

FINDINGS OF THE BOARD OF GAME

IMPLEMENTATION OF WOLF POPULATION REDUCTION

IN GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT 20A

During the publicly convened Board of Game meeting June 26 - July 1, 1993, the board heard public testimony, staff reports and advisory committee reports and discussed the management of caribou, moose, sheep, wolves, and other species in Game Management Unit 20A. Included in the board's discussion were re-evaluations of biological and human use information presented to the board over the past decade, and review and consideration of the Wolf Conservation and Management Policy for Alaska. Based on all the testimony and reports, and after due consideration of public review and comment the majority of the board finds that:

1. Moose, caribou and sheep populations in Unit 20A are valued resources of the public. It is consistent with the public interest to manage these populations for sustained use by application of sound principles of wildlife management. These objectives are reasonable, are within the carrying capacity of the habitat and are attainable using sound principles of wildlife management.
2. By virtue of a number of considerations, including fidelity to home range, calving grounds, and blood sera differences, the Delta Caribou Herd is distinct and separate from other clearly identified caribou herds in Alaska.
3. The Delta Caribou Herd has declined from about 11,000 animals in 1989 to less than 4,000 today. The decline is believed to have been initiated by adverse weather conditions but accelerated by predation. The majority of predation on caribou is by wolves. The wolf population is at an historic high estimated at 270 wolves. Caribou hunting in Unit 20A has been closed since November 1991. There are indications that if no action is taken this year, the Delta Caribou Herd will continue to decline to even more unacceptable levels. Absence of efforts to reduce wolves in this area likely would lead to unacceptable declines in alternative prey species such as moose and sheep.

4. Dall sheep populations have also declined. Hunting of Dall sheep has been restricted to mature rams and has no measurable effect on population trends. Further restrictions in hunting of caribou are not possible and further restriction on hunting of sheep will not reverse the declines in these populations.

5. The moose population in GMU 20A is stable or declining. Wolf predation is a significant factor limiting the harvestable surplus of moose in GMU 20A. With the decline of the caribou herd the impact of wolf predation on moose is expected to increase.

6. Although bear predation is also known to occur, past management of grizzly bear populations has reduced the effect of bears on the population dynamics of moose and caribou in GMU 20A. Management of wolf predation is the most effective tool remaining to address the status of moose, caribou and sheep populations in GMU 20A.

7. Unit 20A is one of the most important areas for use of wildlife in Interior Alaska and has a history of high consumptive use of moose, caribou, and sheep by the public. Management of Unit 20A to provide for high levels of use is important in reducing conflicts for subsistence resources in other parts of Alaska. For example, the November 1991 closure of hunting of the Delta Caribou Herd greatly increased hunting pressure in Units 12 and 20E.

8. According to the Wolf Conservation and Management Policy for Alaska; "The Board will consider wolf control when:

1. Wolf predation is a factor in an unacceptable decline in prey population, size or productivity;
2. Wolf predation is a factor preventing recovery of a low-density prey population;
3. Wolf predation is a factor preventing attainment of approved population or human use objectives;

9. All three of the conditions above are met. Wolf predation has contributed to the unacceptable decline in the Delta Caribou Herd from 10,700 to less than 4,000. Wolf Predation is a factor in preventing the herd's recovery to the approved population objective of 6,000 to 8,000 caribou by 1998. Hunting of the Delta Caribou Herd has been prohibited since 1991, thus the approved human use objective of an annual harvest of 300 to 500 caribou is not being met.

10. The control program further complies with the Wolf Conservation and Management Policy by providing:

- (a) an area description: Game Management Unit 20A excluding military lands and the southwest portion near the Denali National Park;
- (b) a statement of proposed action: Reduction of the wolf population by state employees using ground based methods for a period not to exceed three years;
- (c) population and human use objectives: Caribou objectives are 6,000 to 8,000 with a sustainable annual harvest of 300 to 500 by 1998, the wolf population objective is to maintain a minimum population of 100 wolves within Game Management Unit 20A overall or 35 wolves within the control area;
- (d) methods to be used to reduce wolf predation: Trapping; snaring; and shooting, except aerial shooting, by department personnel only;
- (e) a justification of the proposed action: No alternative management approach can reasonably be expected to reverse the decline of the Delta Caribou Herd and achieve approved management objectives;
- (f) relevant information about wildlife populations and human use: The board considered extensive information provided by the department concerning the wildlife population and human use patterns in Unit 20A;
- (g) an estimate of the time necessary to meet objectives: The program is authorized for three years subject to annual review and renewal;

11. Similar predator control has been conducted in this area before and has accomplished its objectives. Wolf population reduction in Unit 20A from 1976 through 1982 resulted in significant improvement in calf caribou survival and allowed the herd to increase from 2,300 to over 10,000 by 1989 as well as restoring human harvest opportunity.

12. Based on studies by the National Park Service indicating that wolves living primarily within Denali National Park occasionally range outside the park into the southwestern area of Unit 20A, the Board excluded portions of southwest 20A from the control area to avoid conflict between state and federal management objectives.

13. While this control effort relies on ground-based methods such as trapping, snaring and shooting; the control will be done solely by state employees and should not be confused with normal wolf hunting and trapping by the public.

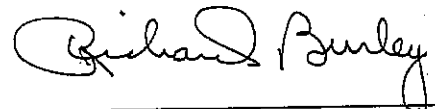
14. Nothing in this control program threatens the long-term survival of wolves either in the control area or Alaska as a whole. The wolf population in Unit 20A recovered from prior control programs to the current record level. Less than one percent of Alaska's land is included in this wolf control program. More than half the land in Alaska is managed by the Federal Government and is not subject to intensive management.

15. According to Dr. David Mech, chairman of the Wolf Specialist Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), this plan complies with international standards as outlined by the IUCN's Wolf Manifesto.

16. The board and the department recognize the importance of increasing efforts to provide information to the public that allows it to accurately assess the need for actions such as these and to continue public dialogue aimed at achieving stable, long-term wolf conservation and management in Alaska.

17. All public testimony, written comments and staff reports were considered. Furthermore, because of extensive deliberations in November 1992 on the predator-prey situation in GMU 20A, BOG findings 92-63 from that meeting are incorporated by reference.

Adopted July 1, 1993



Richard Burley, Chair
Alaska Board of Game

PROPOSAL 1A - Strategic Wolf Management Plan for Alaska. Amend the plan as follows:

[STRATEGIC] Wolf Conservation and Management [PLAN] Policy for Alaska

The purpose..(no change)...

Findings...(no change)...

Principles...(no change)...

The Goals...(no change)...

History of Wolf Management in Alaska...(no change)...

ADD NEW SECTIONS AS FOLLOWS:

I Conservation and Management:

A. Uses of Wolves

1. Nonconsumptive Uses of Wolves and Wolf Prey Species

Nonconsumptive uses of wolf and prey populations are recognized and will be provided for on a long-term basis. Nonconsumptive uses of wolves and prey species must not threaten long-term survival. Locations that offer unique opportunities to see or hear wolves will be identified, but habituation of wolves to people will be discouraged.

2. Consumptive Uses of Wolves and Wolf Prey Species

Consumptive uses of wolf and prey populations will be provided for on a sustained yield basis. Harvest of wolves and prey species must not threaten long-term population survival. Management objectives must ensure prospering populations of all species in the long term.

B. Management Strategies

To fulfill the goals of this plan, different management strategies must be used in different areas. Wolf populations in Alaska will be managed under three broad strategies:

1. Full Protection from Hunting and Trapping

Under this strategy, wolves will be fully protected by regulation from hunting and trapping. The only killing of wolf permitted in areas managed under this strategy is the isolated taking of individual wolves for the protection of human life or property or for other limited purposes authorized by state or federal statute. Areas where this management strategy is currently applied are the

original portions of Denali National Park, Katmai National Park, Glacier Bay National Park and Chugach State Park.

2. Naturally Regulated Populations

Under this management strategy, wolves may be taken by hunting and trapping during established seasons using methods generally approved by state and federal regulations. No aerial shooting or land-and-shoot taking will be allowed. Wolf harvests will be below maximum sustainable levels and wolf population size will be determined primarily by availability of prey or other natural factors,

This management strategy is mandated by federal law on National Park lands not managed for Full Protection. This strategy is also currently applied on National Preserve and Monument lands, National Wildlife Refuge lands, National Conservation Areas and National Forest lands. In addition to these federal conservation system units, most remaining federal and much of the state and private land in Alaska is managed under this strategy.

3. Managed Population Size

Under this management strategy, wolf populations may be managed as part of an integrated systems approach to management of predators and prey to achieve identified wildlife population and human use objectives. Wolf populations and predation will be managed through regulated hunting and trapping using general methods approved by state and federal regulations to the maximum extent possible. Predation by other species will be managed in conjunction with that by wolves to limit the impact on wolf numbers and assure continued viability of wolves in the ecosystem. Wolf predation control programs using methods not generally approved for hunting and trapping may be proposed and implemented by the state in areas managed under this strategy in accordance with criteria described below.

Portions of Units 12, 13, and 20 have been managed under this strategy in recent years (Figure 1). It is anticipated that the proportion of the state where this type of management is applied will be very limited. Wolf control (reduction) programs are not expected to be permanent, ongoing activities under this strategy. However, in some areas wolf populations may be held at specified levels to achieve identified human use or other objectives.

C. Wolf Predation Control

Based on careful consideration of scientific information and public comment, the department and the board believe that in limited circumstances in some areas it is necessary and appropriate to control predation by wolves to achieve population and human use

objectives. To the extent practical, the board and department will comply with standards of the IUCN for consideration and implementation of wolf control.

The board will consider wolf control when:

1. wolf predation is a factor in an unacceptable decline in prey population size or productivity;
2. wolf predation is a factor preventing recovery of a low density prey population; or
3. wolf predation is a factor preventing attainment of approved population or human use objectives.

If the department or the board determine that one or more of these conditions exists in a given area, the department will prepare a proposal for public review that includes:

- an area description;
- a statement of the proposed action;
- population and human use objectives;
- methods to be used to reduce wolf predation;
- a justification for the proposed action, including previous measures taken which failed to achieve the wolf and prey objectives and other alternatives considered;
- relevant information about wildlife populations and human use, including wolf and prey population status and trend, harvest information, habitat, and estimates of the effects of wolf and bear predation on prey populations;
- an estimate of the time necessary to meeting population and human use objectives; and a schedule for update and re-evaluation of the program.

Wolf control will be implemented using the most humane, selective and effective methods available. Methods used may include government-assisted trapping, trapping by government employees, aerial shooting by department employees or the public, land-and-shoot taking by the public or other methods approved by the board. Aerial shooting and land-and-shoot taking will only be used when no alternative method can reasonably be expected to achieve the level of control needed to reach approved objectives.

Effective non-lethal methods of control are not available at this time, but should be studied. If additional methods that do not require killing of wolves are found to achieve desired results in a reasonable time, they should be considered.

D. Special Management Considerations

1. Defense of Life and Property

Nothing in this plan affects the authority under state or federal laws for an individual to protect human life or property from wolves. All reasonable steps must be taken to protect life and property by non-lethal means before a wolf is killed.

2. Disease and Parasite Control

Like all other species, wolves have evolved in the presence of many natural diseases and parasites. In most cases, wolf populations are capable of responding to the effects of diseases and parasites without the need for human intervention. However, there may be times when action is warranted to halt the spread of a disease or parasite infestation for the benefit of the overall wolf population, particularly if the disease or parasite is introduced to wolves from an unnatural source.

AS 16.05.020 directs and authorizes the Commissioner to protect the wildlife resources of the state. If, in the Commissioner's judgement, it is necessary to take an action to protect wolves or other wildlife from the adverse effects of disease or parasites, such action can be taken without further authorization by the board.

The only situation in Alaska at this time that meets the criteria for human intervention is the infestation of wolves on the Kenai Peninsula by the biting louse (*Trichodectes canis*). It is probable that this louse infected wolves as a result of contact with domestic dogs.

Emergency Situation Plan (deleted in action on Proposal #83).

Research Program...(no change)...

Information and Education...(no change)...

Adopted June 29, 1993

PROPOSAL 39A - 5 AAC 92.XXX WOLF PREDATION CONTROL IMPLEMENTATION PLANS. Propose regulation to control predation by wolves in a portion of Unit 20A by temporarily reducing the wolf population as follows:

In accordance with 5 AAC 92.110, the commissioner or the commissioner's designee may conduct a program to control predation by wolves in the following areas, consistent with the following program objectives and constraints:

(a) The Unit 20A wolf predation control area includes those portions of Unit 20A, except for: the Fort Wainwright and Fort Greely Military Reservations; Clear Air Force Station; and that portion south and west of a line beginning at the confluence of Lignite Creek and the Nenana River, then along the north bank of Lignite Creek to the mouth of Sanderson Creek, then in a direct line to the top of Pyramid Mountain, then in a direct south line to the south boundary of Unit 20A.

(1) The objectives for this program are:

(A) to reverse the decline of the Delta caribou herd and increase the mid-summer population to 6000-8000 with a sustainable annual harvest of 300-500 caribou by the year 1998; and

(B) to determine if ground-based control methods can effectively reduce wolf numbers temporarily to reverse declines in prey populations.

(2) The commissioner shall implement the program to achieve the objectives of this section in the following manner:

(A) for up to 3 years beginning October 1, 1993, the commissioner may reduce the wolf population in Unit 20A; however, the commissioner may not reduce the late-winter wolf population within the area described in paragraph (a) to fewer than 35 wolves or within all of Unit 20A to fewer than 100 wolves; and

(B) department personnel may take wolves between October 1 and April 30 by trapping, snaring, or shooting, except shooting from aircraft; and

~~(C) no personnel other than department employees shall be involved unless their activities are under the direction and supervision of the department; and~~

(D) the commissioner shall reduce the wolf population in an efficient manner, but as safely and humanely as practical; and

(3) This program is authorized for a 3-year term beginning October 1, 1993 and is subject to reauthorization under 5 AAC 92.110.

Proposal 39A

(4) Hunting and trapping by the public will continue under normal hunting and trapping regulations.

(5) The department will provide annually to the Board of Game at the spring meeting a report on activities conducted during the past year, including implementation activities, the status of prey and predator populations, and recommendations for changes if necessary to achieve objectives.

Adopted June 30, 1993