

Chairman Spraker and members of the Board of Game: thank you for this opportunity to testify.

My name is Connie Brandel. I am a staff member and board member of the Alaska Wildlife Alliance. My testimony today is on behalf of the organization.

Incorporated more than 35 years ago, AWA is an Alaska-based, grassroots, not-for-profit organization. We have more than 1,000 active supporters representing Alaska, the Lower 48 and several foreign countries.

Our mission statement reads in part:

The Alaska Wildlife Alliance advocates for healthy ecosystems, scientifically managed to protect our wildlife for present and future generations.

I am here to testify in support of Proposal 142, to establish a Denali wolf protection area. The Alaska Wildlife Alliance submitted this proposal in cooperation with the Denali Citizens Council.

The six year (in effect seven year) moratorium the Board imposed in 2010 banning the submission of proposals relating to this issue has expired. In the absence of a buffer the park's wolf population declined, and remains at historically low numbers. More importantly, several wolf packs which ranged near the park road likely have been eliminated. As a result, it is almost impossible for park visitors – including many Alaskans - to see a wolf, one of the iconic animals they most want to see at Denali.

It is time for the Board to re-instate protection for these wolves when they cross onto state land adjacent to the park.

Historically, the wolves in several eastern park packs have been the most easily viewed by visitors traversing the park road. Hence, Denali was the number one recommended "go-to" place for anyone wanting to see a wild Alaska wolf. But not now.

These packs which historically spent the summer and fall seasons – coinciding with the tourist season – in the eastern park area were likely eliminated when key individuals from each pack were killed just outside the boundary. Peer-reviewed research proves it is not how many wolves from a pack are killed, but which wolf or wolves are killed. Removal of the packs' breeding members disrupted the family units, and the remaining wolves disbursed.

Not only is the park's wolf population low, population density remains below state management objectives in the surrounding area, Unit 20C. Despite this, the Board in 2014 increased the bag limit for hunters in 20C from 5 to 10 wolves.

When the last buffer area was in place, visitors had a 45 percent chance of seeing a wolf – pretty good odds for a notoriously elusive species. Since that buffer was eliminated, the odds that visitors saw a wolf along the park road dropped to 5 percent. That percentage is not a one-year anomaly; it has been consistent over several summers.

Alaska can boast that it has by far more wild wolves than any other state – but currently there is not one location in this state where a visitor can expect to have a 50-50 chance - or even a 1 in 10 chance – of seeing one of those wolves.

This is an immense loss for Alaska, both in terms of revenue and public perception.

Regarding revenue: others in favor of this proposal have provided details of the economic payoff tourism – a significant component of which is viewable wildlife – brings to Alaska. Well over half a million visitors annually to Denali. \$500 million annually to the Denali-area economy. 7,000 seasonal jobs in the area. \$3.3 million in bed tax revenue to the Denali Borough. Given these precarious financial times at the state and local level, what is the rationale for not protecting such a valuable resource?

Then there is public perception. When visitors learn one of the reasons that they did not see a wolf in Denali is that the state allows hunters and trappers to target these wolves adjacent to the park, they must wonder about our priorities. Why do we allow just a handful of hunters and trappers seeking “easy prey” to take precedence over hundreds of thousands of paying visitors who came hoping to see a wolf? The truth is, most Alaskans do not want this. Why does the Board want to perpetuate this black mark on Alaska?

We acknowledge that in 2016 the Board adopted a minimal reduction of the wolf hunting season in the townships. We maintain that change is inadequate for several reasons, including 1) it does not address trapping: this is the primary method of take in the area, and there is no bag limit on wolves; and 2) it does not sufficiently mitigate the killing of wolves, in particular breeding females, during that crucial season.

In conclusion, I would like to remind the Board that it has not always been this way. In the past, the Board recognized the economic and intrinsic value of easily viewable wolves at Denali. It approved no-take buffers on the adjoining state land. There is ample precedent and need for a no-hunting, no trapping protected area as requested in this proposal. It has been done before, and it can be done now.

We ask that you vote in favor of Proposal 142. Thank you.