

## **PROPOSAL 166**

### **5 AAC 92.012. Licenses and tags.**

Amend the requirement for licenses and tags to include game legally taken with dogs and cats as follows:

### **5 AAC 92.012. Licenses and tags**

(a) No hunting or trapping license is required of a resident under the age of 18. An appropriate license and big game tag are required of nonresidents, regardless of age, for hunting and trapping. No person may take waterfowl unless that person has a current, validated, federal migratory bird hunting stamp or "duck stamp" in possession as required under federal regulations. **No person may take game (except deleterious exotic wildlife) with a dog or cat, unless the dog or cat is used to find, tree, or retrieve game taken in season and in an area open to hunting in association with a hunting license or permit.**

(b) ...

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** In 1916 Edward Howe Forbush observed that "a man may be fined \$10 for killing a songbird, but he may keep any number of cats." Our pets, particularly cats and dogs, are capable of injuring and killing wildlife. Dogs can kill a moose or caribou; however, state and local regulations have significantly reduced the number of wild animals killed by dogs. For instance, AS 03.55.030 allows any person to kill a free-ranging dog that habitually annoys domestic or wild animals after giving the owner reasonable opportunity to restrain the animal. And the local jurisdictions where most dogs live usually require dogs to be licensed and leashed, which promotes responsible ownership. Not so with cats. State law does not allow a person to shoot a cat harassing wildlife and most local jurisdictions do not require licenses, much less leashes for cats.

Cats are not native to North America. However, the number of pet cats has tripled during the last 40 years, and pet cats are now more numerous than dogs, with an estimated 94 million pet and 70-100 million unowned cats in the U.S. Cats are now the most abundant terrestrial carnivore in North America.

Free-ranging cats, including many pets but also feral, abandoned, and stray cats, kill an estimated 1.3 to 4 billion wild birds and 6.3 to 22.3 billion mammals annually in the contiguous United States.<sup>1</sup> Using the same predation rates as the national study, an estimated 30,000 free-ranging and 74,600 pet cats are estimated to kill 1,148,000 birds and 5,975,000 mammals annually in the Municipality of Anchorage alone.<sup>2</sup> These estimates are driven primarily by the high numbers of cats. The average pet cat probably kills less than a bird a month, but it adds up.

Cats kill far more wild animals than they do house mice, rats or other deleterious exotic species. Cats are now the single greatest cause of wild bird mortalities. They kill more birds than windows, communication towers, vehicles, and pesticides combined.<sup>1</sup> Many of their prey are not normally considered game animals. However, cats compete with coyotes, foxes, lynx, ermine and other mid-sized furbearers and fur animals by removing voles, shrews, squirrels and even snowshoe hares from the food chain. Cats hunt and kill even when well fed.

If your dog is harassing wildlife and you know about it but don't do anything, Alaska law allows your neighbor to shoot the dog. If your young son is shooting protected birds or game birds out of season with his BB gun, you are responsible and may be fined. If you use your dog to find or retrieve game birds, you need a hunting license. Alaskan falconers, who possess birds of prey to hunt game animals, are required to purchase a hunting license even if the bird isn't flown that year. But if your cat is killing dozens of birds and small mammals every year, you don't need a hunting license and you'll never suffer the indignity of a game violation for your cat's wanton waste.

That's wrong and it should be rectified. People who own pet cats or feed stray or feral cats should be held responsible for taking protected species or "hunting" in closed areas or out of season. In other words, they should be required to purchase a hunting license annually if they know or can be reasonably expected to know that their cat is hunting wildlife, and to take reasonable precautions to prevent the cat from hunting protected species, in closed areas, or out of season.

Everyone knows free-roaming cats kill wild birds and mammals and, in a perverse sense, that cat predation is "hunting related." Reasonable precautions should include keeping cats indoors or otherwise under control, affixing a predation-control device to the cat's collar, or not owning a cat in the first place. Certainly, abandoning a cat or allowing a cat to roam outside presupposes that the cat will prey on wild birds and mammals.

<sup>1</sup> Loss, S.R., T. Will, and P.P. Marra. 2013. The impact of free-ranging domestic cats on wildlife in the United States. Nature Communications 4. <http://www.nature.com/articles/ncomms2380>

<sup>2</sup> Sinnott, R. 2019. Animal control in Anchorage, Alaska: cats and dogs deserve equal treatment. Prepared for the Anchorage Animal Control Advisory Board and Anchorage Watershed and Natural Resources Advisory Commission, Anchorage, Alaska. 110 pp. <https://www.muni.org/Departments/OCPD/Planning/SiteAssets/Pages/WNRCReso-MinutesArchive/WNRC%20ltr%20to%20Animal%20Control%20Board%20w%20Report-12-20-2019%20rev.pdf>

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