

LUMPY JAW AND WOLF CONTROL

by Wayne E. Heimer

Interestingly, this Dall sheep disease has played an important role in the history of predator management. Here's how this happened.....

During the great depression, Adolph Murie used Civilian Conservation Corps workers to gather a famous collection of Dall ram heads from McKinley Park after the killer winters of the 1930s. He noted that almost a quarter of the skulls with lower jaws had evidence of lumpy jaw. Adolph's primary interest was wolf predation. He'd already determined that wolves were significant predators on Dall sheep. Therefore, he naturally associated wolf predation with the presence of lumpy jaw. He assumed that the sheep which had lumpy jaw were easier for wolves to catch because they weren't as healthy as sheep without the disease. This assumption formed the basis for a broad generalization which came to be widely accepted by both biologists and members of the general public. The broad generalization was that wolves specialize in killing old, sick, or injured prey. Other people extended Adolph's idea to claim that predation represents a beneficial evolutionary force on prey populations by "culling the unfit." I think Adolph (and those who have enlarged on his idea) made a mistake.

Over the years, we've captured hundreds of live, healthy Dall sheep in the Alaska Range; and kept records of how many had lumpy jaw. These records showed the frequency of lumpy jaw in sheep we'd captured was the same as in Adolph Murie's skull collection. This suggests the conclusion made by Adolph Murie and others was a mistake. I think the more likely explanation is that wolves are effective predators. They kill any sheep which gets into a situation which favors a hunting wolf. Having a deformed lower jaw does not seem to be a major factor in sheep escaping from wolves.

The high prevalence of lumpy jaw in Adolph Murie's collection was just a coincidence which might have fooled any of us. Even so, the extension of his explanation has been used to justify exempting wolves from management ever since.



CHUGACH STATE PARK CITIZEN'S ADVISORY BOARD

The Chugach State Park Citizen's Advisory Board is a 15-member Board with five new members being elected each year. Steps for application: 1) applications are available in late October—due November 30, 2) a subcommittee reviews all applications and recommends three applicants for each of the five new positions, 3) the Board reviews these recommended applicants and prioritizes them, 4) the Director of Parks makes the final decision.

If any FNAWS members are interested in being on the Board that controls the uses of the park (hunting included) please contact any member of the FNAWS Board or Chugach State Park at 345-5014.

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