

Alaska's Wolves Still "Fair" Game

BY UNLEASHED

Wolf management planners have trouble with legalities. The team formulating recommendations for wolf reintroduction in Yellowstone just had its scheme rejected out of hand by Congress since the plan amounted to a trashing of the Endangered Species Act. Now Alaska's wolf management planning team has issued its final report without recommending against same-day-airborne or land-and-shoot hunting, practices widely regarded as violating the Federal Airborne Hunting Act—not to mention the rights of wolves.

Members of the Alaska Wolf Management Planning Team were drawn from the gamut of interested parties in the state with the basic line of contention falling between consumptive and non-consumptive "users" of wolves. Four "environmentalists" sat on the panel with 14 other members representing sport and subsistence hunting, trapping, the fur industry, and government wolf management. The magic word was compromise; thus wolf advocates proceeded from a point of weakness, the position of Alaska's wolves having been compromised already by past and ongoing wolf management strategies.

A few promising statements were put forward. Non-consumptive use was seriously discussed, and the astounding observation that "wolves have intrinsic value"(!) made it into the final report. The general direction was toward integrated management of all of a given region's usable components to achieve conservation of the wolves. But when coupled with the reality of the overall pro-consumptive use bias of Alaska, this fair-sounding concept is seen to fall short of protecting wolves.

Taking the broad view, the panel declared that the state's wolf population is not endangered. While this may or may not be true, Alaska wildlife biologist Dr. Vic Van Ballenberghe points

out that the statewide assessment is not meaningful, and that wolf populations must be assessed separately for each area when management plans are being developed.

Though Dr. Van Ballenberghe doubts that Alaska wolves can sustain higher than present levels of hunting, the Wolf Management Planning Team approved of localized wolf control programs to offset declines in ungulate numbers; as so often in the past, the wolf alone is being made to pay for the accumulation of impacts that affect big game, and integrated management falls by the wayside.

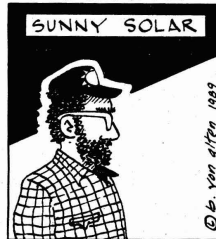


With this approval of wolf control the stage is set for two wolf-murder enthusiasts to break out the fire power. Alaska governor Walter Hickel has recently appointed Ron Somerville deputy commissioner of the state Dept of Fish and Game, and David Kelleyhouse director of the Division of Wildlife Conservation. Somerville was director of the now-defunct Division of

Game during the heyday of Alaska wolf control in the late 70s and early 80s. During the same period Kellyhouse was noted for his attempts to mount machine guns on aircraft to kill wolves, and for publishing falsely inflated numbers concerning wolf predation on moose and caribou. With these two back in the cockpit, one Planning Team non-action becomes especially ominous: the Team failed to condemn land-and-shoot hunting. Land-and-shoot hunting areas were expanded in November 1989, and team member Valerie Brown expects more of the same. Though calling for strict enforcement of hunting law violations, the team acknowledged that there is virtually no oversight of airborne hunting at present. With Somerville and Kelleyhouse at the controls, buoyed by consumptive-user fees, it would be naive to look for improvement by the agencies involved.

Airborne wolf hunting is now popular, and has acquired a life of its own apart from official wolf control. Still, Alaska's hunters widely view the killing of wolves as beneficial to ungulate populations, even in areas where wolves are too few to noticeably impact big game numbers. Alaska's wolves seem destined for persecution, since the state's human population has increased 37% in the past ten years and, regarding big game hunting, Dr Van Ballenberghe observes "I always thought of demand as something that's unlimited...If we had twice as many caribou and moose...as we have now, the potential harvest of those animals would be taken up by hunters...I think hunters will always pressure for more." In its report the Planning Team acknowledged that the continuing wolf slaughter was making Alaska look bad. Can you say "boycott?" How 'bout "hunt sab?" Let's put some pressure on! For more info contact WAG (see directory).

MODERNE MAN



Another Alaskan Fatcat Bill in the Making

BY MICHAEL LEWIS

The Johnston-Wallop Energy Bill passed out of the pro-development Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee last month. Not unexpectedly, the open-the Refuge section survived an amendment to strike it offered by Sen. Tim Wirth and supported by Senators Bumpers, Ford, Bradley, Bingham, Conrad, Akaka, and Wellstone (all Democrats). (Sen. Wyche Fowler was out of town and refused to give his proxy for that vote; Sen. Shelby joined Sen. Johnston and the Republicans in voting for development).

Many other disastrous provisions survived in the bill as well. It contains language that seriously weakens the just-passed Clean Air Act (by exempting rebuilt power plants from the pollution standards governing new plants); it opens the door to unregulated hydropower development; it overturns bans on drilling off hundreds of miles of coastline; and it guts the public review process for nuclear power plants. All in all, it's a

very ugly piece of legislation that would take us down a path fraught with dangers and utterly lacking in vision, but lined with grinning industry fat cats who stand to make out very well.

There are several bright patches on the Senate horizon, however. Attempts to include weak and ineffective Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards in Johnston's bill failed, so the bill was reported out without fuel-efficiency standards. Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) has pledged to filibuster the bill (now renumbered S.1220) should it come to the floor, and he is being joined by an increasing number of colleagues. Other committees (including Environment and Public Works and Commerce) are asserting jurisdiction over portions of it. Senator John Kerry (D-MA) is circulating a Dear Colleague letter urging other senators to join him in opposing the bill's assault on the Clean Air Act. And, best of all, we are now up to 22 co-sponsors on

Sen. Roth's Wilderness Bill and 106 sponsors for the Mrazek-Udall Wilderness Bill in the House!

Action now moves to the House side, where the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife Conservation, and the Environment is taking up the Jones bill (H.R.1320), which trades opening up the Arctic Refuge for a new wildlife refuge to be called the Teshekpuk NWR. The new status conferred on this extremely productive and critical habitat area would mean very little, however; it would not protect it from either oil drilling or coal mining. Meanwhile, the Arctic Refuge would be declared on-limits under a veneer of environmental protections.