

PROPOSAL 76

5 AAC 92.126. Non-Intensive Management Predator Control Plans.

Establish a non-intensive management predator control plan in Unit 21 for bears and wolves as follows:

Establish a non-intensive management predator control plan (5AAC 92.126) to address the conservation concerns for the Galena Mountain (GMH) and Wolf Mountain (WMH) caribou herds.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The GMH and WMH are very low, they have declined in recent years, and their low abundance represents a conservation concern. ADF&G estimates less than 150 caribou remain in the GMH and only 300-500 caribou remain in the WMH. A minimum count of 313 caribou was reported for the GMH in 1998 and a minimum count of 595 caribou was reported for the WMH in 1992. Alaska's State Constitution Article VIII, Section 4 Sustained Yield, requires ADF&G to manage populations (herds) on a sustainable basis. The GMH and WMH are identified as distinct populations in 5 AAC 92.108 and 5AAC 99.025, therefore the state has a responsibility to manage these distinct herds for sustainability. A non-intensive management predator control plan (5 AAC 92.126), should be established for these two herds that encompasses the Kokrine Hills in Units 21B north of the Yukon River, all of 21C, and the eastern portion of 21D. At a minimum, the plan should have three components: 1) department predator control; 2) habitat enhancement, and 3) public predator control.

The abundance of these two herds has been in decline and predators (black bears, grizzly bears and wolves) are likely the primary limiting factors. Although the GMH and WMH do not have a positive finding for intensive management, they are managed to provide hunting opportunities. ADF&G is not meeting these management objectives. All seasons were closed in the area of the Galena Mountain caribou herd beginning in 2004, and harvest from the WMH has never achieved the management harvest objective of up to 35 caribou.

Habitat enhancement along with predator control should be included in a non-intensive predator control plan. The habitat that the caribou travel through on their way to calving grounds, has been encroached by dense spruce and birch forest which provides cover for predators. Fire suppression and the elevational advancement of spruce and birch vegetation in these travel corridors, has reduced visibility for caribou cows and increased risk of predation for them and their newborn calves. In addition, reducing the number of bears and wolves and reducing the cover in these important travel corridors would improve caribou survival, and result in an increase of these populations.

I believe that conservation of these herds should not be contingent upon the biological issue of whether the GMH and WMH are or are not part of Alaska's caribou metapopulation, because these two herds have already been designated in regulation as distinct manageable populations by the Board of Game and ADF&G. The state must not neglect its responsibility to manage these herds by making the metapopulation claim [Native Village of Elim vs. State of Alaska (1999); Koyukuk River Basin Moose Co-Management Team vs. Board of Game (2003); West vs. State of Alaska (2010)].

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