

The Outdoorsman

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Wildlife Conservation – A Question of Balance

by George Dovel



Game species must be managed to thrive and reproduce based on the habitat that is available during normal years.

In the first issue of the original *Outdoorsman* published in May 1969, I wrote, “We are dedicated to the wise use and perpetuation of our natural resources, including, first and foremost, our fish and game. We do not believe in the misguided concept that big game habitat must be unnaturally withdrawn from the very animals designed to inhabit it in the guise of conservation.”

Conservation Defined

In 1993, the Wildlife Society awarded the Wildlife Publication Award to “*The Role of Predation in Limiting Moose at Low Densities in Alaska and Yukon and Implications for Conservation.*” This long-term study by Gasaway and four other Alaska Department of Fish and Game biologists plus one biologist from Yukon Territory, Canada, recognized that terms like “Conservation” have come to mean different things to different people.

Environmental activists who advocate locking up natural resources and letting nature take its course do not like being called “preservationists” or “protectionists” because these accurate terms have a negative connotation. They, and their allies in the media, falsely call themselves “conservationists”, hiding their destructive agenda from the public by pretending they support resource conservation.



When prolonged extreme weather results in abnormal losses, the predators of game must be controlled to restore healthy balance.

The six biologists who authored the Gasaway study report wrote, “*Conservation*’ is the protection, planned management and wise use of natural resources. A ‘conservationist’ is a person who advocates conservation.”

By emphasizing the classic definitions and offering undisputed proof that planned management and wise use of our wildlife resource benefits everyone, they hoped to convince environmentalists and animal rights advocates to come together and support real wildlife conservation.

Environmentalists Sabotage Research

Although these biologists are strong advocates of the wolf’s presence in Alaska and the Yukon Territory, they know populations of wolves and other large predators must be substantially reduced at times to allow both prey and predator to prosper. In this and several other long-term studies, ADF&G biologists documented their inability to restore a healthy ratio of wolves to their principal prey, moose and caribou, as a result of environmental activists forcing a halt to state wolf control programs.

Their tactics included letter writing campaigns, threatened boycotts, citizen initiatives and lawsuits. All of these tactics have also been used in Idaho and other states.

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Identify the Enemy

The more successful environmental activist groups are funded regularly by grants from foundations like the Turner Foundation, Inc. One western activist group is the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), specializing in protection of large predators and filing lawsuits under the Endangered Species Act to add many more species.

The CBD recently received additional grant money to petition the federal government to list 250 new species. It had already filed 175 ESA lawsuits with a 95 percent success rate and had already won listings for 329 additional species!

In its offices in Arizona, California, Oregon and Alaska, it reportedly has a full-time staff of 30 and a \$1.8 million budget. Working with other extremist groups including the Earth Justice League, John Marvel's Western Watersheds Project, Animal Defense League of Arizona and Defenders of Wildlife, it generally opposes sound natural resource management in the west.

With specialists in obtaining grants and filing petitions and litigation, the CBD opposes control of wolves and mountain lions, even when it becomes necessary to protect prey species that are endangered or scarce. Readers with internet access who want a look at these enemies of wildlife conservation can see them at:

www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/aboutus/staff-bios.htm

ADF&G Biologists Try Experiment

After ADF&G biologists' wolf control efforts were halted in April 1982, hunters and trappers could not achieve a high enough wolf and bear harvest to improve moose recruitment in the study area. To reduce predation by bears and wolves on newborn calves, the biologists air-dropped about 15 tons of frozen train-killed moose carcasses during May and June 1985 in and around the Mosquito Flats calving area.

This increased the 1985-86 early winter moose calf survival to 53:100 cows compared to only 11-15:100 cows during the preceding three years. The resultant increase in the number of replacement moose calves also *decreased* the percentage (but not the actual number) of moose calves killed by wolves and bears during the next two years, recorded as 26-36 surviving calves per 100 cows.

Preventing Bear Predation on Cattle

Thirteen years after the aerial predator feeding in Alaska, a somewhat similar experiment was initiated in southwest Alberta, Canada. Since 1998, about 200 frozen road-killed moose, elk and other ungulates have been collected on highways near Waterton Lake National Park.

Beginning in mid-March the carcasses are dumped by helicopter on a dozen sites in the national park, adjacent provincial wilderness areas and private land. When grizzly bears come out of hibernation they find the high protein food, which holds them in the high country until green-up.

According to provincial wildlife biologists, before this program began there were always bear-cattle incidents

when the bears first emerged from their dens. This necessitated trapping and transplanting one or more grizzlies every year, but fish and wildlife officers haven't had to transplant any problem grizzlies in the spring during the seven years since the program started.



By feeding road-killed moose and elk to grizzlies when they first emerge from hibernation, Alberta biologists prevent them from attacking livestock until natural food is available.

1970s Schlegel Study Results Confirmed

The long-term Alaska study corroborated several studies in other states that documented the impact of black or grizzly bear predation on newborn elk or moose. This included a pioneering study by former IDFG McCall Subregion Wildlife Manager Mike Schlegel, who spent thirteen years studying elk in Idaho's Clearwater Region beginning in 1973.

Calf elk survival in the Clearwater had been declining since the late 1950s. In 1971, aerial surveys documented an average elk calf-to-cow ratio there of only 25 calves per 100 cows compared to 45-55 calves per 100 cows in healthy hunted elk populations.

Most biologists blamed the decline on advancing plant succession resulting from protection of the brush fields created by the extensive wildfires in the early 1900s. But Schlegel's study found that habitat had no measurable impact on elk calf survival in the declining population.

During the first three years of the study the physical condition of collared day-old calves was found to be uniformly good. This was based on body weight, blood serum analysis and physical inspection for abnormalities.

Removing Bears Tripled Surviving Calves

The three-year average mortality rate for the collared calves was 68 percent of which 64 percent was due to predation. Predation mortality included black bears 73%, mountain lions 15% and unknown 12%. Six uncollared newborn calves were found dead with one each killed by bear, bobcat and coyote, and two killed by golden eagles.

Beginning in the spring of 1976, a total of seventy-five bears, mostly adults, were trapped, removed from the study area by helicopter, examined at a central location and transported to seven national forests. The bear population in the 80 square mile study area was estimated at nearly 160, or two bears per square mile.

Winter elk herd composition in the three years prior to bear removal averaged only 21 calves per 100 cows. The 1977 winter calf:cow ratio after the 1976 bear removal was 61:100, nearly three times as many surviving calves.

Although no bears were removed in 1977-78 the 1978 winter calf:cow ratio was 51:100. This occurred despite the increased number of yearling heifers (counted as cows) resulting from the 1977 calf increase.

Elk Herd Increased 69%

Prior to 1979 the average number of elk counted in the study area was 358. From 1979-1985 the number of elk averaged 605. Two years of substantially increased calf survival and several more years of smaller increases were a significant factor in nearly doubling the elk herd.

Another action which insured continued high calf production was the implementation of "bull elk only" hunting under IDFG Director Joe Greenley. This resulted from a campaign led by *The Outdoorsman* to eliminate general season cow elk hunting statewide until depleted elk herds recovered.

Based on a 1976 recommendation from Schlegel, Greenley suggested and the Commission adopted a year round black bear season in Units 12 and 16, which included the Coolwater Ridge/Glover Ridge study area. It also permitted taking two bear per season in most of the Clearwater Region. Many other units in Idaho also allowed two-bear harvest with some requiring no tags.

Schlegel reported that in the early 1900s the study area was heavily grazed by domestic sheep and bears were extensively controlled. In the 1940s the sheep industry moved out of the area and elk numbers began to increase along with bear numbers.

Prey Numbers Do Not Regulate Bears

His study conclusions agreed with those of similar studies of black and grizzly bear predation on moose calves in Alaska and Canada. Because black and grizzly bears, unlike many other predators, are omnivores subsisting on a variety of animals, plants and fish, their numbers are not normally limited by declining prey populations.

When wild ungulate prey populations are managed at or slightly below their carrying capacity while producing a sustained harvest, healthy ratios of predator-to-prey may exist for extended periods. During those periods, the *percentage* of newborn calves killed by bears, which are below their carrying capacity, is relatively small in the normal three-week calving season.

But when elk or moose populations decline below their carrying capacity, the same high number of bears will

kill at least the same number of calves, which then represents a *higher percentage* of total calves lost in the declining herd. With insufficient recruitment (replacement yearlings), the prey populations will continue to decline because of wildlife managers' failure to recognize and address the real cause.

The "Lack of Habitat" Theory

That happened in the Clearwater in Idaho and in Interior Alaska during the late 1960s and early 70s. Wildlife biologists had been taught that poor range condition is the root cause of low yearling recruitment and were told the solution was simply to reduce deer, elk, moose and caribou populations with liberal hunting seasons and harvests until the range "recovered".

The Washington, D.C. based Wildlife Management Institute had already visited western states' game commissions/boards in the 1950s and 60s and convinced them that local residents were under-harvesting big game herds in remote areas. The solution, they advised, was to liberalize either-sex seasons and allow non-resident hunters to come in and help harvest the surplus game.

Long, either-sex seasons and multiple bag limits for deer moose and caribou resulted in record harvests during the 1950s and 1960s in both Idaho and Alaska. Abnormally deep snow during the 1968-69, 1970-71 and 1971-72 winters in both states, triggered simultaneous declines in juvenile survival and adult populations.

A Valuable Lesson Ignored

For a number of years IDFG SW Region biologists maintained an open-end deer season in Unit 39. The season opened the first Saturday in October and closed following the first weekend when a total of 2,500 or more deer had been checked through the Mores Creek big game check station near Boise.

This was only one of several Unit 39 check stations, and hunters who lived in the Unit did not normally pass through a check station. Surveys indicated the actual harvest in the 2,615 square mile unit was about 5,000 deer, representing two deer per square mile harvested.

In 1968, the regional wildlife manager announced he could increase fawn production by killing more deer, and he increased the check station either-sex quota to 3,600. In 1969, despite some winter losses, he set the quota at 2,900 and upped it to 3,000 in 1970.

The 1970 quota was not achieved so IDFG cut it in half for 1971. Despite an added late buck hunt to provide even more harvest opportunity, that quota also was not met.

The addition of the two-bear season in the mid 1970s helped improve mule deer recruitment, but it took nearly two decades to restore the Unit 39 deer herd. A 1983 study report by Alaska Biologist Gasaway revealed that Alaska moose and caribou suffered the same fate as Idaho elk and deer in the early 1970s for the same reasons.

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“Poor Range” – A Theory With No Proof

Gasaway’s 1983 conclusions were repeated in a 20-year study by Boertje et al titled, “Increases in Moose, Caribou, and Wolves Following Wolf Control in Alaska.” The study was published in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* Volume 60, No, 3, July 1996:

“In retrospect, errors were made in managing the moose, caribou and wolf populations for several years before the mid-1970s wolf control program. Moose and caribou populations in the study area were at high densities in the 1960s.

“Deep snow in the mid-1960s and early 1970s and overharvest in the early 1970s led to a grave management situation. Overharvest occurred because the increased effect of wolf predation on ungulates was underestimated and because severe winters reduced ungulates. Adult female ungulates were harvested in excess of yearling recruitment.

“This overharvest was allowed, in part, because of the belief that poor range condition was the major factor causing low yearling recruitment. Biologists patiently awaited a compensatory rebound in yearling recruitment from improved range that would offset harvest.

“However it was a futile vigil – calf moose and caribou became increasingly scarce until 1976 (when predator control was finally initiated). Mortality from severe winters, hunting and wolf predation were largely additive.”

IDFG Ignores Biology, Research

Nearly two dozen scientific study reports published in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* or similar wildlife publications from 1983-1990 concluded that once wild ungulate recruitment falls below annual mortality, predator populations must be reduced substantially to allow the prey species to recover. The 1980s Colorado feeding studies detailed in *Outdoorsman Bulletin 1*, proved that proper emergency feeding will mitigate death losses from malnutrition in deer and elk herds that are accessible.

In 1992 an eight-year drought peaked in southern Idaho and wildfires destroyed significant portions of transition and winter range in Unit 39. By September, most deer and many elk lacked sufficient fat to survive the winter and record snowfall occurred in December.

Instead of closing the hunting season, feeding the malnourished deer, and preparing to reduce the number of coyotes and bears, IDFG ignored the research and the deer and elk losses in the early 1970s. Biologists opened a special late either-sex hunt in Unit 39 and killed hundreds of prime breeding age deer searching for food.

Although more than 100,000 mule deer and several thousand elk starved to death in southern Idaho that winter, IDFG biologists and F&G Commissioners claimed winter losses were normal and retained the extended either-sex hunting seasons in 1993.

Despite the devastating losses, IDFG officials denounced Schlegel’s earlier study and were critical of his ongoing efforts to measure available winter forage and improve elk recruitment. They continued to blame their mismanagement on lack of habitat, and repeated the same mistakes again during the 2001-02 winter.

Alaska Did What Idaho Failed To Do

The 1996 Boertje study presents a 20-year history of wolves, moose, caribou and weather beginning in the autumn of 1975 just before a seven-year wolf control program began. After the seven years, from April 1982 to October 1993, there was no ADF&G wolf control and the study ended in the 1994-95 winter when a second scheduled wolf control program was in progress.

The study area was the 6,564 square mile Unit 20A with a pre-control wolf population in autumn 1975 of 239 or *one wolf per 27.5 sq. miles*. Beginning that winter, public harvest plus ADF&G control kept winter wolf numbers 70-80% below pre-control numbers during each of the next five years, and 55-60% below pre-control numbers during the two years after that.

For the next 11 years, hunters and trappers were able to harvest only 12-25% of the wolf population each year. Wolves can sustain an annual harvest rate of 25-40% so, without the additional ADF&G control, wolves began to increase.

In 1975 there were about **2,500** moose in the entire study area – less than 0.4 moose per square mile and only 10 moose for each wolf. Nineteen years later in 1994, there were **13,800** moose in the study area – 5.5 times as many - averaging 2.1 moose per square mile.

Drought, Deep Snow, Predators Decimate Herds

During the 1992 Alaska summer, precipitation was significantly lower than other years yet the number of snow-free days in 1992-93 totaled only 126 compared to 160-199 in the preceding 19 years. The short growing season, four years of abnormal snow depths in 1990-93, plus increased wolf predation severely limited both moose and caribou calf survival.

From 1988-1993 the deer losses in Idaho caused by the drought and the 1992-93 winter were substantially greater than the elk losses. During that same period of drought in Alaska, with *four* years of deep snow winters instead of one, Alaska lost nearly two-thirds of its caribou and a smaller percentage of its moose.

Unlike Idaho, ADF&G halted hunting in Unit 20A from 1992-94 to reduce the impact of the severe weather. The moose herd survived despite poor calf crops and increased predation but, like Idaho’s deer, Alaska caribou became more vulnerable to wolf predation.

The Delta caribou herd, which had increased from **2,200** in 1975 to **10,960** in 1989, declined to 5,755 in 1991. With few moose calves available, the wolves killed more adult caribou. And with only a 25% wolf harvest, wolf numbers increased from 184 in 1989 to 267 in 1991.

The lowest caribou birth rate ever recorded in Alaska (30%) occurred in 1993 following the short 1992 growing season and caribou numbers dropped to 3,661. Meanwhile, limited browse utilization in areas with heaviest moose concentrations failed to support the flawed 1970s "density dependent-range limitation" theory.

The 1996 study agreed with Caughley and Gunn (1993) that herbivore (hoofed animal) nutritional status can change independently of herbivore numbers or density in systems with high annual variations in weather.

Healthy Moose-Wolf Ratios

By 1998, after limited wolf control in 1993-94, populations had stabilized with **five** more wolves, **2,300** more caribou and **8,600** more moose than existed in 1975. Instead of the *unhealthy* 10-moose-per-wolf that existed in 1975, the ratio had changed to 45 moose for each wolf.

Ongoing unhealthy moose-wolf ratios and low moose populations in Denali Park and adjacent hunted units with no wolf control, emphasized the need for wildlife managers to learn the ratio of prey to predators that is necessary to assure adequate prey recruitment.

Studies from Alaska, Canada and other countries show that when moose have more than one predator such as bears and wolves, the ratio of moose to wolves must remain 30:1 or higher to maintain a viable moose population. When wolves have alternative prey species such as moose and caribou or moose and deer, the wolf population may not be limited by a decline of its principal prey until all of the alternate prey species, including domestic animals, have been depleted.

Caribou harvest was prohibited for the first five years of the study and strict limits on both moose and caribou harvest were maintained throughout the study. This was done to prevent hunting from having any significant impact, and to maintain a bull:cow ratio of 30:100 in both species.

Cost Effective Management

From 1976-1984 Alaska biologists spent \$824,200 to kill 1,313 wolves in the entire state, an average of \$628 per wolf. In 1986 the Alaska Board of Game asked ADFG to prepare an accurate cost-to-benefit analysis of the wolf control program.

Based solely on the market value of \$2.74 per pound for the *extra* 1.24 million pounds of wild meat that was harvested as a direct result of the wolf control, the direct benefit for meat production alone was \$3.4 million. The 1-4 cost-benefit did not include the multiplier value of increased recreation and tourism providing income to merchants, pilots, guides, etc. or the increased wildlife viewing and photographic opportunities for everyone.

Unlike the early 1970s when biologists depended on a flawed theory to restore game populations, Alaska biologists did their homework when the next bad weather began. They provided data supporting the need for wolf control to the BOG before the 1992-93 winter even hit.

In November 1992 the Alaska Board of Game approved plans to kill wolves annually for five years in Units 13, 20A and 20E. ADF&G biologists were to kill the wolves in 20A by shooting them from helicopters, and hunters would be allowed to land and shoot the wolves in the other areas.

Activists Sabotage Wolf Control Again

Although zealous environmentalists and animal rights groups had participated on the Wolf Planning Team and attended the hearings, they published false claims that ADF&G intended to conduct a massive wolf killing campaign including killing wolves in Denali Park. The wolf control was based on sound biology but Governor Hickel caved in to hundreds of letters and threats of a tourist boycott and lawsuit while the media kept the pot boiling.

He canceled wolf control for the 1992-93 winter and attempted another effort to reach consensus with the extremists. Then aerial gunning was canceled, despite the fact that it is the second most efficient and possibly the most humane method of reducing wolf populations, and the BOG told biologists to snare the wolves beginning in October 1993.

The Governor received a telephone message from a New Jersey resident threatening to kill one member of his family for every wolf killed by the state. Although the caller was caught and given a light sentence the incident illustrates the mass hysteria generated by these enemies of wildlife conservation with help from the media.

"High Level of Harvest" Law Passed

In 1994, the legislature passed and Governor Hickel signed the intensive management law. This amendment to Title 16, Chapter 5 says the highest and best use of most big game populations is to provide for high levels of harvest for human use.

"High levels of harvest" is defined as "a high probability of success for human harvest of the game population." Under this law, the BOG may not significantly reduce the harvest level through regulatory action, such as season lengths and bag limits, unless it has adopted regulations that provide for intensive management.

"Intensive management" allows wolf populations to be regulated when necessary to maintain the ability of Alaska residents to achieve high levels of harvest of moose and caribou.

The Battle Continued

Later that year (1994) a new governor halted the wolf control when a national TV program showed a wolf that was snared by an ADF&G biologist but not killed immediately. "Friends of Animals" bragged that it took 54 "howl-ins" in 51 cities to convince the governor to order a wolf moratorium ten years ago.

But the animal rights activists did not stop there. "Friends" organized a letter writing campaign threatening

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a massive tourist boycott and joined the Sierra Club and other “anti-s” in getting a citizen initiative passed which eliminated a “land and shoot” provision in the law for wolves, coyotes and foxes. The initiative also prohibited ADF&G from using aircraft in government wolf control programs except in a “biological emergency.”

The 1999 Legislature overturned the initiative and the activists responded by restoring the “same-day airborne wolf hunting” ban in a 2000 referendum. In March 2003 Legislators introduced SB 155, which clarified that the ban only applies to sport hunting – not predator control.

Also in March, after eight years of documenting that wolf and bear predation had destroyed the productivity of the Central Kuskokwim moose population, the BOG approved an experimental intensive management plan in a 528-square-mile area around McGrath.

The three-year plan included the removal of all of the 45 wolves of which about 12-15 could be removed by trappers and the remaining two-thirds would be removed by ADF&G aerial gunning teams. Temporary relocation of up to 50 bears in the spring, excluding sows with young cubs, would limit predation on young moose calves.

The plan was praised by many Alaskans who realized it would accomplish two goals: (1) initiate restoration of healthy moose populations and harvests for several villages that relied on moose as a food source; and (2) provide scientific proof that *effective* (intensive) predator reduction will result in timely moose recovery and then associated predator recovery.

This plan was originally approved by the BOG in 1995 but its implementation had been blocked by former Governor Knowles. During his 2002 election campaign, Governor Murkowski charged the Knowles administration with dragging its feet on wolf control programs approved by the BOG.

Trappers Can't Control Wolves

Yet as the 2003 wolf control was about to get underway, Murkowski said he would not allow state employees to shoot wolves from helicopters, claiming that trappers could do the job effectively. This resulted in angry responses from Alaska hunters and wildlife managers who knew better.

ADF&G biologists flew the area in helicopters and fixed wing aircraft, spotting wolf kills and pointing them out to trappers so they could set traps or snares and catch more wolves. But by the time travel and trapping became limited by melting snow and ice, the trappers had caught only 15 wolves – three more than the 12 that was their annual average.

The Governor attempted to get the trapping season extended by 30 days but the BOG declined because weather conditions made it almost impossible to selectively trap wolves in May. Meanwhile outdoorsmen contacted Murkowski asking him to rethink his position.

They were apparently successful because Gov. Murkowski signed SB 155 into law on June 18, 2003. The final version provided that the BOG could approve aerial gunning or land-and-shoot predator control, establish goals, limits and methods, and determine who will participate. The use of state employees in aerial control programs must also be approved by the ADF&G Commissioner.

On November 4, 2003 the BOG announced the wolf control plan for the 2003-04 winter. Because of thick vegetation in the McGrath area, qualified pilots and gunners there were allowed to either shoot wolves from the air or land and shoot. In more sparsely vegetated areas around Glenallen, pilots with permits had to land their planes and get out to shoot.

During the previous spring, ADF&G trapped and relocated more than 80 bears from the McGrath area. This resulted in 64% of collared moose calves surviving compared to only 26-33% survival during the two years before bear removal.

Moose pregnancy and twinning rates in the Nelchina Basin in the Glenallen area were high but 70-90% of calves were dead in less than five months. Hunters had been taking record numbers of brown bears but wolf numbers there remained high.

Governor Defies Threatened Boycott

The proposed programs prompted Friends of Animals to call for a boycott of Alaska tourism and they held a “howl-in” at New York’s Rockefeller Plaza on December 27, 2003 to raise funds and protest the predator control. But when the control effort was nearing the end of its first winter in late April 2004, neither the tourist boycott nor 150 claimed howl-ins in the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, Japan and Germany had worked.

Only two small environmentally-oriented tour outfitters in Alaska claimed a decline in customers while others reported increases of up to 20% over last year. Gov. Murkowski announced he would not bend to the threatened boycott because the state has an obligation to manage its resources to benefit Alaskans.

Based on a voluntary request by residents, the Moose season was closed in the intensive control area around McGrath and nonresident hunters were prohibited from hunting moose in the other wolf control areas. Alaska law (Sec. 16.05.256) allows special restrictions on nonresident hunting in order to provide residents with a reasonable opportunity to take big game in accordance with sustained yield principals.

“Defenders” Challenge Use of Aircraft

On January 22, 2004 the BOG land-and-shoot goal in the Nelchina Basin was to take 135 to 150 wolves in addition to those taken by normal hunting and trapping. The BOG goal in the McGrath area was to reduce wolf predation to the greatest extent possible in the 528 Square mile area through a combination of aerial control and normal hunting and trapping.



Location of January-April 1994 aerial land-and-shoot wolf control in Nelchina Basin Unit 13, and aerial shooting control in Unit 19D near McGrath.

On February 9, 2004 Defenders of Wildlife filed a lengthy petition with Interior Secretary Gale Norton alleging that the ongoing aerial wolf hunting violated the 1971 federal ban on aerial sport hunting. The major thrust of its arguments was that moose populations were healthy in both areas and the only reason for the control was to destroy wolves in order to increase moose harvest by hunters.

The petition asked Secretary Norton to amend the “exceptions” in the Airborne Hunting Act which allow “persons operating under the authority of a state to aid in the protection of land, water, wildlife...(etc).” They requested that the following subparagraph be added:

“(c) A state may not issue permits, or engage in any otherwise prohibited activity under the Airborne Hunting Act, for the purpose of manipulating any wildlife populations.”

They cited a 1971 biologists’ report to Congress claiming that a balance of wildlife should be “left up to nature or sport hunting.” They also cited a *regulation*, which prohibits states from issuing aerial permits for sport hunting.

Wildlife Conservation Wins

On April 8, 2004 Defenders of Wildlife reported it received a letter from Interior Secretary Gayle Norton’s office saying the aerial wolf-control program is allowed under exceptions in the 1971 wildlife law.

In November 2003, Friends of Animals had also tried to challenge the aerial wolf control program in an Alaska state court. The court issued a temporary restraining order, which halted the program initially, but later rescinded the order when FOA lawyers failed to support their claims.

On April 28, 2004, ADF&G Commissioner Duffy reported a successful conclusion to the first year of airborne wolf control in more than 20 years. He reported

that 127 wolves had been taken in the Nelchina Basin and 20 wolves had been killed by aerial hunting near McGrath in addition to 11 wolves taken by trappers.

On August 24, 2004, ADF&G advertised for qualified pilot/gunner teams to apply for permits to land and shoot wolves in Units 13A, B and E in the Nelchina Basin and in Unit 16B west of Cook Inlet. Permits to either land and shoot or to shoot wolves while airborne will be issued for Unit 19A, and Unit 19D East near McGrath.

The permits will be issued in early fall and control programs will begin after adequate snow has arrived but no later than December 1, 2004. Overcoming opposition from groups who refuse to admit that wildlife management is a question of balancing game with habitat and predators with game, has required many years of dedication from Alaskans.

Alaska biologists emphasize the importance of habitat improvement, including prescribed burns to provide willows for moose populations. But burning, without reducing predation, has only resulted in moose densities up to 0.9 moose per square mile. Yet much of the moose habitat in Alaska will support 2.6 to 3.1 moose per square mile if the moose:wolf ratio is maintained at or above 30:1.

“A Question of Balance”

European wildlife managers are often critical of wildlife managers in the U.S. who are prone to place too much emphasis on the *opportunity* to participate in the “sport” (hunting, fishing or trapping) rather than on providing a sustained *harvest* of wild game and fish. Ignoring the value of our renewable game harvest allows our wildlife managers to ignore the effect of excessive predation when wild game populations are reduced.

A highly acclaimed book produced by the Game Conservancy trust in Great Britain entitled, “A Question of Balance” offers similar insight into the relationship of game to predators:

“Game animals form a spectacular part of Britain’s wildlife heritage. Predators of game, too, are exciting species, and the relationship between them and their prey has shifted as the complex web of species and habitats has changed. Man has been involved in this web for thousands of years, both by hunting game, and often attempting to reduce the number of predators which compete with him for a game harvest.

“Our research has shown that predators, if very abundant, can depress wild game stocks sufficiently for there to be no possibility of driven wild game shooting. Therefore our objective in game conservation must be to reduce predation pressure on game populations while at the same time enhancing the community of predators in the country as a whole.”

Discussion of several habitat management options included the statement, “Habitat management goes hand in hand with predator control. Habitat management on its own would simply be regarded as a waste of money”

Wildlife Management vs. Practical Politics

By George Dovel

The lead article in this bulletin, "Wildlife Conservation – A Question of Balance," frequently compares progressive wildlife management in Alaska with contrasting efforts by Idaho wildlife managers. There are obvious similarities in the two states, including the vast amount of public land in each, and the fact that each state was considered a "wildlife paradise" during the 1950s and early 1960s.

Both states experienced a severe game decline in the late 1960s and the citizens of each state elected an outdoorsman governor who promised to restore sound resource management to benefit the state's residents. When Jay Hammond was sworn in as Governor of Alaska in 1975, the Alaska legislature divided the Board of Fish and Game (F&G Commission) into two separate boards.

Hammond then appointed seven knowledgeable outdoorsmen to the Board of Game, including Dr. Jim Reardon, a former ADF&G biologist and wildlife professor at the University of Alaska. A highly qualified BOG and a governor who put the welfare of Alaska citizens above political considerations accomplished a return to sound natural resource management during his two terms.

With help from the Alaska Legislature, the BOG and Gov. Hammond overcame the court challenge by animal rights groups. They survived the telephone threats to kill ADF&G biologists and BOG members, the massive demonstrations, and the letter writing campaigns and attempts to boycott Alaska businesses.

Seven years of intensive predator control in Unit 20A and several decades of comprehensive studies proved the "natural regulation" theory had no basis in fact.

Promises Not Kept

Meanwhile in Idaho, 1966 gubernatorial candidate Don Samuelson promised Idaho sportsmen he would immediately replace the F&G Commissioners with outdoorsmen who would restore predator control where indicated and rebuild Idaho game herds. With only \$6,000 in campaign donations he was elected by grassroots sportsmen and women who walked the pavements convincing urban residents to vote for him.

Although his office remained open to the sportsmen who elected him, he failed to replace former political appointees on the Commission, confiding it might cost him votes when he ran for re-election. In 1970 Idaho big game populations reached record lows and Samuelson lost the grassroots sportsmen support needed for reelection.

But thanks to the Idaho Legislature and a new IDFG Director, Idaho game populations were slowly rebuilt and the amount spent to control predators by IDFG was slightly increased. Then, following the 1986 election of Gov. Cecil Andrus after he had served as Secretary of

Interior, he began to appoint environmentally-oriented activists to the F&G Commission who opposed all forms of predator control.

Again, Promises Not Kept

In 1994, Idaho gubernatorial candidate Phil Batt promised to replace those F&G Commissioners with knowledgeable people who would restore sound wildlife management. He also promised to appoint a citizen committee of experienced outdoorsman from each region to provide facts about fish and game populations in their respective areas and make recommendations.

Following his inauguration, Batt asked for a letter of resignation from the F&G Commissioners, a common practice with other commissions, boards and department heads who serve at the pleasure of the governor. This allows a governor to replace individuals who are not performing as expected, without the need to go through a hearing process involving the inevitable media circus.

In January 1995, using IDFG Director Jerry Conley's weekly radio program, Idaho Wildlife Council head Don Clower organized a protest by sportsmen and environmentalists on the Capitol steps to intimidate Batt. It worked and Batt told the protesters his action had been premature.

He also reneged on his promise to appoint the citizen advisory committee, claiming his staff had convinced him it would alienate traditional IDFG support groups. In my presence, Batt told a Republican Party worker "I backed off of 'Fish and Game' because the media beat up on me and I'm not going to try it again."

Batt had the respect and support of both citizens and legislators to restore responsible wildlife management but he chose instead to listen to his political advisors. He provided his Natural Resource Advisor, John Chatburn, to assist in some significant changes at IDFG but the F&G Commission remained divided and the depleted game populations continued to decline.

F&G Commission Still Divided

On April 15, 1999 new Idaho Governor Dirk Kempthorne appointed five Boise residents to a committee charged with screening more than 100 applicants to fill four F&G Commissioner vacancies across Idaho. With the exception of Lt. Gov. Butch Otter who chaired the committee, its members represented special interest groups who supported the status quo at IDFG.

Roy Moulton from the Upper Snake Region was the only qualified candidate recommended by grassroots sportsmen in the four regions who was even interviewed. The other three candidates appointed by Kempthorne included an outspoken anti-rancher activist and two who initially left wildlife management up to IDFG.

Although activist Don Clower created gridlock on the Commission almost as soon as he was appointed, Kempthorne defended his appointment and pressured the Idaho Senate to confirm him. Senate Resource Committee Chairman Laird Noh assured his Committee that Clower was a changed man but Sen. Dean Cameron compared him to a snake who can't be trusted.

Some Commissioners Not Qualified

When Clower's stormy term expired in 2002, Kempthorne replaced him with John Watts, an environmental/political activist and lobbyist who belonged to the Idaho Wildlife Federation and Idaho Rivers United. Kempthorne explained that Watts would bring a different perspective to the Commission.

Idaho Code Sec. 36-102 (b) mandates: "The selection and appointment of said members shall be made solely upon consideration of the welfare and best interests of fish and game in the state of Idaho, and no person shall be appointed a member of said commission unless he shall be well informed upon, and interested in, the subject of wildlife conservation and restoration."

But after he began serving as Southwest Region Commissioner, Watts confided to me that he had no idea how "involved" the subject of wildlife management was when he was appointed. Lacking knowledge of wildlife conservation and restoration, he is forced to make decisions based on uninformed opinions.

Kempthorne's appointment of Watts was praised by environmental activists but it has not brought unity to the Commission. He generally appears to support the status quo and is often absent from scheduled Commission meetings when critical management issues are discussed.

Alaska BOG Members Qualified

Like Kempthorne in Idaho, Alaska Governor Murkowski supported resource management at the state level when he was inaugurated in 2003. But, unlike Kempthorne, he replaced environmental activists on the BOG with experienced outdoorsmen who understood wildlife conservation and the need to maintain a healthy balance between game species and their predators.

When Murkowski realized he had made a mistake by halting airborne wolf control in April 2003, he corrected his mistake and signed appropriate legislation designed to prevent it from happening again with another governor. By showing courage instead of making politically motivated appointments, he insured sound resource management.

Idaho has a fair number of outdoorsmen who are also naturalists, and who are familiar with the past 30 years of sound biological studies. Instead of appointing people who have never attended a Commission hearing and who are misinformed about the basics of wildlife conservation, our leaders should take advantage of the expertise that is available.

"On the job training" is a poor substitute for the expertise need to manage a billion-dollar resource.

Short Shots

Bear Baiting Initiative

Environmental activists who disagree with the Alaska Board of Game's recent decision to temporarily reduce bear populations in a small area, responded with a citizen initiative to prohibit all bear baiting. The BOG normally allows baiting only for black bears because that is the only way hunters can limit expanding bear numbers in the dense cover of southeast Alaska.

But it recently issued permits allowing baiting for either black or brown bears in a limited area to achieve management goals. Between the hunter harvest and the bears that were baited, trapped and moved to other locations, last year's goals were achieved.

The city of Anchorage contains about half of Alaska's population, many of whom are newcomers with limited knowledge of wildlife management and hunting or trapping. By conducting an urban media campaign claiming that baiting is unsportsmanlike, the Anchorage group calling themselves Citizens United Against Bear Baiting (CUBB) gathered enough signatures to place their initiative on the 2004 ballot.

If Ballot measure No. 3 passes, "a person may not bait or intentionally feed a bear for the purpose of hunting, photographing, or viewing." Anyone who places or otherwise exposes any attractant or edible material in order to attract or entice a bear would be subject to one year in prison and/or a fine of \$10,000 if found guilty of a single violation.

The initiative is opposed by the group, "Alaskans for Professional Wildlife Management," which includes the Alaska Outdoor Council, the National Rifle Assn., two Safari Club International chapters and others. They hired Pac/West, the group that defeated the 2000 anti-trapping initiative in Oregon, to help.

Pac/West's Jerod Broadfoot commented, "Alaska has really set an example nationwide of how to properly manage game populations. If out-of-state animal-rights extremists come in and ban bear baiting, other states could follow suit."

Elk Crippling By Wolf?

Shortly after mailing the July Outdoorsman, I received a call from an experienced Garden Valley outdoorsman who had just read Page 3 describing wolves pulling down moose, eating 25-30 pounds from a ham, and then leaving the animal to die a slow death. The caller reported finding a year-old elk calf that was apparently dead with a magpie pulling hair from a bloody ham.

On closer examination he discovered the elk was still alive but had lost considerable blood where an 8-10 pound chunk of muscle was missing from one ham. Alaska bush pilots have also described seeing wolves pull down a moose and then chew and swallow chunks of meat while the moose got up and attempted to escape.

F&G Seeks To Change Funding Law

by George Dovel

When the 2002 Idaho Wildlife Federation Initiative to remove the Fish and Game Department from Legislative accountability failed to gather enough signatures to qualify it for inclusion on the ballot, IWF President Jack Fisher, Don Clower and other supporters promised to come back with another initiative that would succeed.

On February 3, 2003 IWF Secretary Jerry Conley filed another proposed initiative with Idaho's Secretary of State and Fisher, Clower et al announced they had plenty of time to gather enough signatures to place this one on the 2004 ballot. The 2002 proposal to eliminate Commissioner Burns' and Moulton's Districts had been deleted from the new version, but the creation of Wildlife Citizen Advisory Committees (WCAC) to choose Commission nominees remained.

IWF Proposal Declared Unconstitutional

However, the 2003 proposal removed authority from the governor to form the WCAC (nominating committees) and gave it to the IDFG Director. It also retained the language that would prohibit commissioners appointed by the governor from being removed by the governor without a public hearing.

IWF realized that the only effective tool the Legislature has to force the F&G Commission to carry out its Wildlife Policy is strict control of Department budget and expenditures. The proposed initiative they presented for inclusion on the 2004 ballot would have changed I.C. Sec. 36-107(b) to prevent the Legislature from changing any budget fixed by the F&G Commission without approval of five F&G Commissioners!

A February 28, 2003, review of the IWC proposal by Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden said this proposal violated several provisions of the Idaho Constitution. The Constitution requires the Legislature to balance the budget and this would infringe upon the Legislature's authority and ability to accomplish that.

According to Wasden it would also have given the Commission "veto" power over proposed legislation and violated several other Constitutional protections. These include separation of powers and the requirement that money expended from the treasury must be done by appropriations made according to law (by the Legislature).

F&G Seeks Authority To Set License Fees

Since they couldn't exempt IDFG from Legislative oversight without amending the Constitution, Conley and IWF apparently decided it wasn't worth the effort to try to gather signatures to put what was left of their proposed initiative on the ballot. Instead they have reportedly chosen to work behind the scenes to support protection of wolves and secure authorization for the Commission to set its own fees.

That was proposed to the F&G Commission three years ago by former Commissioner Fred Wood as a solution to the Department's failure to live within its budget without unlawfully misappropriating money from dedicated funds. The Commission opted not to present the proposal to the Governor or the Legislature until the "stink" died down from the Office of Performance Evaluation's financial investigation ending in 2001.

History of Misappropriating Funds

The OPE investigation was prompted by our report to the Commission that IDFG had "borrowed" \$1.3 million dollars from \$2 million collected from sportsmen and set aside by law in a special fund to maintain fish hatcheries and fishing reservoirs. The money was spent on non-game activities or otherwise lost, and was never paid back.

The practice was hidden so that the annual Legislative Services audits did not detect it. We cited other examples of misuse of sportsmen's money, including paying the POS license sales contractor an unwarranted \$1.5 million "bonus" which was negotiated privately in violation of Idaho Law.

Efforts by F&G Commission Chairman Hadley, Acting Director Mallet, IWF and others to halt the investigation before the results were made public in 2001 reflect the need for legislative oversight of all IDFG income and expenditures.

When Fred Wood suggested the Commissioners should have authority to increase license, tag and permit fees without legislative approval, he claimed it was justified to cover the cost of inflation and would prevent them from having to go to the Legislature every two or three years asking for a handout.

He said a reasonable cap imposed by the Legislature would prevent excessive increases, and used the analogy of the Burley Hospital Board of Directors on which he serves. When costs go up *or income declines* the Hospital Board simply votes an across-the-board increase on each item or service which is then passed on to their patients. But his analogy is hardly appropriate.

If the hospital doesn't provide desired results at a reasonable price the patients can go to a competitor, but Idaho sportsmen don't have that luxury. Hunting, fishing and trapping licenses are taxes (user fees) charged by government to pay for continued supplies of wildlife being provided for harvest.

Idaho Already Charges Too Much

Despite its wolves, Alaska provides a better chance to harvest wild game and fish than Idaho – at a fraction of the cost. A license to hunt and fish for every species in Alaska, including \$10 for a King salmon permit, costs a resident only \$49 compared to \$107 for a resident in Idaho.

The \$107 does not include the cost of special hunt drawings and permits to have a reasonable chance of harvesting an animal. It also does not include the dollars spent applying for a chance to hunt a moose for many years, which prohibits drawing for other big game species.



Mary Hanson of Horseshoe Bend with two of the four sockeye she landed on her first day fishing the Kenai River in Alaska.

A low-income family in Idaho cannot afford to buy licenses and tags for every family member to enjoy their hunting and fishing heritage, including fishing for salmon and steelhead. A low-income family in Alaska pays just \$5 per person for a combination hunting fishing and trapping license, which allows fishing for several species of salmon.

Idaho sportsmen pay thousands of dollars in fees to this agency every year for each big game animal that is harvested. Even a government agency cannot be that inefficient so what happens to most of the money?

It is used, often unlawfully, to subsidize the non-game/fish activities which either lack funding or require matching dollars for federal funding that is available.

A Federal "Con Job"

Unlike most states, Alaska did not even have a nongame program until 2002. But Alaskans, like some Idahoans, believed the propaganda that "free" federal dollars would be provided "to prevent additional species from being listed under the ESA in your state."

Both fish and game agencies have already committed to spend several million dollars hiring ecologists, zoologists, and botanists to catalog assorted plants, lizards, snails, etc. and provide a list of species they consider candidates for listing. They must also provide a

conservation plan which meets federal approval, outlining how populations of these species will be increased.

Why Must Sportsmen Finance Endangered Species?

Rita Dixon, the IDFG Zoologist in the Natural Resources Policy Bureau who coordinated development of the database, announced last week that about 100 "nongame" species in Idaho are already in danger of ESA listing unless steps are taken to halt their declines. Those "steps" inevitably mean more land use restrictions, with no assurance they will prevent ESA listing.

If the Idaho Legislature is determined to provide conservation plans for plants, mollusks, etc. to the feds, it would seem logical to transfer the appropriate specialists and the federal CWCS funding to the office of Species Conservation, which deals directly with the USFWS. Why should sportsmen dollars be used to pay part of the cost when it does nothing to increase game populations and may result in even more species being listed?

But even if that were corrected, sportsmen are still paying for the controversial environmental education and "watchable" wildlife programs because they also lack adequate funding. IDFG is already lobbying individual legislators for passage of a substantial fee increase to sportsmen in the upcoming legislative session to meet the rising cost of these non-game/fish programs.

We have received word that an interim finance committee will meet with IDFG on Monday, September 20, 2004 in Idaho Falls to request a 13.7% increase in fees along with their request to make future changes by rule rather than through the legislature. When IDFG presented the last fee increase, it claimed a far smaller increase than was represented by the individual increases it established for each license or tag.

Unlike the last fee increase four years ago, IDFG has kept the details of this proposal hidden from the public. In October Bulletin No. 7, we will report the proposal and include IDFG income changes since the previous increase.

Allowing F&G To Set Fees

In its 2004 session, the Virginia Assembly passed, and the governor signed, HB 301 authorizing the Board of Game and Inland Fisheries to set its own hunting, trapping, fishing, and motorboat registration fees. The fees cannot be changed more than once every three years and may be increased a maximum of \$5 each time.

Allowing IDFG to set its own fees in this fashion would remove annual accountability to the representatives elected by Idaho citizens. Although the groups who supported the failed IWF initiative will probably endorse this proposal, leaders of the mainstream grassroots majority have already indicated their opposition to it.

If the Idaho Fish and Game Commission would eliminate the non-game/fish programs that are not self-supporting and the endless duplicating studies, which offer no solutions, adequate funding to properly manage Idaho's game and fish already exists.

Editorial Comment

At the risk of appearing to repeat myself, I have condensed several hundred pages of valuable wildlife research into a few pages in this issue. To the Legislators, wildlife managers and sportsmen who take the time to read it carefully it presents the simple solution of "balance" to what many people perceive to be a complex problem.

For many centuries humans have attempted to destroy wolves and found it was nearly impossible without widespread use of poisons or plagues. When adverse weather destroys too many of their prey, they simply kill each other to survive.

Wolf densities in Denali National Park in Alaska are lower than in parts of Idaho because the few moose and caribou in Denali remain in a predator pit. Protection of unhealthy predators under those circumstances is a do nothing – have nothing management philosophy.

Some Alaskans I visit, occasionally express dissatisfaction with favoritism shown to commercial fishermen or having to pass up too many moose to try to find a legal bull. But I have never heard any say they are willing to trade their wildlife management for Idaho's.

Please remember that ecosystems are dynamic, constantly changing, with some species disappearing and others flourishing. When you hear a wildlife manager repeating "sound bites" about predators co-existing with their prey, try to politely remind him or her that they must achieve balance to remain healthy.



Patti Dovel with her first Alaska halibut. We brought 200 pounds of delicious frozen halibut and sockeye filets back last month.

Each month, Outdoorsman articles reveal little known facts about a variety of fish and game management issues that affect every Idahoan, especially those who cherish Idaho's hunting, fishing and trapping heritage. Please help distribute these facts to help stop the destruction of our billion-dollar wildlife resource and restore sound wildlife management for future generations. A donation in any amount will help defray the cost of printing and mailing these informative bulletins to elected officials. A donation of \$20 or more will pay the cost of printing and mailing all bulletins to you for the next 12 months, and will guarantee they will also be sent to the Senator and Representatives in your District.

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