic and red fox populations. These animals present a risk of exposure to people but even a greater risk to dogs in the villages.

"This incident emphasizes that there is a risk to both people and domestic pets thru direct contact with rabid wildlife. The greater threat to public health is from our domestic pets that can bring rabies into homes and expose our family members and friends. The best protection is to make sure all your pets' rabies vaccinations are current," said Dr. Gerlach.

To protect against acquiring disease from animals, trappers and hunters are urged to:

- always wear gloves when skinning animals,
- wash any wounds thoroughly with soap and water,
- avoid cutting into the brain and spinal cord as much as possible, and
- wash knives with soap and water immediately after severing the head.

Injuries sustained while skinning an animal should be reported to a health care provider and that animal saved for possible rabies testing to determine if post exposure rabies treatment is needed.

Although leaving skinned-out animals in the field is common practice, trapped/hunted animals transported to a different region of the state could spread or introduce diseases and parasites into those regions if carcasses are left for scavenging in the environment. It is recommended that hunters and trappers safely dispose of carcasses in the areas animals are taken.

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