

Alaska Hunting Bulletin

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A publication of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game

Alaska Led Nation in 1997 Hunting Fatalities

Steering group proposes uniquely Alaskan approaches to increased hunting safety

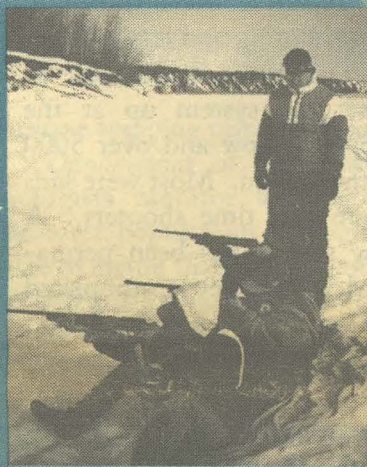
by Tony Monzingo, ADF&G Hunter Services Coordinator

Alaska had the unwelcome distinction of having the highest hunting fatality rate of any state in the United States in 1997.

During 1997 at least five hunters died as a result of firearms accidents, according to John Matthews, ADF&G hunter education coordinator. Nationally, there were just 99 firearms-related hunting fatalities in 1997 among 14 million hunters. With five fatalities among just 93,000 licensed hunters, Alaska had an accident rate nearly eight times the national average.

..Alaska had an accident rate nearly eight times the national average..

In comparison, Matthews points out, Colorado had only two fatalities among



Left: Allakaket students learn safe shooting and hunting skills from an ADF&G certified Hunter Education Coordinator. Right: Regional Hunter Education instructor Bob Hunter demonstrates a muzzle-loader to students in Fairbanks. Photos by Barry Whitehill, AVHELA



more than 577,000 hunters, Montana averaged one fatality per year among over 150,000 hunters and Pennsylvania suffered a single casualty among over 1 million hunters in 1997. Had the other 49 states experienced Alaska's fatality rate, 761 hunters would have died in

firearms accidents in 1997.

Matthews suggests these chilling statistics show little change in a trend that has continued since Alaska statistics were first systematically recorded. In a 1982 "Firearms Casualty Report" covering the years 1970-1981, state safety

officers reported that one of every 5,200 Alaska hunters was involved in an accidental shooting and that almost one-fourth of all firearms accidents in Alaska occurred while hunting. Over 14 firearms-related hunting accidents per year were reported during this period and the report authors stated that "Alaska has a very high firearms accident rate compared to other states." The report concluded that only two of Alaska's certified hunter education graduates had been involved in firearms accidents during the 10-year period.

Tracking Alaska's hunting accidents is difficult because the Department of Public Safety does not keep detailed records of firearms-related hunting accidents. Alaska is the only state that does not keep such detailed records. Despite the lack of official records,

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Nelchina Caribou: What Next?

by Les Palmer

[Editor's note: The seemingly ever-changing Nelchina caribou herd is on the minds of many Alaska hunters. We asked veteran Alaska outdoor writer Les Palmer to report on the current situation, and then to elaborate on three components: the herd management objective, how managers use hunting to control populations, and how caribou herds are counted. These short pieces begin on page 11 following the main story.]

For the second season in a row, the 1997-98 Nelchina caribou hunt ended with a lot of hunters going home disappointed.

A decade ago, Nelchina caribou hunters hunted with drawing permits and hunter participation and success were both high. This year, harvest was high in comparison with many past years, but hunter success was low. The 24,000 holders of Tier I and Tier II subsistence permits took only 3,500 caribou (2,400 bulls and 1,100 cows). It was pretty much a repeat of the previous season, when 37,000 permits were issued and only

5,000 caribou were taken. Many hunters were left wondering what had happened.

The Aug. 1 - Sept. 20 season looked grim before it began. Summer droughts apparently caused the herd to move from the Talkeetna Mountains to lower areas, where the grass looked greener. Instead of bunching up, the herd dispersed into a broad band stretching from the Fog Lakes, in the upper Susitna River Basin, eastward along the Alphabet Hills toward Paxson. Unfortunately for hunters, much of that area is swampy and miles from roads and trails.

What's more, the herd numbered fewer than the 45,000 animals that biologists had predicted early last year. When they counted again in June, after calving, they found only 35,000.

Many hunters wondered what had happened to the 10,000 "missing" caribou. Part of the 10,000 was probably due to error, said Bob Tobey, area wildlife biologist

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While the Tier I hunt ended earlier than expected, many Alaska hunters were able to bring in a caribou for winter table fare. Photo by Matt Snyder

The *Alaska Hunting Bulletin* is a publication of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Hunter Services Program.

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From the Director...The Way I See It

by Wayne Regelin, Director of Wildlife Conservation

Lots of good things are happening in our Hunter Services and Hunter Education programs. First, we merged these into one program this year and renamed it the Hunter Information and Training program. This change was the product of numerous discussions with Hunter Education instructors, staff, and members of the hunting public across the state, and it has proven to be a good one. A lot has been happening!

The goal of the Hunter Information and Training program is to promote and ensure safe, responsible and ethical behavior of hunters in the field. There are many aspects of this program ranging from Alaska's basic hunter education class to providing services to hunters that include events or products such as the Hunter Clinics, Becoming an Outdoor Woman, the *Alaska Hunting Bulletin* and proficiency training. This program is under the capable direction of Tony Monzingo and John Matthews.

This program will be expanding over the next three years. The legislature has provided a capital improvement project for this program that provides stable funding which will allow us to greatly

expand our efforts to assist hunters. We will expand the very popular hunting clinic series into more communities and offer more courses in the larger towns. Nearly all of our clinics are sold out. Even those who have hunted for years seem to be eager to enhance their skills and pick up tips from other experienced hunters and to share their knowledge. We will expand the Becoming an Outdoor Woman program to offer it more times each year. The demand for this program continues to increase as more women hear about it.

This year we purchased two laser shooting systems that are very popular with the public, particularly young beginners. We will purchase a third laser shooting system that will be housed in a mobile trailer that can travel the road and ferry system. This is an excellent way to expose kids to shooting and is a valuable tool for hunter education instructors. In March we set the system up at the Anchorage Sports show and over 5000 people tried the system. Most were kids and most were first time shooters. A laser shooting system has been permanently housed at the newly completed hunter education classroom at the Rabbit Creek Rifle Range, and we plan to put

one in the Fairbanks Indoor Rifle range that will soon be under construction. As for Southeast, we have requested funding for an indoor range and Hunter Ed facility in Juneau which we believe the legislature will approve this session.

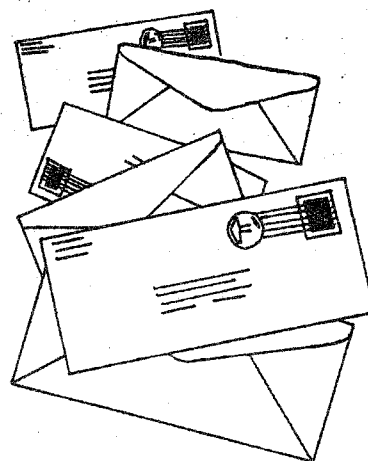
We will continue to expand and improve our efforts in hunter education. The hunter education steering group has completed their work and will soon provide me with their recommendations for future improvements. I believe the steering group's recommendation for mandatory hunter education is timely and appropriate given Alaska's very high firearms-related hunting fatality rate. I will tell you more about these plans once I have the final recommendations from the steering group.

This bulletin has proven to be popular with hunters and a good way to provide the hunting public with information about division programs, ongoing research, and population status. We will continue publishing this and encourage you to pass it on to interested friends and hunting partners. Please let us know what you'd like to see more of in these issues.

Thanks for your support and good hunting.

Letters to the Alaska Hunting Bulletin MAILBAG

We invite your letters to the editor. We reserve the right to select which letters to print, and the right to edit letters for length, clarity and good taste. Letters are limited to 300 words. Send your letters to: Editor, Alaska Hunting Bulletin, ADF&G/WC, PO Box 25526, Juneau, AK 99802-5526, or e-mail: marthak@fishgame.state.ak.us, or FAX: (907) 465-6142.



The mailbag is empty for this issue. Have a comment or question about hunting or wildlife conservation in Alaska? Share it with other Alaskans and other readers Outside with a letter to the Alaska Hunting Bulletin.

DRAWING AND TIER II PERMIT APPLICATION DEADLINE MAY 31

Applications for 1998/99 drawing and Tier II permit hunts must be postmarked by May 31. The application forms and permit supplements are available during May at Fish and Game offices and many license vendors around Alaska, or by mail. The permit supplement information (not including maps) and applications are also now available on the World Wide Web. The URL is http://www.state.ak.us/local/akpages/FISH_GAME/wildlife/geninfo/drawing/pmthunt.htm Application forms can also be obtained by FAX 24 hrs. Call (907) 267-2885 from a FAX machine for a list of application forms and other FAX on Demand documents. Completed applications and any fees must be mailed to the address shown on the application forms. Staff at ADF&G offices are not permitted to accept applications.

ADF&G Position Statement on Trapping and Snaring of Furbearers

February 1998

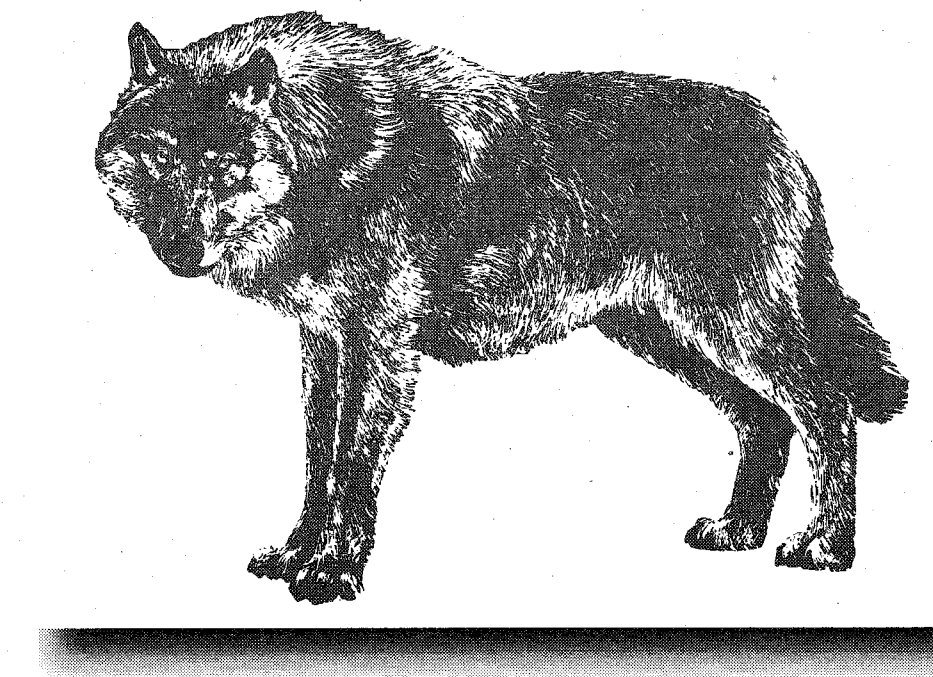
Editor's note: The signatures of sufficient Alaska voters were obtained to place on Alaska's November, 1998 General Election Ballot an initiative that would prohibit the use of snares in trapping wolves. The following information is the summary information used in the petition booklets: "Bill Prohibiting Trapping Wolves With Snares — This bill would prohibit a person from using a snare with the intent of trapping a wolf. It would also prohibit a person from possessing, buying, selling, or offering to sell the skin of a wolf known by the person to have been caught with a snare. Breaking the law would be a misdemeanor. The penalty could be jail time of up to one year, and a fine of up to \$5,000."

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game supports regulated trapping and snaring as legitimate harvest methods for use of Alaska's furbearer resource. Snaring and trapping are labor intensive harvest methods and trapper success rates are inherently low. Trapping and snaring are regulated by the Alaska Board of Game to insure that harvests do not exceed sustained yields. The Department recognizes public concerns regarding the issue of animal welfare in the context of trapping and snaring, and is dedicated to the continued improvement of trapping methods and equipment that conform to the principles of humane harvest.

Most trappers are careful to set their traps and snares properly. Instances where snares do not kill immediately or catch other animals besides wolves are the exception. The Department supports and promotes humane and ethical trapping using the best techniques available. The Department participates in annual trapping schools to teach trappers responsible techniques and ethical considerations.

The following background information may help clarify some important points regarding the use of snares for trapping wolves in Alaska.

* Snaring and other methods of trapping are strictly regulated in Alaska. Trappers must abide by restrictions on the size of snare, use of bait, snowmachines, airplanes, boats, artificial lights, and radio communications. Trappers 16 and older must be licensed. Trappers are encouraged to attend special clinics where ethical and



humane trapping principles are taught.

* Department of Fish and Game biologists monitor wolf and other furbearer populations throughout the state to assure that populations remain healthy and are not overharvested.

* The Department has been working at the national level to help develop trap standards to address the issue of humaneness. It is also involved in studies to identify methods to make snaring and trapping as humane as possible.

* Trapping is an important part of the economy in rural Alaska. It is part of traditional fishing, hunting, and gathering activities. In some rural communities in the Interior, as many as 87 percent of households trap for income.

* Snares are particularly important in cash poor villages of Interior Alaska because they are the most effective way to trap wolves in areas of deep or frequent snowfall.

* In addition to cash, trapping generates other products used by rural households, including food for human consumption (e.g., beaver, lynx, ptarmigan, and hare) and raw materials for clothing (especially cold weather gear for the head, hands and feet).

* Snares are usually made of wire or cable. They are designed to catch animals around the neck, torso or foot. They can either be lethal or used only to restrain an animal. Many wolf trappers prefer snares because they are lighter than other traps, less expensive, more effective than leghold traps dur-

ing freezing and thawing weather, and remain operable after snowfalls.

* Snares are legal in 39 of 49 states that have regulated trapping seasons as well as in all the Canadian provinces.

* A 1992 Gallup survey found that 80 percent of Alaska trappers use snares and that 30 percent of their catch is taken by snaring.

* In 1996-97, 1,280 wolves were harvested in Alaska. Of these, 435 were taken in snares; 415 were shot; and 381 were trapped using other methods (mostly leg-hold traps). Over the last five years, snares have accounted for an average of 29 percent of the wolves harvested each year in the state.

* The Alaska Board of Game will review snaring and trapping regulations in March 1998. At that time, the Board will consider public proposals for changes to snaring and trapping regulations to ensure that Alaskan trappers are using trapping equipment and methods that are consistent with the best conservation and management practices for the use of Alaska's furbearer populations.

Trapping furbearers has been economically and culturally important to Alaska's people for centuries. The seasonal harvest of wildlife provides meat and warm clothing needed to sustain and enhance life in the North. Historically, trapping was at the heart of trade in Alaska, and it is still a vital part of rural economies and cultures. Like hunting, viewing, and photography, trapping is a legitimate use of our wildlife resource.

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Fairbanksans will enjoy fishing, hunting and wildlife-related activities at Kids Fish & Game Fun Day on May 30. The day is designed to introduce young people and adults to fishing, hunting and wildlife-related outdoor recreation. DWC biologist Cathie Harms says young people of all ages will find something of interest. She says a "Pathway to Fishing" has been designed to help beginners learn the sport and there will even be the "Fishing is Fun Day" pond stocked with grayling, rainbows and arctic char for new anglers. Among other activities she anticipates this year are archery instruction and shooting, a discovery hunt for clues about wildlife, opportunities to shoot pellet rifles under the watchful eyes of trained instructors, and more. The program will start at 11 AM and ends at 4 PM on Saturday, May 30. Additional information can be obtained by calling the Fairbanks ADF&G office at (907) 459-7206.

The Southern Alaska Peninsula caribou herd appears to have "bottomed out." Area wildlife biologist Dick Sellers of King Salmon says the herd is hovering around the 2,000 - 3,000 animal mark — down from its peak in recent years of 10,000 in 1983. Sellers says the herd remains closed to hunting except for a subsistence use quota of 100 animals for Peninsula villages. ADF&G and USFWS staff intend to deploy some additional radio collars within the herd to determine if interchange is taking place between the SAP and the Northern Alaska Peninsula herd. Deteriorating caribou range was clearly the reason for the decline in the last 15 years, Sellers says. Biologists now have to determine whether range has recovered enough to support a population increase.

Meanwhile the Northern Alaska Peninsula herd continues at about one-half its peak in the mid-1980s. Sellers says ADF&G worked to reduce herd size in the late 1980's and early 1990's to better match herd size and range conditions. The increased harvest worked fine until about 1993 when the herd dropped several thousand animals in one year, a drop that still puzzles biologists. Today the herd numbers approximately 10,000 animals. The good news, Sellers says, is that the herd is reasonably productive, with around 30 calves per 100 cows. Range conditions are not as bad as further south on the peninsula. Until range conditions further improve, Sellers and his

Continued next page

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colleagues believe the herd should be maintained at about the present level.

Alaskans will vote to decide whether snaring should be allowed in Alaska at the polls on Election Day this November. This is an important issue for Alaskans, biologists say. Additional background information on this issue and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's position on the matter can be found in a separate article on page 3.

Alaska bear researchers captured a 10-year-old male bear last summer whose 28-1/4 inch skull would place him at the top of the Boone and Crockett record book for grizzly bears. Last June, the bear's weight was 680 pounds, but by fall, this bear could have reached 900 pounds. The researchers were taking tissue samples from bears to determine familial relationships through DNA examination, and to learn more about what rates of hunter harvest are sustainable. ADF&G bear research biologist Harry Reynolds, UAF Institute of Arctic Biology veterinarian John Blake, and Russian biologist Mikhail Kretchmar have been cooperating in the study. The US Army and Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration have also been supporting the project. Reynolds hopes to use the data to measure rates of immigration of bears into the Alaska Range population. He predicts the study will show that most females in the population live their entire lifetimes near the area of their birth so that bears in a specific locality are more likely to be related to one another. In contrast, he predicts that males living in the same area were born in far away and immigrate into the area. This pattern would avoid inbreeding of the population while allowing females the advantages of known food supplies and places of safety for bears.

The third annual Becoming An Outdoor Woman program was held in Juneau on July 11-13 last summer at the University of Alaska Southeast. (See photo story and text in the center of this issue - Ed.) Fifty women tried their hand at kayaking, filleting fish, field dressing deer, map and compass, survival, shooting skills, Dutch oven cooking, and many other outdoor activities. Knowledgeable local and out of town instructors, many of whom were ADF&G staff, generously volunteered their time. In addition to daytime classes, a variety of evening programs were offered on both Friday and Saturday nights. A round robin of demonstration tables gave women the opportunity to learn basic skills including how to sharpen a knife, clean a firearm, or bait a halibut hook. Guest speakers told hair-raising bear stories and talked about hunting, fishing, and camping throughout Alaska. Ketchikan area biologist, Doug Larsen participated as a key-note speaker, showing slides and sharing stories and outdoor pointers with participants, and Vern Beier related accounts of several of his bear hunting and research-related experiences with brown bears. The finale was a fashion show of women's outdoors clothing. The participants were enthusiastic and both students and instructors seemed to enjoy the weekend. One objective of the program was for women to

Continued next page

Hunters Take First Elk in Southeast Alaska

Just ten years after fifty Oregon elk were released on an island south of Wrangell, hunters have taken the first elk from the population.

Thirty-three Roosevelt elk and 17 Rocky Mountain elk were released on Etolin Island in 1987. After a shaky start, the elk population increased and dispersed, and last year biologists estimated 250 animals in the spring population. The elk have established a breeding population on Zarembo Island and observers have reported elk on several surrounding islands as well.

The Board of Game established the first bull elk hunting season in Unit 3 for October 1 through October 31, 1997. Twenty-seven drawing permits were selected from 1,375 applicants. The State Legislature passed a bill allowing the Department of Fish and Game to donate up to four additional elk harvest permits to nonprofit corporations. Two of these were issued and were raffled off for the 1997 season, benefiting both the nonprofits and state wildlife conservation programs.

At the end of the season, ADF&G staff

counted 8 bulls in the harvest: seven from Etolin Island and one from Zarembo. Three of the bulls were large trophy bulls; two had 6 X 6 antler points and one had 7 X 8 points.

Most of the hunters used boats to hunt the beach on the southwest side of Etolin Island. One successful hunter flew into an alpine lake on the island. The successful hunter on Zarembo shot his bull from the road system.

As usual, October weather was variable. The first week was clear and warm. This caused the elk to move away from the beach to higher elevations. The next two weeks brought cooler temperatures and rain. The last week of the season was wet with high winds out of the southeast. Clarence Strait had small craft warnings the entire week making access difficult.

ADF&G plans to issue 30 drawing permits for the second fall 1998 SE Alaska elk season. Applications and newspaper supplements explaining the hunt will be available from license vendors May 1. Applications must be postmarked by May 31.

Alaska Fish and Wildlife Safeguard



Alaska's Fish and Wildlife Safeguard pays cash for information on poachers.

HOW CAN I HELP?

If you see or hear of a fish or wildlife violation, report it.

**Call (800) 478-3377,
a toll-free number.**

Also, you can contribute to the reward fund which makes the program possible.

Contributions are tax deductible. Checks should be made payable to:

Alaska Fish and Wildlife Safeguard, 5700 Tudor Rd, Anchorage, AK 99507

800-478-3377

Reinventing Alaska's Permit System

by Bob Robb

Since statehood, sport hunting in Alaska has grown from a relatively simple thing into a sometimes-complex proposition involving licenses, harvest tickets, permit hunts, and different levels of subsistence hunting. For sport hunters, permit hunts draw a LOT of interest. And as this interest continues to grow, the Department of Fish & Game is working to streamline the permitting process to eliminate confusion and to reduce both the cost and complexity of administering the program.

Permit hunts occur when hunter demand is higher than a game population can sustain. There are two kinds of permits—drawing permits, and registration permits. Drawing permits limit the number of hunters who may participate in a given hunt, while registration permits are typically unlimited in number, but the season may be closed when a specified number of animals have been harvested.

"The permit system has grown over the years and has become very complex," said Suzan Bowen, Regulations Project Coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Conservation in Anchorage. "We're trying to make it more user-friendly for hunters. Our job is to make the program as cost-efficient, smooth running, and fair as possible."

A task force within ADF&G was created to come up with answers to these problems, and has been meeting since October 1997.

"All regions of the state are represented, as well as the Hunter Services coordinator, an area biologist, and one of our public service people," Bowen said.

The task force is following a process in developing solutions. The first step, she says, is to docu-

ment how the agency is currently handling permitting. The second step is to decide how it should be handled to better serve the public.

In 1997 the Board of Game adopted a new regulation that complicated the permit process. Both resident and non-resident hunters had to buy a hunting license and big game harvest tag before they could apply for a permit hunt. However, the Board amended that regulation for the 1998 season, so that only a hunting license must be purchased or order by mail before applying for a permit. It is no longer necessary to purchase the big game tag prior to applying for a permit hunt.

Bowen said the agency also wants to make it easy for a hunter to purchase a license and big game tags. Future plans include automating license sales, allowing people to purchase their hunting license over the telephone using a credit card.

"We hope for that system to be in place by 1999. We are also exploring the idea of putting the drawing permit system on the Internet, so people could apply for permits and purchase license over the 'net using a credit card."

Bowen stressed that the hunting public will have ample opportunity to comment on how to make the permit system better.

"First we are looking at how to improve the internal process of issuing permits," she said "We will soon be asking hunters how we can make the system better from their point of view. The task force has made few changes for the 1998 season."

"We plan to have the new program in place by the year 2000, but hunters will see major changes beginning in 1999."

Staying Off the Black List

by Bob Robb

Many hunters are not aware of what ADF&G calls the "Black List." But if you're on it, you may not be allowed to apply for a permit hunt for that year. The good news is that it is easy to stay off the black list: you simply have to return your permit report.

According to state hunting regulations, hunters are required to turn in the report portion of a permit within a few days after the season closes for most hunts. However, for some registration permit hunts, the time period for returning the permit report is shorter.

Bowen says this is because the seasons for some registration hunts are closed when a set harvest level is reached and permit reports are used to determine the

harvest level. For example, on some Kodiak brown bear hunts ADF&G wants your report two days after you leave the field, even if you don't kill an animal. On other hunts, it may be five days, or 15, or 30. These dates are determined by area biologists, who closely monitor the harvest as it occurs to avoid excessive take. Hunters need to pay attention to the requirements of each individual hunt.

"If you fail to return your permit report on time you may be put on the black list," or fined," Bowen said "If you're on the black list, you would not be able to participate in any drawing permit hunts the next year."

This stiff penalty is in place to force hunters to report to area

biologists in a timely fashion, Bowen said. The reason is simple. "These are restricted hunts because the number of hunters who want to participate is higher than the game population can sustain."

"Obviously, ADF&G has to keep a close eye on the affected game population," she said. "That makes the harvest information extremely important in terms of future management of that game population."

The black list is a one-year disqualification. It does not disqualify a person from participating in the general hunting season, only from permit hunts. Avoiding the black list is easy, game managers say: just turn in those permit reports on time.

Newsbreaks...

meet other like-minded outdoors enthusiasts to go hunting and fishing with. One lucky woman not only found a kayaking partner, but also a job through the contacts she made at the Juneau BOW. That same woman also won a sleeping bag as a door prize. Many women requested daylong workshops that built on the skills they had learned. Suggestions included a shotgun class for women, a class on canning fish, and saltwater fishing and boating. ADF&G biologist Anne Post reports that because of the positive experience of the BOW program, a group called "Beyond BOW" has formed in Juneau. The group now has 50 members. Members hold monthly meetings which feature lectures, demonstrations and a chance to practice outdoors skills. In addition, they plan boating, hunting, and hiking trips and are pursuing one-day weekend classes for women in shooting and other outdoors skills to build on what was learned at the BOW workshop.

Glennallen area biologist Bob Tobey reports the Copper River and Chitina River bison herds are both increasing. Tobey attributes improved counts to better calf survival during the previous two winters. The Copper River herd numbered 87 with 17 calves when he counted it last summer, and the Chitina herd numbered 46 with seven calves. He expects herd numbers to look good again this summer because of the mild winter just past.

Steel Shot Shoots Skeet in Juneau: Douglas area biologist Matt Robus worked with waterfowl hunting consultant Tom Roster to present his non-toxic shot education program to an enthusiastic Juneau audience during late last summer. This program is aimed at improving waterfowling skills and reducing wounding losses. The program kicked off with a Friday evening seminar where Roster made points about the need for hunter recruitment and why reduction of crippling is essential to the continuation of waterfowl hunting. The classroom was packed with more than 70 people. On the range the next day, each person was tested for ability to hit a crossing target at 20 yards. The group then went through exercises on distance estimation and shotgun patterning. This helped everyone see the relationship between distance and lethality. Then, Roster coached every participant until they were hitting at least six out of eight clays at thirty yards. Despite considerable difficulties arranging a shooting site and dealing with a roughly handled shipment of clay targets, the clinic was well received by participants.

The fall 1997 brown bear season on the Kenai Peninsula was closed by emergency order for the third year in a row. The harvest objective was reached when a moose hunter shot a collared sow. The three-year-old sow surprised the hunter on a trail and was shot at about fifteen paces. A train about five miles north of Moose Pass killed another collared female. The sow apparently was feeding on the remains of a hunter-killed moose near the tracks and was using the tracks as her access route. The bear was walking down the tracks and made no attempt to get off until the last instant. The hide was

Continued on page 10

Game Board Drops Big Game Tag Pre-purchase Requirements for Drawing Permit Applications

Faced with a declining number of applications, increasing confusion and a revenue loss estimated at \$120,000 last year, the Alaska Board of Game has rescinded the requirement that drawing permit applicants purchase the necessary big game tags prior to or at the time of applying.

The board, however, did leave in place the requirement that drawing permit applicants purchase a hunting license prior to application.

At its February meeting, the board heard a report from the Division of Wildlife Conservation on the effects of the tag fee requirement, which was adopted by the board in 1995 but only went into effect in the spring of 1997.

Even though slightly more permits were available than the year before, the number of applicants decreased by 4,389 (17 percent). The decline was most dramatic among nonresidents intending to hunt with next of kin for species for which a guide normally would be required. That segment of applicants declined 73 percent. The number of general nonresidents applying dropped 40 percent and the number of

resident applicants was down 15 percent.

Those who did apply had trouble completing the forms accurately. The initial error rate was more than 20 percent. Actions taken by DWC, including telephone contact with some hunters, trimmed the error rate to slightly more than 6 percent, but that still was nearly double the rate in any of the four previous years.

The single two-sided sheet previously used to apply for drawing permits was replaced by four double-sided pages to explain the new requirements and obtain the necessary information from those who wished to purchase tags and licenses with their applications.

DWC estimated it spent \$178,700 to start-up the new license and tag fee system, most of it on computer system analysis and software development to process applications. Recurring administrative costs were estimated at \$24,300 per year.

Based on averages for the previous four years, the loss of nonresident application and tag fees was projected at \$127,130 a year. That was offset somewhat by increased license sales.

One of the reasons the board adopted the tag fee requirement was to ensure that participants in Alaska's most intensively managed hunts were contributing a fair proportion of those management costs. But the large number of nonresident dropouts indicated their unwillingness to do so.

Another reason that motivated the board to adopt the tag fee requirement was to discourage frivolous applicants from decreasing the opportunities for serious hunters to obtain permits. The tag fee requirement did accomplish that goal. The number of permits won by Alaska hunters increased almost 3 percent to 97.2 percent. And the percentage of successful applicants jumped from 4.8 to 6.4 percent.

The increase was most dramatic for brown bear permits where the success rate jumped 4.75 percent to 12.25 percent. Interestingly, the success rates for two of the most coveted species, bison and sheep, increased by less than 1 percent.

Applications for drawing permits for the 1998-99 season became available May 1 and must be returned by mail no later than May 31.

1998-99 HUNTING REGULATIONS — What's New

The Alaska Board of Game meets at least twice each year to revise the state's hunting regulations and keep them up to date with changes in wildlife populations, hunting trends and other factors. This list shows some important changes that hunters can expect for the 1998/99 season. This list should be viewed as a general guide only. The regulations booklets will be available in early July.

BROWN BEAR

- * Changed resident bag limit to one bear per year in Units 19D and 25D, and eliminated resident tag requirement. Required in-unit sealing, and the bag limit does count against other areas of the state where the brown bear bag limit is one bear every four years.

- * Expanded all brown bear seasons in Unit 22 (except 22C) to include the entire winter season and extended the season to May 31.

- * Reduced resident season in Unit 26B from Aug. 20 to Sept. 1. Eliminated nonresident general season in Unit 26B and established drawing permit hunt from Sept. 1-May 20.

CARIBOU

- * Added a portion of Unit 12 to the registration hunt in southern Unit 20D.

- * Changed caribou drawing hunts in Unit 20B, 20F, and 25C (White Mts.) to registration hunts.

MOOSE

- * Closed the antlerless moose drawing hunts in Unit 14A, most non-military lands of 14C and 15A to nonresidents.

- * Added 5 days to the beginning of the spike-fork season in Units 12 and 20E.

- * Established Aug. 15-28 spike-fork moose hunt, and Jan. 1-Feb. 15 any bull hunt in Healy R. drainage of Unit 20D.

- * Eliminated the registration moose hunts in the Unit 21B Nowitna drainage and established general seasons.

MUSKOXEN

- * Established a combination of Tier I and drawing permit hunts on the east side of the Dalton Highway in Unit 26B and restricted the Tier II hunt to the west side of the Dalton Highway.

SHEEP

- * In Units 23 and 26A, sheep hunt areas were redefined, fall drawing permit hunts were established in portions of the units, and winter registration hunts were extended to begin Aug. 10 instead of Oct. 1. See page 96 and page 107.

MISCELLANEOUS

- * Simplified the license requirement for drawing permit applications.

- * Amended the meat-on-the bone restriction in Units 9B, 17, portions of 19A within the Holitna/Hoholitna Controlled Use Area, and 19B, to apply only prior to Oct. 1, and eliminate the ribs from the requirement. Also added Unit 21A to the area where meat-on-the-bone is required.

- * Required waterfowl hunters to register in the migratory bird harvest information program

- * Relaxed airboat restrictions in Nenana Controlled Use Area to allow hunting in the main channels of the Teklanika, Toklat, and Nenana Rivers.

- * Clarified that placing or leaving any active trap or snare set on land within 1/4 mile of a moose, caribou, or deer taken by the use of a trap or snare is illegal.

- * Redefined Wood River Controlled Use Area to remove northwest portion and add to the Ferry Trail Management area.

Hunters Support New Concepts in Hunter Services

First results from a novel new continuing survey of Alaska Hunters

by Tony Monzingo

ADF&G Hunter Services Coordinator

In 1994 the Department of Fish and Game and the Alaska State Legislature developed the Hunter Services program to provide hunters with the most current information and "how-to" tips on hunting in Alaska. David Johnson, now retired, was ADF&G's first Hunter Services program coordinator. David continues to participate in Alaska hunting issues as editor of the Alaska Hunting Bulletin. Under his leadership, clinics such as "Bear Hunting," "Becoming an Alaskan Hunter," "Caribou and Moose Hunting," and "Sheep and Goat Hunting" were initiated. The clinic program has been a resounding success from its inception. Each year many of the clinics' are sold out well in advance.

In addition to the present clinics, many hunters have indicated interest in additional clinic topics that would be "hands-on" and assist in developing new hunting skills or sharpening skills they already possess. In January 1997, the Hunter Services program began an on-going survey of Alaska hunters. Hunters participating in the survey are provided descriptions of numerous topics for future hunting clinics. Topics include such diverse hunting interests as handloading, marksmanship, animal tracking, muzzleloading, field care of wild game, photographing the hunt, and gun dog training.

Surveys show the most frequently requested clinic topics are these: field care of big game; survival for hunters; navigation for hunters; wilderness medicine; rifle marksmanship; calling big game; and animal tracking and sign identification. In response to the survey the Hunter Services program will add new clinic topics during 1999. As these clinics require a considerable amount of equipment and practice materials, the price will increase to cover costs. Most of the new clinics will probably cost \$20 to \$25, according to ADF&G Hunter Education Coordinator John Matthews.

To insure plenty of personal attention and hands-on experience, each "hands-on" clinic will be limited

to 24 hunters at a time. Hunters who complete a survey (see final paragraph for how to obtain a survey - Ed.) will have their name entered into the Hunter Services Program database. When a clinic is scheduled, the Hunter Services program will send a personalized card or letter to every hunter on the list who has marked that clinic topic as a high priority.

Direct marketing is less expensive for the program and insures that hunters who have a high interest in a particular topic will have a chance to obtain the training, skills, or practice they want. Clinics will initially be scheduled for Anchorage and Fairbanks. They will be held in other communities as demand warrants.

It is easy to praise Alaskan hunters for their selection of clinic topics. Numerous surveys of public opinion show that up to 80% of the non-hunting public supports hunting for food when the kill is swift and efficient. Hunters who work hard to train and prepare themselves for the hunt are to be commended and will be rewarded with continued strong public support for their hunting heritage.

*We found 77% of the Alaska hunters
we surveyed strongly support
special youth hunts.*

We found 77% of the Alaska hunters we surveyed strongly support special youth hunts. Youth hunts have quickly sprung up all around America. Hunters are faced with growing evidence that the hunting community is aging rapidly and too few young adults are becoming hunters. One of the greatest obstacles for youth interested in hunting is finding a place and opportunity to hunt. Many states have set aside a weekend or two in specific areas for mentored youth hunts. According to wildlife agency officials in those states, these hunts have been very successful in providing young people with both a place and an opportunity to develop hunting skills and enjoy the entire range of experiences associated with being outdoors during the hunting season.

*In 1991 Alaska's bowhunters requested a
proficiency test in conjunction with bow-
hunter education classes.....The net result,
according to bow hunter education
instructors, has been the production of more
efficient, skilled, and ethical bow hunters.*

Alaska's hunters also support reasonable proficiency requirements for firearms hunters. The experience of bowhunters bears out the value of this idea. In 1991, Alaska's bowhunters requested a proficiency test in conjunction with bow-hunter education classes. The proficiency test was designed to reduce wounding loss and to preserve hunting opportunities in publicly visible and sensitive areas. The results have been encouraging. The number of bow hunters has not declined as a result of the proficiency requirement and wounding losses have declined. The net result, according to bow hunter education instructors, has been the production of more efficient, skilled, and ethical bow hunters.

A large majority (78%) of the Alaska hunters we surveyed support extending proficiency testing to firearms hunting. A reasonable proficiency standard should go a long ways in reducing avoidable wounding losses among big game and waterfowl. Wounded animals may die a lingering death and high wounding losses detract from all hunters' opportunities by reducing available animals for harvest. In permit-only areas, wounding loss contributes to a reduction in available permits. A reasonable standard for proficiency would reduce wounding loss and increase public support for hunting as a quick and efficient means of sustained yield wildlife management.

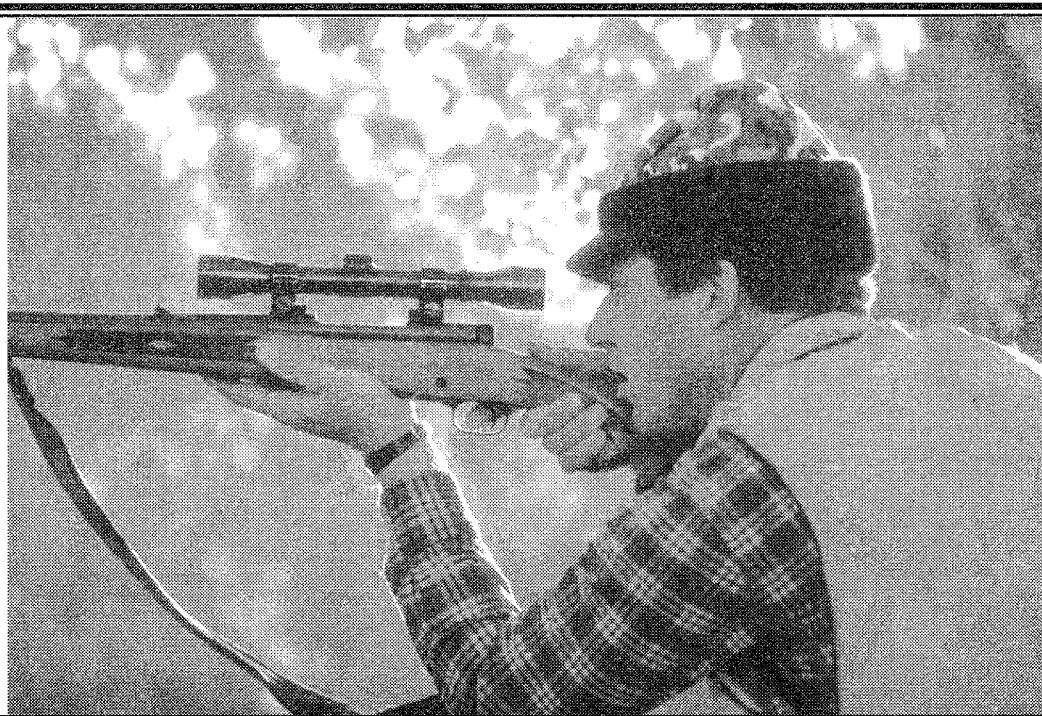
Hunters who have not had the opportunity to complete a Hunter Services Survey may pick up a survey at their nearest Fish and Game office. Hunters may request a survey by writing to Hunter Services, 333 Raspberry Rd., Anchorage, AK 99518 or by calling (907) 267-2347 in Anchorage or (907) 459-7213 in Fairbanks.

Hunter education: it's not just for kids. Adults can learn valuable skills too!!

For more information, call your local ADF&G
Wildlife Conservation office or:

(907) 459-7211 Fairbanks
(907) 267-2373 Anchorage
(907) 465-4265 Juneau

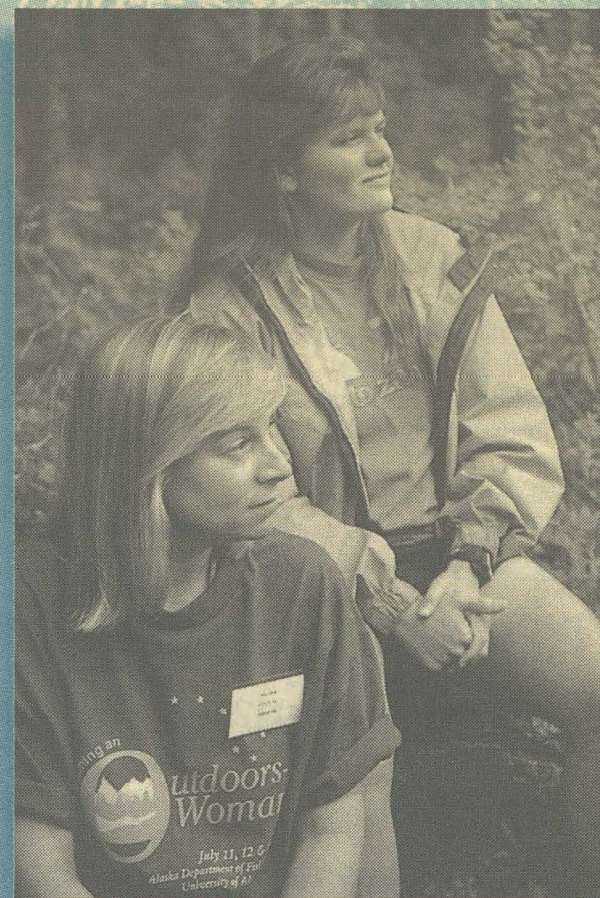
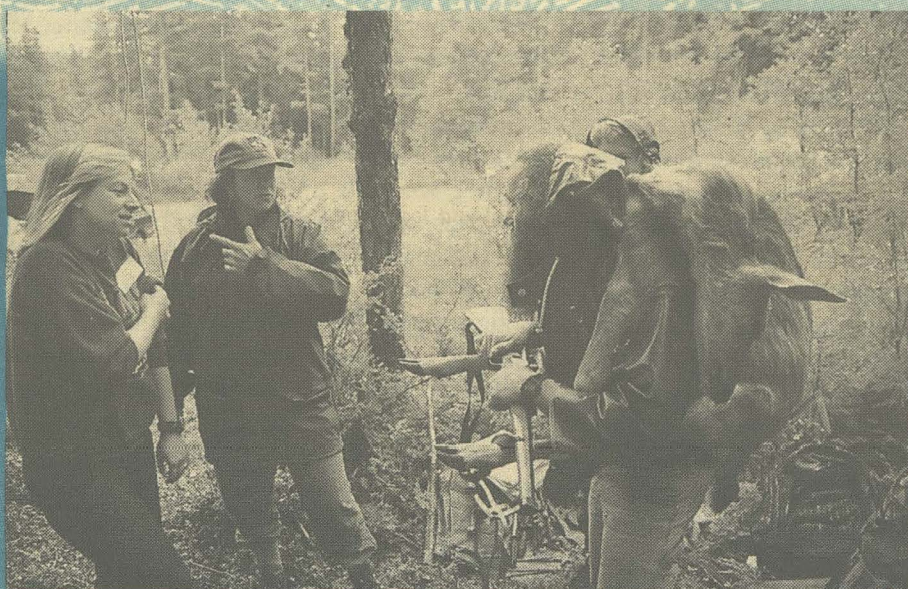
Most classes are taught winter and spring. Training includes firearms and outdoor safety, wildlife conservation, and hunting ethics and responsibility. Graduates receive an Alaska Hunter Education card which is accepted in other states and provinces that require hunter education training.



Becoming An Outdoors-Woman, Southeast Alaska Style

*Rain did not dampen the enthusiasm of
these Juneau area Outdoors-Women*

All photos by Michelle Sydeman, ADF&G



Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Weekend

Dear Gwen,

You asked me about the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman weekend. It was great! Yes, even your mother who has lived in Alaska for over 30 years - including the years in Galena - can learn new things about the outdoors in Alaska.

I have to admit that I wasn't sure what the women would be like. They included every age from the twenties to the sixties, personalities from boisterous to quiet, every body build and conditioning, some experienced and others new to Alaska. All of them wanted to learn more about the Alaska Outdoors and were real nice.

The instructors included well-known names and behind-the-scenes personnel from Alaska Department of Fish & Game, the Forest Service, Alaska Marine Safety Education Association and the public. The knowledgeable instructors explained things clearly without condescending. They encouraged us to get our hands on the subjects. They all showed great patience and tolerance with our beginner's attempts, like when I backed the boat trailer over the curb three times in a row. I sure used the whole empty parking lot during the boating safety class. Sure, I can drive a boat on the water, but Dad always trailers it. I should know how to do it if he got sick. Trailering is like learning to drive, your spouse shouldn't teach you.

The instructors also stayed cheerful, even when our Southeast rain tried to drown the fires during the Dutch Oven Cooking class. I wish you could have tasted the cakes and pastries we made. And the venison roast melted in our mouths. It all tasted so good! The rain added the right ambiance to the survival class when we built a shelter using leaves and sticks.

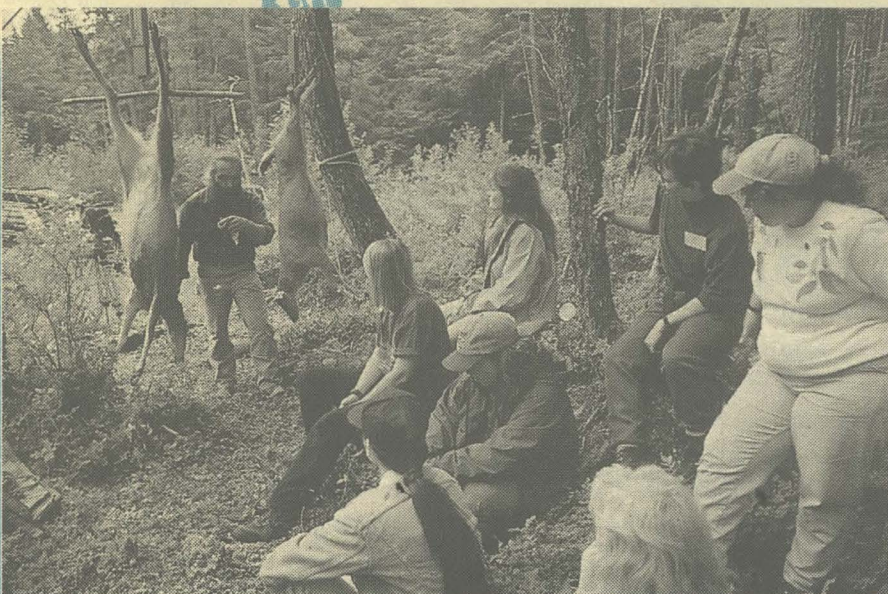
We had great sponsors, too. National, State and local organizations and businesses donated T-shirts, mugs and wonderful door prizes at the end of the weekend. My number was drawn for two prizes! I've never had my number drawn before - you know how many times I've put in for a buffalo permit. All the women and instructors came away winners from this weekend with new knowledge and friends.

On Sunday I didn't want it to end. Yes, I wanted to go home to your Dad, but I didn't want to loose contact with women who were interested in doing things I like to do. Now that my best hunting partner - you - lives out of state, I need other companions. So I set out a sheet of paper for them to write their names, addresses and phone numbers. I also drew some columns so they could check off their interests in boating, fishing, hiking and/or hunting and whether they were interested in going out weekends, weekdays or longer. Later I sent a copy of the list to each woman. Nineteen wrote down their names.

Since then our "Buddy List" has grown to 47. Now when one of us wants to take a hike or go fishing we can find someone to go with. We're talking about forming a club. I'm going to make sure it always encourages the safe and careful use of Alaska's wild creatures and places. This weekend some of us will hike to a cabin. One of the women might go on my hike-in hunt for a Dall ram up north in August.

I hope the Department of Fish & Game puts on another BOW workshop soon. Next time I'll take kayaking, shotgun and bowhunting, but then I sure do need to learn more ways to cook fish. I hope they have classes on using a GPS and making jerky from game meat. So many things to learn ... You have to get the people in Washington State to start a Becoming an Outdoors Woman Program, too. You and Jill will enjoy it.

Love, Mom



Nelchina Caribou: What Next?

Continued from page 1

for the Department of Fish and Game in Glennallen.

"When you're counting 30-some-thousand animals, an error of 10 percent is within acceptable limits of any affordable field operation," Tobey said.

Most of the remainder of the 10,000 was that fewer calves were born than were predicted.

"We determined at least half of that 10,000 was lower calf production," Tobey said. "When you go from a production of 55 calves per 100 cows down to the lower 40s, that's a 5,000 to 6,000 drop in calves."

Why the drop? There is good evidence that poor nutrition on the summer range is causing problems, Tobey said.

"Calves from the Nelchina herd don't weigh as much as calves from most other Interior herds," Tobey said. "We

feel the smaller size is some indication of range stress."

Tobey points out that nutritionally stressed caribou also often skip pregnancy the next year. Either they don't conceive or they don't carry the calf to term. "Pretty much the same thing happened after the cold summer of 1993."

Four years ago, biologists began a study to determine "age at first reproduction." With the aid of radio-collars, they're now finding that the Nelchina herd's cows aren't producing calves until age three.

"By comparison, when a herd is on real good range, probably about half the two-year-olds would have calves," Tobey said. "None of our two-year-olds had calves, and only half of our three-year-olds had calves."

Wildlife staff believe wolf predation is also up, based on their field observations and a higher than usual mortality

rate among radio-collared caribou, Tobey said. That can also have a strong effect on calf survival.

Last fall, after adjusting for summertime calf mortality, biologists reduced the Nelchina herd population estimate to 32,000, which is below the management objective of 35,000 to 40,000 caribou.

When the season began on August 1, department biologists were closely monitoring the herd's movements. With 24,000 permits out and only 32,000 caribou, they had to be ready to stop the hunt to avoid overharvest.

"We reduced the allowable harvest figures based on what we observed in herd production," Tobey said. "Herd swings are pretty much normal for caribou, and we always have to be ready to change our plans quickly."

Most hunters never did see the herd in large numbers.

Continued on next page

Newsbreaks...

Continued from page 5

salvaged for auction. The incident brought the total mortality to thirteen bears, seven of them females. There is some evidence that one other bear may have been taken illegally.

A plan to extend the Coastal Trail southeast from Kincaid Park to the Potter weigh station threatens wildlife habitats on the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge (ACWR) and operation of one of Alaska's most important shooting ranges. The Coastal Trail now extends approximately eight miles from downtown Anchorage to Kincaid Park at the tip of the peninsula in Cook Inlet on which Anchorage sits. The paved trail is popular with hikers, joggers, bikers, and other recreationists. The idea of a trail extension along the south side of the peninsula is widely popular, but locating the trail is the problem. Anchorage Wildlife Biologist Rick Sinnott points out that the ACWR is one of the largest wildlife refuges in any city anywhere, and that a trail cutting through it, as some have proposed, could substantially degrade wildlife habitats. Sinnott says the refuge is now largely protected from extensive human activity by limited public access. A paved trail would bring large numbers of people onto the refuge. A heavily-used trail and waterfowl hunting are probably not compatible in the refuge. The trail could also negatively change the nature of these tidal and estuarine wetlands by creating impoundments and changing water flow patterns. Also at risk is the Rabbit Creek Rifle Range, run by the Department of Fish and Game and serving thousands of shooters during snow-free months.

Some potential trail routes would force closure of parts of the range, which is now used not only for shooting, but also for hunter education training. The rifle range property is also now home for a regional hunter education training facility. Sinnott says the planning process is still ongoing and trail routing is still up in the air. He suggests hunters and other users of the refuge and the rifle range should be sure to make their views known to the consultants preparing the plan: Sarah Barton or Mark Dalton at HDR Alaska (274-2000).

Biologists see allowable PWS harvest more than doubling to 104 goats for the 1998/99 season. Cordova area biologist Roy Nowlin says surveys in nine Prince William Sound goat count areas indicate the goat population recovery that began two years ago continues. Conservative harvest rates of less than five percent of counts and hunting closures during the early- and mid-1990s likely improved the speed and strength of the recovery.

A mid-summer, 1997 sheep survey of a portion of the western Alaska Range (ARW) suggests the population has changed little since the area was counted in 1979 and 1986. ADF&G McGrath area biologist Jack Whitman and a survey team sampled 11 count areas, and classified a little under 1,200 sheep. These and data from 1994 and 1995 comprise the most recent data for an area covering 1,500 square miles. This is about half of the Dall sheep habitat within GMU 19C. Whitman says about 3,400 sheep currently reside in the GMU 19C segment of the ARW. He says additional 600-700 sheep probably inhabit GMUs 16 and

19B, bringing the total ARW sheep population to approximately 4,200-4,300 sheep. This number coincides roughly with the earlier population estimates. The team observed approximately 18 legal rams per 100 ewes and 28 lambs per 100 ewes.

Yearling moose survival appears to have increased dramatically in the intensive management zone in eastern GMU 19D. ADF&G staff flew calving surveys in late spring and summer last year and observed that calf percentages in the herd peaked by June 29 at 44 percent, then declined to about 25 percent by July 10. This pattern is similar to that observed during the previous three years. Whitman believes the improvement of yearling survival was probably due to mild winter conditions during 1996-97, as well as a significant increase in the wolf harvest. Fall, 1997 moose surveys verified the trend, he said.

The federal government is moving toward a simple new grazing lands policy that should dramatically reduce the potential of transmission of domestic animal diseases to wildlife. The Bureau of Land Management policy would establish buffer zones around wild sheep habitat. Grazing of domestic sheep would not be allowed in these buffer zones. Division of Wildlife Conservation wildlife disease specialist Dr. Randy Zarnke says the policy was discussed at a meeting of the Western Wildlife Health Cooperative (WWHC) in Reno last summer. WWHC representatives asked that the policy be extended to lands managed by the US Forest Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service as well. Zarnke asked that it also be extended to Alaska.

He says that if this policy were extended to lands managed by the State of Alaska, the potential for devastating domestic animal disease transmission could be reduced substantially. On another disease issue, Zarnke says that "chronic wasting disease" (CWD), the cervid equivalent of "mad cow disease," has recently appeared in captive and free-ranging elk and deer in Wyoming and Colorado. The WWHC agreed it would be prudent to limit movement of game farm cervids from those two states until CWD is better understood. The implications for Alaska are that importation of these animals from these states should be limited or excluded until this disease is understood.

Fairbanks Wildlife Conservation staff are in the final stages of planning an indoor shooting range that will be constructed on state land across from ADF&G headquarters on College Road. Regional Hunter Education coordinator Bob Hunter says the legislature appropriated \$2.5 million for the project that should dramatically improve firearms and hunting training in the community. Hunter expects ground to be broken for the project by mid-summer and a completed project by early 1999. The facility will have two classrooms with a capacity of 75 students and ten shooting lanes. The shooting lanes are designed for small bore rifles and will also accommodate some large bore handgun shooting.

The Kenai chapter of Safari Club International was granted a cultural education permit to take a moose in December. Several SCI members and

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1998 HUNTING CLINIC CALENDAR

Date	Clinic Topic	Location	Ticket Sales Begin
May 22-23	Big Game Hunting for Women	Anchorage	May 1
June 5-6	Alaska Big Game Hunting	Fairbanks	May 1-5
July 31 - August 1	Sighting-In Days	Anchorage	Tickets Not Required
August 15-17	Waterfowl/ Shotgun Skills	Juneau	TBA

Tickets are required for admission to clinics. Youth under 16 and seniors 60+ may obtain free tickets to the species specific hunting clinics. Tickets to species specific hunting license may be purchased for \$10 from Mountain View Sport Center and Barney's Sports Chalet in Anchorage, Chimo Guns in Wasilla, and at Down Under Gus in Fairbanks beginning on the dates show. Clinic locations and times will be printed on the tickets. The information this calendar is subject to change.

24-hour clinic information recording

Anchorage (907) 267-2531 • Fairbanks (907) 459-7333



Women are taking to hunting in record numbers in Alaska and across America. Photo by David Johnson

Nelchina Caribou: What Next?

Continued from page 10

Nonetheless, the department's Glennallen office kept busy. With so many hunters looking for the herd in vain, one person was kept busy just answering telephone calls, Tobey said. The recorded-message phone that gives in-season herd information was also in constant use, he said. [The Glennallen office provides up-to-date hunting information during the season on a telephone recording in Anchorage — 267-2304 -Ed.]

As in 1996, the herd remained dispersed and inaccessible to most hunters. However, the harvest was large enough that on Sept. 20, the department closed the Oct. 21 - Mar. 31 winter hunt to all but the 10,000 holders of Tier II permits. As things turned out, that decision made little difference to the 14,000 Tier I hunters. In October and November, the herd moved eastward to Tok, Northway and into Canada, another repeat of 1996 behavior. Again, the herd was inaccessible to most hunters.

What's the plan for the coming season?

"There's no question we didn't have the calf production," Tobey said. "At some point we have to cut back on the harvest to make up for this poor cohort coming in."

The department decided to cut back sooner rather than later, Tobey said. Only Tier II permits will be issued for Unit 13 in 1998, and how many won't be known until after the June herd counts.

"We told hunters Tier I was just a one- or two-year thing, and not to expect it to be an annual event," Tobey said. "It was intended to reduce the herd. It's just unfortunate that the herd declined in productivity and that hunters didn't get the benefit of more caribou."

One "social" type problem that Tobey saw with this year's hunt was that some hunters left gut piles right next to the road and parking areas.

"A few hunters came into the area, shot a caribou, brought it out to the road and left the gut pile almost on the blacktop," Tobey said. "Most travelers don't like seeing that. It's not that they're anti-hunters necessarily. Most are just non-hunters, and we don't want them to turn into anti-hunters because of some poor hunting practices."

The Management Objective

"The management objective" may sound like a Robert Ludlum novel, but it's nowhere near that exciting. Unless you're a biologist, that is.

Department of Fish and Game biologists have estimated that 35,000 to 40,000 caribou is the number the Nelchina herd's range can carry without damage from overgrazing. This is the management objective biologists attempt to attain and sustain.

The number wasn't plucked from the air, but is the product of years of field research in range health, calf production and other factors. Although nature may have done more in the last two years to reduce the herd's size than hunters, the department remains "pretty comfortable" with the current objective, said area biologist Bob Tobey.

"We increased the management objective above 35,000 when our studies showed the range improved in the late 1970's and early 1980's," Tobey said. "Then, when the herd got higher than 40,000 we started seeing a range condition decline."

Tobey says overall range condition today is visibly poorer, an observation borne out by the permanent range survey sites the agency has established. These sites show a distinct decline in lichen abundance, a caribou forage mainstay.

"With that kind of range decline, we had to reduce herd size in order to maintain the population," he said. "Caribou herds tend to cycle high and low, and the lows can sometimes remain low for a long time. We're trying to avoid those lows."

Whether the present management objective will accomplish that, only time will tell. Managing large herds of animals that wander over vast areas of roadless wilderness will likely always remain part science and part art.

Hunting As A Management Tool

"Game management" is something of a misnomer, since game managers have little control over game. They do, however, have at least some control over hunters. By regulating seasons, bag limits, antler size, methods and means, and so forth, managers can meet harvest objectives.

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The Search for Caribou Comanagement

(Editors Note: John Trent is Rural Issues Coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Conservation. In the August, 1997 issue of the Alaska Hunting Bulletin, he described recent experiences in the north with comanagement, a kind of shared decision making that developed in the 1980's. In this issue, John explains ongoing efforts in Alaska to explore the possibility of comanaging the Western Arctic Caribou Herd.)

At the Board of Game

It is October 27, 1997, the Alaska Board of Game is convened at Nome and Pete Schaeffer, Inupiaq hunter and regional leader from Kotzebue, is concluding his remarks to the Board:

"In fact, we have been waiting since Statehood and prior to be asked to participate. We wait patiently, instructed by our Elders to do so until we sit in our rightful place on the management table. Caribou is a good place to start, since we Inupiaq in Northwest Alaska, among other tribes, are the People of the Caribou. We cannot allow an opportunity such as this co-management project to fall by the wayside. We all cannot afford to. Thank you."

The Board responded with a resolution (97-115-BOG) encouraging the use of comanagement teams as, "a positive and beneficial supplement to the Board's regulatory process." The Board also assigned two members to work with a group examining comanagement of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd.

Looking for a Better Way to Manage

Comanagement of the herd emerged as a promising concept in the spring of 1995, during a meeting about improving harvest reporting in the north. In the winter of 1995-96, University of Alaska Professor Jack Kruse and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game held scoping meetings in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Barrow, Kotzebue, Nome and Huslia. The question asked was, "Does comanagement make sense for the Western Arctic Caribou Herd?"

Simultaneously, Maniilaq Association (Kotzebue), represented by Art Ivanoff, held a series of meetings in villages in northwestern Alaska to gauge support and share information on the Western Arctic Herd.

In the ADF&G scoping process, responses varied with geography. For the hunters, trappers and advisory committee members in Huslia, there was no question: comanagement was worth trying. Leaders in Nome and Kotzebue were also interested. "But it has to be true comanagement," one leader from Nome warned, "a true sharing of responsibility between the managers and the people".

At Barrow responses were mixed.

Elsewhere, members of the Fairbanks and Anchorage Advisory Committees expressed concerns that comanagement might cost urban hunters opportunities to hunt Western Arctic caribou. The Fairbanks committee agreed to provide a representative to work on the comanagement concept. Representatives of environmental organizations and feder-

al managers also had some concerns about comanaging this herd.

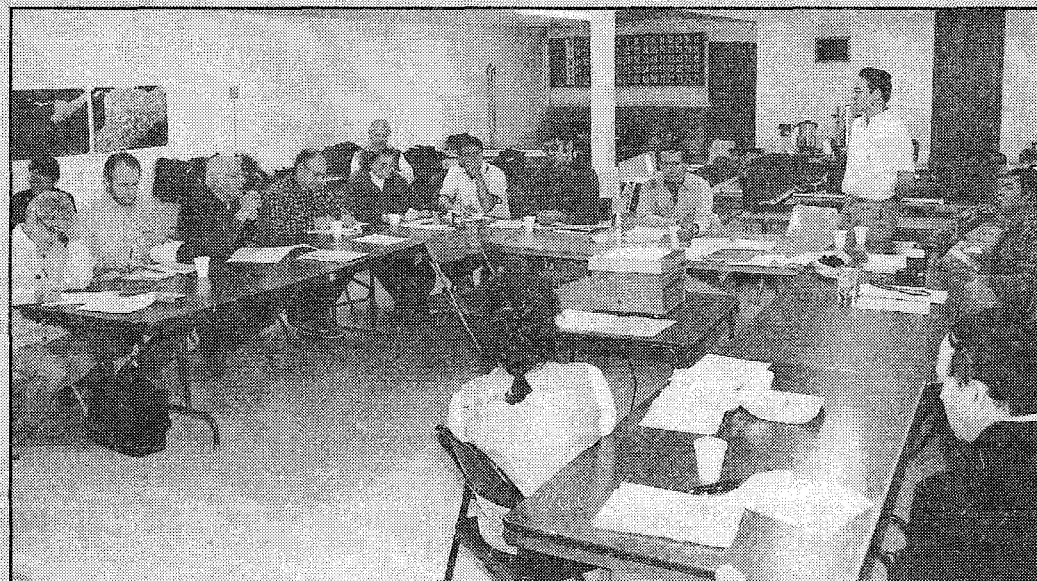
In April 1996, the Maniilaq Association organized a meeting called "Comanagement, an Opportunity to Work Together." Following that meeting, a comanagement agreement was drafted by some of the federally recognized tribes and regional Alaska Native

organizations like NANA, Maniilaq, Kawerak, and Tanana Chiefs. People in these organizations were ready to make caribou comanagement a reality.

At that point few people in Alaska knew about the tribes' draft comanagement agreement. Workers in the

Continued next page

The Western Arctic Caribou Working Group met at Unalakleet, Nov. 19-20, 1997. The purpose of this newly formed temporary group is to, "Develop an integrated grass-roots process for sharing representation, responsibility and decision making among stakeholders in management of the WAH."



Art Ivanoff (standing) of Maniilaq Assoc. is discussing comanagement concepts with the working group. Participants (seated left to right) are: Katharine Richardson, Fairbanks Advisory Committee; Pearl Sedacca, ADF&G (behind); Sverre Pedersen, ADF&G; Phil Driver, Fishing and Hunting Guide; John Coady, ADF&G; Leslie Kerr, Selawik Refuge Manager USFWS; Don Tomlin, BIA (behind); Stanley Ned, Tanana Chiefs Conference; Pete Schaeffer, Kotzebue IRA and working group Co-Chair; Bobby Amorak, Golovin; Art Ivanoff, Maniilaq Assoc. (standing); Jake Olanna, Kawerak Inc., Dave Spirtes, Superintendent USNPS (back to camera); Mary D. Charles, White Mountain IRA (back to camera). Photo by John Trent, ADF&G



IRA leaders Weaver Ivanoff of Unalakleet (left) and Pete Schaeffer of Kotzebue (center) listen to ADF&G Commissioner Frank Rue (right). Mr. Schaeffer is the Co-Chairman of the Western Arctic Caribou Working Group which was meeting at Unalakleet. Commissioner Rue attended for a day to listen and to support the concept of seeking a comanagement process. Photo by Walter Sampson



John Trent, ADF&G Working Group Co-Chair (left) and Guide Phil Driver (center) listen to Victor Karmun (right) tell a story. Victor works for the Northwest Arctic Borough in Kotzebue. All three were attending a meeting of the Western Arctic Caribou Working Group in Unalakleet. Photo by Walter Simpson

Caribou Comanagement

resource agencies felt that more public discussion was needed. Some also wanted to more fully understand the legal implications of comanagement. ADF&G staff were not opposed to comanagement, but felt that the discussion process needed to be expanded. "We believe the time is ripe to consider comanagement for selected resources," said John Coady, a senior ADF&G biologist speaking to the Alaska Bar

Association in March, 1997.

Since then, a Western Arctic Caribou Working Group has organized to include as many interest groups as possible. The working group is developing a public involvement plan and will begin discussing the Maniilaq draft comanagement agreement as well as other ideas for improving public participation. The working group will then make recommendations for change to decision makers like the Alaska Board of Game.

If created, a comanagement group would not be a regulations-making body. Instead it would provide recommendations for regulatory action to the Board of Game and the Federal Subsistence Board. Experience elsewhere suggests that comanagement groups are very successful in influencing the outcome of regulations as well as policies, research and management activities.

It's a Public Decision

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd is an enormous public asset. It is a resource currently in excellent condition. The 1996 census results have just been published: 463,000 animals were counted in that year. This represents approximately half of all the caribou in Alaska and is by far the largest caribou herd in the U.S. For Alaska Native people, the search for comanagement represents a deep-seated desire to participate more fully in management of a resource crucial to their cultures. For wildlife biologists, comanagement is an opportunity to improve upon the limitations of existing management systems. Will Alaskans approve this change in management style? Only time and discussion will tell. And that is the way it should be.

How would caribou comanagement be different?

If we follow many other examples already established in Canada and Alaska, the comanagement centerpiece would be a group of individuals dedicated solely to the welfare of the Western Arctic Herd and the all-people who use that herd. The people in this group would work together to identify and resolve problems concerning Western Arctic caribou. The group would meet regularly, including in the smaller communities within the range of the herd. Cross-cultural communication would be emphasized and decisions would largely be by consensus. The thorny issue of representation would have to be resolved to include all the main interests in this herd.

Newsbreaks...

Continued from page 10

Soldotna area biologist Ted Spraker, took 12 high school students and a couple of parents on the moose hunt. Prior to the hunt, students were required to take a hunter education course and discuss their hunt plans. A forked antler bull was shot on the first day. Each student was required to assist in field dressing the moose and helped pack the meat to a vehicle. After the meat hung for three days, students and instructors met again to butcher the meat. The finished products were divided among the

students. Students were selected by their high school principals and had to be from a single-parent household, needy, and show an interest in learning about hunting and how to care for a harvested animal. SCI plans to request this permit annually in an effort to educate young people who otherwise would not be exposed to hunting and game management.

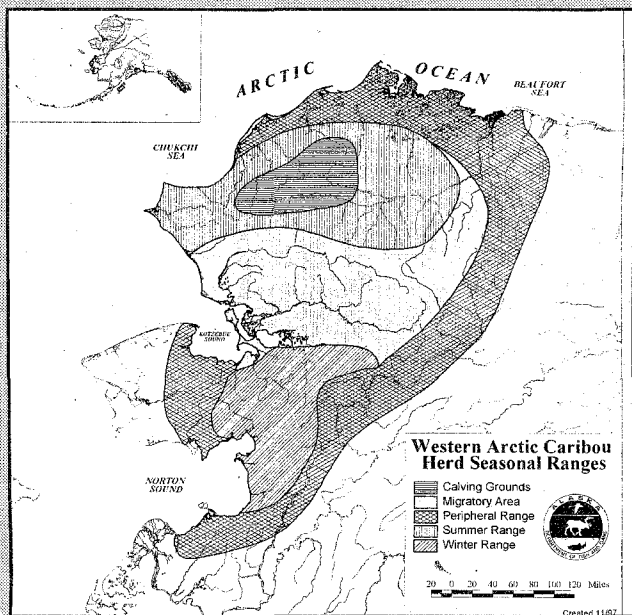
The US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) officially opposes reintroduction of wood bison on the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge at this time. In a letter, Regional Director Dave Allen

stated, "...if wood bison were not historically present on the Yukon Flats, the Service cannot support this proposal as an endangered species recovery effort, nor can we consider the species part of the natural diversity of the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge." FWS is not persuaded by oral history provided by 13 Athabaskan elders describing the presence of bison in Interior Alaska within the last 200-300 years, nor by other scientific evidence including sub fossils of wood bison found in the region.



Board of Game member Walter Sampson (left) enjoys a moment with Selawik National Refuge Manager Leslie Kerr (right) at the Unalakleet meeting of the Western Arctic Caribou Working Group. An important feature of comanagement decision making is heavy reliance on trust and understanding across cultural and agency boundaries.

Photo by John Trent, ADF&G



Approximate seasonal ranges of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd This large migratory herd, (436,000 in 1996), calves on the western North Slope near the headwaters of the Colville and Utukok Rivers. In recent years most of these animals have wintered south of the Brooks Range especially in the Nulato Hills east of Norton Sound. Alaskans from about 50 communities live within the range of these caribou.

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Caribou Identification Video Now Available

by Craig Gardner, Tok Area Wildlife Biologist

With antlers on both sexes, caribou bulls are sometimes difficult to distinguish from cows. In some hunts, moose must carry antlers larger than 50 inches. And in both cases, accurate identification is important.

In areas where caribou and moose hunts are restricted by sex of the animal or by antler characteristics, the regulations require hunters to accurately identify a legal animal — often under difficult circumstances. A poor decision in the field most likely will result in an illegal take. If illegal harvest is high, the resource and all hunters will suffer.

The Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) realizes that distinguishing a cow caribou from a small bull or determining if a bull moose has antlers greater than 50" in width can be difficult even under good conditions. To help hunters prepare for moose and caribou hunts in restricted areas, the DWC has developed two videos on identification of legal animals.

The video on moose identification has been available for three years. It remains an excellent review of antler size judging. The video is available at most Fish and Game offices. The video on caribou identification was completed in July 1997.

Caribou hunters face a difficult task when hunting caribou in areas that limit harvest to bulls. Both male and female caribou have antlers. Their antlers are often similar in size and conformation, particularly among cows and small bulls. Most hunters who mis-



No trouble distinguishing this as a large bull, but other caribou may not be so simple. A new ADF&G video can help hunters learn to tell smaller bulls from cows. Photo by Paula Rak courtesy of 40Mile Air.

takenly shoot cow caribou make bad decisions based on widely held misconceptions on how to distinguish young bulls from cow caribou.

The 10-minute video illustrates the different criteria that each hunter should use to identify caribou.

These techniques work in almost all situations. The video also covers some of the most common misconceptions that are still held by many hunters. We discuss what proportion of the herd are bulls, how using antlers as the main identifier could cause a hunter to shoot a cow and pass up a bull, and the dangers of using mane color to distinguish between bulls and cows. One important theme of the video is this: if you are not sure that you are looking at a legal animal, do not shoot. The video is currently available at ADF&G offices in Tok, Fairbanks, Delta, and Anchorage.

Since the inception of bull-only caribou hunts, the ability of hunters to identify bull caribou has improved. This has resulted in reduced illegal cow harvest. However, in some areas the number of illegal animals is still unacceptably high. We have found, in general, that hunters with the least caribou hunting experience make the most mistakes.

As a caribou hunter, your ability to accurately identify a legal animal is essential for the success of many management programs and for the continuance of extended hunting seasons and increased quotas. A little preparation can help ensure that hunting does not limit population increases and could lead to increased hunting opportunities in some areas.

Please, before hunting caribou in areas restricting harvest to bulls only, watch this video. We think you will be pleased that you did. Thank you for helping our caribou management programs succeed.

Southeast Alaska's Wolves: Threatened?

by Doug Larsen, Ketchikan Area Wildlife Biologist

In 1993, the Colorado-based Biodiversity Legal Foundation submitted a petition to the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS or Service) asking the Service to list Southeast Alaska's wolf population as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The petitioners argued that loss of habitat from clearcut logging, along with increased road access in parts of Southeast, had made the subspecies vulnerable to population declines which could best be addressed by placing it in threatened status.

Although the USFWS identified a number of concerns about the status of Southeast Alaska wolves, they did not at the time believe listing these wolves as "threatened" was warranted. The Alaska Board of Game (Board) met during fall 1996 and expressed concerns about the potential listing. The Board further expressed concerns about the long-term well being of Southeast wolves, particularly those inhabiting Prince of Wales Island (Game Management Unit 2) in southern Southeast Alaska where logging and

roading was most extensive.

To safeguard against over harvesting of wolves, the Board requested that ADF&G staff annually estimate wolf numbers in Unit 2 and then set harvest limits at 25% of those estimates. Additionally, the Board shortened the Unit 2 wolf hunting and trapping season from 172 days to 121 days, required that wolves from the unit be sealed within 30 days of the date of take, and required that hunters and trappers retain leg bones with their wolf pelts. Leg bones were requested by ADF&G biologists because the age class of wolves can be determined from them. These data are useful in better evaluating and understanding harvests.

The US Forest Service implemented additional safeguards through revisions of their Tongass Land Management Plan. A key revision to the plan was the establishment of a network of old-growth forest reserves to ensure for the conservation of critical wildlife habitat. This action is expected to substantially increase the likelihood of maintaining viable and well-distributed wolf populations throughout Southeast Alaska.

Wolf harvests from Southeast Alaska

have ranged from about 175 to 250 annually during the past six seasons. In Unit 2, where the bulk of the region's harvests occur, over 100 wolves have been harvested during several of the past six seasons, including a high of 134 during the 1996-97 season. The harvest of 80 wolves from the unit during the 1997-98 season appears to be within the pre-season quota of up to 90 wolves.

Given the interest and concern about Southeast Alaska wolves, ADF&G hired a full-time wolf research biologist who will be stationed in Ketchikan. The researcher, Dave Person, who recently completed a four-year doctoral wolf research project on Prince of Wales Island, is very familiar with the area and with local wolf populations. In his follow-up research, Dave will focus on wolf/deer relationships and ecology in a portion of Unit 2. He will also work on developing practical and efficient techniques for estimating numbers of wolves inhabiting Southeast Alaska.

In the meantime, the December - March hunting and trapping season will remain in effect for Unit 2, and the

November - April season will remain in effect throughout the remainder of Southeast Alaska. Biologists will examine leg bones collected during the season from hunters and trappers in order to determine the proportion of pups and adults harvested during the 1997-98 season. This information will be compared with future age structure data as a way of detecting possible changes in wolf populations.

Today, Southeast Alaska's wolf populations appear to be stable at relatively high levels. Although there continues to be some concern about the long-term welfare of wolves in areas where habitat loss and forest fragmentation have occurred, we are unaware of any current efforts to list the subspecies as either threatened or endangered. We believe recent Board of Game actions and Forest Service land management planning actions should take care of many of the short-term concerns for Southeast wolves. ADF&G and federal agencies will continue to monitor longer-term impacts from habitat loss into the future.

Alaska Hunting Fatalities Lead to Proposed New Training Plan

Continued from page 1

hunter education instructors, individual state troopers and wildlife protection officers have continued to assemble records of hunting accident trends.

According to hunter educators, Alaska could remain the most dangerous state because it does not have comprehensive hunter education requirements. Hunting accident research shows that virtually every accident is preventable if hunters practice and abide by a few basic rules of firearm safety. In states where hunter education is required, accident rates have declined as much as 75% since pre-hunter education days. The clear correlation between mandatory hunter safety and the decline in firearms-related hunting fatalities shows the effectiveness of hunter education, Matthews says.

Concern for the safety of both hunters and non-hunters afield triggered a 1997 request to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game from Alaska's volunteer hunter education instructors. Many of Alaska's 300 volunteer hunter education instructors urged the Department to address the need for statewide hunter education requirements.

ADF&G hosted a statewide meeting of over 120 hunter education instructors in February 1997. The instructors recommended the Division develop a new five-year plan. They wanted to address three priorities: 1) implementing universal and incentive-based hunter education programs; 2) developing an Alaska-specific hunter education curriculum, and 3) addressing Native Alaskan concerns about presenting hunter education in rural communities.

As a result of the meeting Director of Wildlife Conservation Wayne Regelin appointed a hunter education steering group the following month. The steering group's charge was to assist the Division in establishing a five-year plan for hunter education. This new five year plan will become effective beginning July 1, 1998. The eight-member steering group includes hunter education instructors Mel Hein of Palmer, Del Demeritt of Fairbanks, Sarah Jones of Soldotna, and Ted Schenck of Sitka. The steering group also includes Dan Kittoe of Anchorage, a registered guide and volunteer instructor; Eddie Grasser of Palmer, representing the Alaska Outdoor Council; David Cline, representing the Alaska environmental-conservation community; and Orville Lind of King Salmon, representing the rural Native community.

The steering group immediately began regular meetings. The group examined national and Alaska statistics regarding hunting accidents, hunter behavior in the field, other states' hunter education programs, and public perceptions of hunting and hunters. By September 1997, a comprehensive draft proposal had been crafted. Each member of the steering group took the draft plan to other groups for feedback on the proposal.

As a result of the feedback, the draft proposal was fine-tuned over the next three months. In January the steering group gave unanimous approval to the final draft. A few weeks later, the steering group presented the final draft to

hunting accidents, sharpen Alaska hunters' skills in the field, address excessive game and waterfowl wounding losses, and increase the number of ethical and responsible hunters in the field.

The proposed plan would take effect on July 1, 2000 in key Game Management Units to be designated by the Alaska Board of Game. Anyone hunting in those GMU's born after July 1, 1970 would be required to possess a hunter education card. Hunters who already possess an Alaska hunter education card or a valid hunter education card from another state would not have to retake the basic hunter education class. Surveys conducted by the

classes in topics such as survival, wilderness medicine, field care of game meat, marksmanship skills, tracking game animals, and calling big game.

Hunters applying for drawing-only hunts who completed two advanced clinics over a three-year period would have an additional random number entered in the annual drawing for the restricted entry hunts. The steering group selected this incentive plan because first time applicants and hunters who do not choose to attend advanced clinics would still retain a reasonable chance to be drawn.

The draft plan calls for the development of a voluntary "master hunter" program patterned in part after the concept pioneered in Oregon and Utah. Department surveys show that 83% of Alaska hunters support the implementation of a "master hunter" program. These states and others are now using their "master hunter" program to certify small numbers of hunters for participation in highly sensitive hunts, typically in or near urban areas.

The intent of the "master hunter" program is to preserve hunting opportunities that would be lost in urban areas due to safety or competency concerns or regain lost hunting opportunities by placing highly proficient and safe hunters in areas where hunting was lost due to safety or animal wounding concerns.

In Minnesota, bow hunters have been able to create and maintain deer hunts within the metropolitan Minneapolis-St. Paul area by using this concept. In Oregon, hunters have been able to reopen areas previously closed to hunting by certifying "master hunters." Volunteers for the "master hunter" program undergo approximately 160 hours of advanced training in topics including big game anatomy, media relations, and more.

The steering group is convinced that implementation of the draft plan is a "win-win" situation for Alaska's hunters. This plan should dramatically reduce Alaska's alarming hunting accident rate, bolster public confidence in Alaska's hunters, and reduce hunting regulations violations. Alaska's hunters will reap the benefits of this plan by saving lives, preventing anti-hunting from reducing hunting opportunities, and perhaps regaining some of the hunting opportunities we have already lost.

HUNTER EDUCATION PROPOSAL HIGHLIGHTS

Note that this is still very much a proposal and whatever changes eventually come about will be as a result of public discussion and action by the Alaska Board of Game. The proposal is designed to dramatically reduce firearms fatalities in Alaska by training hunters to be safe, responsible, and ethical when afield.

If approved by the Board, Alaska or other valid US or Canada Hunter Education cards would be required beginning 7/1/2000 as follows:

- * For anyone born after 7/1/1970
- * Initially in certain Alaska GMUs only
- * In additional GMUs beginning 2001
- * Statewide beginning 7/1/2003

Incentives would be offered to encourage maintaining or sharpening hunting skills

- * Hunters completing two advanced clinics over a three year period would be eligible for improved odds in drawing hunts
- * Hunters could work and study toward recognition and additional hunting privilege as a "master hunter."

over 110 instructors at ADF&G's annual instructor's conference and workshop. After receiving additional feedback from the instructors, the plan was accepted by acclamation and presented to Director Wayne Regelin. Actual implementation will depend on public discussion and approval by the Alaska Board of Game. The Board of Game will have to approve or modify portions of this plan for implementation.

The steering group's final comprehensive draft plan directly addresses Alaska's high hunting accident rate. Incorporating successful ideas from other state programs and adding some uniquely Alaskan ideas resulted in a draft plan designed to reduce Alaska's

Department of Fish and Game indicate that more than 40% of Alaska residents in this age group already possess a current hunter education card.

In 2001 and following years additional GMU's would be added to the requirement. According to the plan, hunter education would become universally required in Alaska beginning July 1, 2003.

The draft plan also calls for incentives for hunters to maintain their hunting skills and safety practices. Surveys indicate that a large majority (over 80%) of Alaska hunters support some form of incentive system for the drawing-only hunts. The draft program would offer voluntary advanced

Nelchina Caribou: What Next?

Continued from page 11

Trouble is, legal constraints sometimes limit management options. And hunters don't always do what managers think they'll do.

Until 1990, if you wanted to hunt Nelchina caribou in GMU 13, you threw your name in with as many as 16,000 other applicants to win one of 1,800 drawing permits in a lottery. If you won, you went hunting, and you hunted hard. In those days, up to 70 percent of drawing permit holders took home caribou.

After a 1989 decision by the Alaska Supreme Court (*McDowell v. State of Alaska*), all Alaskans became subsistence users, where before it had been only the 20 percent living in "rural" areas. To provide for times when game was insufficient for subsistence needs, the Board of Game set up a "tiered" system for allocating game among subsistence users. To obtain a Tier II subsistence permit, applicants have to answer questions about their customary and direct dependence, and the availability of alternate foods. Applicants scoring highest win the permits, with a limit of three per family.

For whatever reason, when the Nelchina hunt went to Tier II, the hunter success rate began dropping, from about 70 percent to about 50 percent. At the same time, the percentage of bulls in the harvest increased from about 50 percent to about 75 percent.

In 1996, when the herd numbered 50,000—10,000 more than the management objective—biologists knew that to reduce and stabilize the population, they needed to harvest more cows. Because of the state's subsistence laws, a Tier I hunt was the only available option. In this case, permittees were only allowed to harvest cows. To minimize problems with young bulls being mistaken for cows, Tier I hunters were allowed to take a young bull instead of a cow, providing it had 6 or fewer tines on one antler. Tier II hunters were given the choice of taking a bull under the Tier II permit or a cow or young bull under a Tier I permit.

Although natural factors including weather and predation apparently helped reduce the size of the herd during the past two years, the Tier I hunt showed promise as a management tool. During the 1996-97 season, 50 percent of the harvest of 5,000 caribou in Unit 13 were cows, most of which were taken by Tier I hunters. If Tier I hunting had continued into the winter of 1997-98, a similar cow-bull harvest composition would have likely resulted, instead of the 1,100 cows and 2,400 bulls that were taken in that harvest.

If—or more likely when—the Nelchina herd again surpasses the management objective of 40,000, biologists say hunting cows will probably again be necessary. This should avoid herd growth to a size that could spell long term damage to its range.

Counting Caribou

Caribou, constantly in motion, are not the easiest animals to count. While modern radio-tagging and photographic equipment has come to the aid of biologists, much hard work remains. Area biologist Bob Tobey, of the Department of Fish and Game's Glennallen office, explains how the Nelchina herd is counted.

"In the spring, about a month after calving, we count the caribou when they come together in a post-calving group. This is the time when caribou are most aggregated. The bulls are the missing ingredient in these big groups, because they are spread out in smaller groups in the mountains."

"If the groups are tightly grouped we take aerial photos with a special survey camera. Smaller groups that are more spread out we count from other small aircraft. We count the caribou in the aerial photos and add in the caribou we count in the smaller groups."

"Immediately after we count in the spring, we go back out in a helicopter to get herd composition. We need to know the percentage of bulls, cows and calves in the herd. Then, during the rut, we go back out and look at herd composition again. This is when we pick up the bulls

that weren't in the spring groups. This second comp count also tells us how the calves fared during the summer."

"The final herd estimate is a combination of a direct count and an extrapolation of animals that didn't get counted, but that we know are there based on changes in the comp counts. This is why we do comp counts twice a year."

"We're tracking trends. We don't know the exact number. But we know that what-

ever number we get, it's probably a minimum. You usually don't count them all."

"Our current caribou counting techniques have evolved quite a bit in the last few decades. The counts aren't perfect, but that's pretty typical of wildlife surveys anywhere. The question we have to ask is this 'is the system good enough to allow us to meet management objectives.' At this point, I'd have to say it is working."

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