RC28

PUBLIC TESTIMONY FR THE BOARD OF GAME

PRESENTED BY JOE CHYTHLOOK, BBNA

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WASILLA, ALASKA

Mr. Chairman, Board of Game Members, State and Federal Staff, and Members of the public:

First of all, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

For the record my name is Joe Chythlook, a life time Alaska Native resident of the Bristol Bay Region. I am a subsistence hunter and fisherman. I have also been involved in the commercial salmon fishery in Bristol Bay for over 60 years. I was employed as a minister and an air taxi commercial pilot for several years as well. In May of 2009, I retired from 21 years (seasons) of public service to the State of Alaska as a Regional Coordinator for the Boards Support Section of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in Southwest Alaska. And I'm wondering **"WHAT AM I DOING HERE TODAY?"**

I currently Chair the Board of the Bristol Bay Native Corporation (BBNC), one of the 13 regional corporations established under 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANSCA). As stated in my other submitted comments, for most of our 8700 shareholders who reside in the Bristol Bay region, fish and game resources, including moose and caribou, are very important as their continued subsistence food sources.

For this meeting, I am working under a limited contract with the Natural Resource Department of the Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA), a Tribal Consortium in the region, made up of 31 tribes from villages which are situated within the boundaries of Game Units 9 and 17 in Southwest Alaska. My main job is to help with the ongoing **Bristol Bay Moose and Caribou Enhancement Project** which was started by Hans Nicholson a couple of years ago. Therefore, my comments on the predator control proposals you have before you will reflect the concerns of the folks who live in these villages.

Mr. Chairman, moose and caribou have historically been the main red meat source for most of the tables of residents within Units 9 and 17. However, in both areas, it has become more challenging to successfully hunt and harvest either moose or caribou in the hunting grounds surrounding these villages. Not only has competition from out of the area Alaska residents and non-Alaska residents hunters increased, but most local folks believe predation from both brown bears and wolves has had a very significant effect on the decrease in numbers of these ungulates. Another factor expressed was that bears and wolves are chasing moose and caribou away from their historical local rearing areas and habitats.

From my recent conversations with some southwest village residents, more problems with wolves and brown bears is due to the increase in their numbers close to these communities. In particular, brown bears were mentioned as causing more problems at fish camps, local lodges, and around fish racks and smokehouses in most villages. Then in several local AC meetings, village member representatives reported more wolf packs were observed in both areas within GMUs 9 &17. And we hear of more cases where wolves are attacking dogs and killing them within villages in the area. And, as some of you may recall from several Board of Game meeting cycles ago, one lady from Egegik observed that **"humans could become part of the food chain."** And, most unfortunately, that became the sad reality down in the Village of Chignik Lake during the winter of 2010.

My observation has been that both State and Federal biologists have down played the number of wolves and brown bears and the damage they can cause to moose and caribou within southwest Alaska. But what local village residents have stated, and the conclusions from the April 2009 Hans Nicholson's King Salmon meeting report, clearly suggest that wolf and brown bear numbers have greatly increased. And they are becoming real nuisances locally and are also preying on these ungulate species that local folks heavily rely on for subsistence food. And the overall consensus I hear loud and clear from the residents of these communities is that **"control measures need to be implemented sooner rather than later".**

Mr. Chairman, you and past Board members have heard similar comments from many others before. And I suspect you will hear from more today. And, I fully realize and do appreciate the sensitivity of this issue. The following excerpts I took from the **Kimberly Titus (2006-2007)** report on **Intensive Management of Wolves and Ungulates in Alaska**, has helped me to fully realize and to agree that the predator control **"debate has existed since before statehood in 1959 and is ongoing".** And I also realize that **"high public interest in wolves and brown bears is confounded by some unique Alaska laws and perspectives."** But there is no doubt in my mind today that **"many Alaskans (STILL) maintain a subsistence culture, tradition and lifestyle that depends on wild foods. This dependence is protected under both state (state subsistence statute) and federal (Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act [ANILCA]) laws. Therefore, despite changing times, the public demand for access to food in form of ungulates, salmon and other subsistence foods remains a cornerstone of fish and game management in Alaska. As a result, many Alaskans support intensive management programs, such as predator control".** And many tribal members as well as many others Alaska residents from the Bristol Bay region continue to support this position.

Mr. Chairman, from the same report cited above, I observed with great interest what was successfully done in GMU 20A and fully agree with the conclusions that were drawn from the use of the wolf predator control program in that area. I read **"wolf control can lead to an increase in moose densities."** And I also note that **"The area contained only about 2500 moose when wolf control was implemented in 1975....and the moose population increased to between 10,000 and 11,000 moose by 1989."** Then in as a result of the 1993 and 1994 wolf control program..."**the moose population increase to over 15,000.**" Then Mr. Titus concluded that **"this successful program suggests that, even in a northern system with multiple predators (wolves and brown bears in this case), wolf control can shift a moose population from a low-density to a high-density equilibrium where favorable habitat occurs. In these situations, the moose population can increase markedly".** From this I conclude that predator control can and does work. And I firmly believe it can work in our area as well. Many local tribal members and southwest fish and game advisory committees have repeatedly spoken to support this in past meetings.

Therefore, on behalf of the many BBNA tribal members and others who STILL rely heavily on moose and caribou as subsistence food in southwest Alaska, I would strongly recommend that proposals that are before you to reduce wolf and brown bear numbers are given due diligence and properly addressed. The proposals to implement predator control in GMU 9 & 17 that were discussed and acted on by the Southwest AC members in their meetings I participated in were:

Proposal 21. Supported as amended by Lake Iliamna AC

Proposal 29. Supported as amended by Lake Iliamna, Nushagak, and Togiak ACs

Proposal 119. Supported as amended by Lake Iliamna, Nushagak, and Togial ACs

And since many of the members of these advisory committees are tribal members as well, BBNA fully supports these actions taken. Again, I would strongly suggest that similar actions that have been taken for other areas are seriously considered and action by this Board taken to implement predator control programs in Game Units 9 and 17, **"sooner rather than later"**. I believe now is the time. And if affirmative action is taken by this Board on the suggestions made by the local advisory committees, this could certainly help the enhancement of moose and caribou in parts of GMUs 9 & 17.

Now, I hope you understand with me why I was here today. And I will be willing and available to continue to discuss this issue and to help to come up with a viable solution to this issue.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak.

Intensive Management of Wolves and Ungulates in Alaska

Kimberly Titus
Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation
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Introduction

Across Alaska, all species of terrestrial wildlife and, in particular, big game currently occupy their historic range. Wolves (*Canis lupis*) and brown bears (*Ursus arctos*) are not, and have never been, listed under the Endangered Species Act. Wolves and brown bears are generally absent from the state's few urban areas, but both are often found within a few miles of downtown areas. Ungulates, including moose (*Alces alces*), caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) and Sitka black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus sitkensis*) occur across the state. Moose and caribou numbers are regulated by many factors, such as range health, habitat type, weather, disease, human harvest and predation. Wolves, brown bears, and black bears (*Ursus americanus*) have, within their respective ranges, significant impacts on ungulate populations in northern regions. Understanding these relationships has been the subject of various research efforts over the past few decades (e.g., Gasaway et al. 1983, Gasaway et al. 1992, Boertje et al. 1996, Hayes et al. 2003). Over the same period, there has also been constant, public debate across Alaska about how to manage prey and predators, particularly control of predators to increase ungulates for human harvest (e.g., National Research Council 1997, Regelin et al. 2005). In fact, this debate has existed since before statehood in 1959 (Harbo and Dean 1983) and is ongoing (Decker et al. 2006).

High public interest in wolves and brown bears is confounded by some unique Alaskan laws and perspectives. Many Alaskans maintain a subsistence culture, tradition and lifestyle that depends on wild foods. This dependence is protected under both state (state subsistence statute) and federal (Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act [ANILCA]) laws. Therefore, despite the changing times, the public demand for access to food in the form of ungulates, salmon and other subsistence foods remains a cornerstone of fish and game management in Alaska. As a result, many Alaskans support intensive management programs, such as predator control. However, despite the

ranged from 6,700 to 8,700 during 1996 to 2005, with a mean annual harvest of 7,500. Hunter harvest may be managed by restricting the harvest to one sex, by imposing antler restrictions, such as the spike-fork, 50-inch and 4-brow-tine regulations, and by issuing a limited number of permits. Three types of permits mainly are used to manage hunter participation in an area. In areas with very high hunter demand where subsistence is not a priority, a drawing (lottery) hunt may be used to limit the total number of hunters. In registration hunts, the number of permits is usually not limited, but these hunts are sometimes restricted to residents or to specific locations. In areas where there are not enough moose to satisfy the subsistence need, a subsistence permit hunt may be held. Subsistence permits are awarded only to residents based on a demonstrated history of use and dependence on the resource for food and on the availability of alternative resources. In some remote areas of the state, there is a late-winter, moose-hunting season designed to provide moose for subsistence hunters. Where moose numbers are at very low levels, locals have sometimes asked the Alaska Board of Game to completely close the hunting season in an attempt to eliminate all poaching and to help increase the moose population to allow for a future harvest.

Across much of interior Alaska, both north and south of the Alaska Range, large predators (wolves, brown bears and black bears) can maintain moose and sometimes caribou at low population levels (e.g., Gasaway et al. 1992, Boertje et al. 1996, National Research Council 1997). This can leave little harvestable surplus for humans. Alaska has an estimated 7,700 to 11,200 wolves. Wolves have never been threatened or endangered in Alaska, and they inhabit all of their traditional range, except within the largest cities. Wolves are harvested across the state, traditionally by trapping and hunting (Figure 1), with the total annual harvest averaging 1,500 from 1996 to 2005. Seasons and bag limits vary depending on whether wolves are harvested via hunting or trapping regulations, which differ.

Intensive Management and Wolf Control

There have been two intensively managed areas where predator control was either never implemented or has been terminated. One area with a program for nonlethal, wolf-control was for the Fortymile caribou herd, mentioned previously; the program is no longer in effect.

The other area is Game Management Unit 20A (6,796 square miles [16,601 km^2]), south of Fairbanks (Figure 2), which is an example of how lethal

control program was implemented to reverse a dramatic decline in caribou numbers, but the primary beneficiary appeared to be moose. The wolf population was reduced by about 60 percent and the moose population increased to over 15,000. Harvest of antlerless moose was eventually implemented to meet intensive harvest objectives and to regulate the moose population (Boertje et al. 2007). Annual harvests of up to 1,100 moose have occurred over the last few years and appears to regulate the moose population. After 1995, wolves recovered to precontrol levels and the Unit 20A wolf population is now the highest-density wolf population in interior Alaska. Wolves are currently harvested by trapping and hunting, but their population is not being regulated by that harvest, and no control program is in place. Favorable habitat and weather conditions appear to have facilitated the increase in this moose population. This successful program suggests that, even in a northern system with multiple predators (wolves and brown bears in this case), wolf control can shift a moose population from a low-density to a high-density equilibrium where favorable habitat occurs. In these situations, the moose population can increase markedly.

Current (2006 to 2007) Intensive Management Programs Using Wolf Control

The intensive management law requires that the Alaska Board of Game establish predator- and prey-population objectives prior to instituting a predator-control program. The board sets prey-population objectives at a public meeting, after considering department staff reports on historic prey population and harvest levels, population parameters, habitat status, predation levels, as well as testimony from the public and local advisory committees. Once the prey-population objectives have been set, the department determines the size to which the wolf population would need to be reduced to achieve the desired prey densities. This wolf-population objective is included in a predation-control-area implementation plan that is then presented to the board for adoption into regulation. Wolf-take objectives represent the difference between the regulatory management objective and the department's current best estimate of wolf-population size. Wolf-population estimates are derived from results of aerial surveys, sealing information, productivity estimates and on immigration information. Population estimates and take objectives are revised annually as updated information becomes available. Wolf-take objectives for the winter of 2007 are between 382