

Thank you. Again, name is Nicole Schmitt - I appreciate you allowing me time for personal testimony.

Firstly, I've been engaged with both the Board of Game and Board of Fish and I'd like to echo the comment made by a gentleman yesterday in support of the Committee of the Whole process, used by the Board of Fish. I think it leads to more informed decisions, and is better for the both the public and the board when there's testimony is focus on the proposal at hand.

I'd also like to make a few quick comments on the Mulchatna bear program.

**There has never been a feasibility assessment published on this IM program**, including the bear control program. I don't know if that's because it was never written or was never made available to the public. Without a feasibility assessment it's very difficult for anyone, including myself or the Board, to understand the feasibility of a control program.

**I think it's also important to discuss calf survival versus calf recruitment.** This is a subtle but distinct difference in biological nomenclature, and is extremely important in understanding the efficacy of the control program

- Calf survival, which is the term most commonly used by ADFG, refers to the ability of young animals to live through a specific period, and that period can be anything. In ADFG's 2024 Memorandum on the program they quote calf survival as being measured up to 5 months of age.
- Calf recruitment is the number of calves that survive to a certain age and become part of the adult population.
- Improving calf survival can mean many different things - is a program successful because it improved calf survival by 2 weeks or 5 months? In 2022, the calf mortality studies presented in the Mulchatna overview addressed calf *survival* during the neonate period (first two weeks) calf mortality after the first two weeks was not, and still not known. It seems the Board created this program with the hope that by protecting caribou as neonates, bear control would improve calf *recruitment*, and therefore the herd. There are a lot of assumptions there. Bear and even eagle control may improve calf survival to say, August, and we can all pat ourselves on the back to say the program was successful in improving calf survival, but the devil is in the

details, and we need to understand mortality impacting calf *recruitment*.

- Calf collaring is key to understanding this. It is my recollection that during the first year of the program, the collaring effort stopped after only one, or maybe two collars were deployed. This would be good to clarify. I've heard people say "if the control program is stopped this year, we won't know if it worked, it will all be for not", but this program was never designed understand if bear control works, you'd need baseline data for that, and consistent collaring. In my view, the program was designed to kill bears first and ask questions later.
- Yesterday a former ADFG biologist testified on the **difference between correlation and causation**. I please ask that you be mindful and inquisitive on testing those assumptions when you review this program, particularly when it comes to calf: cow ratios. If ADFG makes a claim that the control program conclusively led to increased calf: cow ratio, make sure they explain that conclusion.

I wish we had the opportunity to really discuss these issues because I haven't even touched on bears. "Bear abundance" measures the number of bears in a snapshot of time, but cannot provide a conclusion on the bear population. If we measured the population abundance of this room, a survey taken at 9am on Saturday would yield a very different abundance from 9am on Sunday. Abundance is a snapshot, not a full picture of a population - to know that, you would need other measurements like reproduction and survival rates.

**Because this program never had a public comment period, you have not had the opportunity to hear these concerns** - questions on program design have been aired outside the Board of Game process. The professional journal of the International Association of Bear Research and Management rebuked this program in 2023, in the ADN alone I've seen opinion pieces from a former ADFG Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner writing that this program "risks the credibility" of the State's wildlife management, a former Governor and a former ADFG biologist from region 4 (different from the one we heard yesterday) also published pieces critiquing this program, and 34 wildlife biologists signed an open letter in the ADN concluding that there is "a lack of clear criteria for evaluating this intensive management program."

I am sympathetic to the question posed by Mr. Scott yesterday - how do you hold different interests at the same time? I think there can be progress, but there needs to be transparency and consideration of these real concerns. That cannot be done through this rodeo

“emergency” petition process. These sneaky maneuvers will only degrade trust in this process and in the Department.

Thank you for your time.

*[References to the articles referenced in this testimony are submitted as subsequent RCs]*