

The Truth About  
Wolves In Alaska

Testimony By Concerned  
Alaskans

## ALASKA

For most of my life I have been misled into believing that Alaska was a natural wonderland abounding in wildlife. Not until recently, when I began receiving information from the Common Man Institute (a private research organization dedicated to acquainting the general public to the destructive nature of the wolf), did I learn that Alaska, like most of the rest of North American Continent, had very little wildlife before agriculture and predator control.

This chapter is devoted to commentary and letters published in the 1975 spring edition of the Alaska Wildlife Digest, that clearly expel such myths.

In explaining the common misconception of what Alaska was like at the time Alaska was purchased from Russia, Alaska Wildlife Digest editor, Chuck Grey wrote:

The preservationists prefer a "balance of nature" theory-which means non-use by man. Their limited knowledge of the subject precludes them knowing about the true balance of nature in Alaska before the coming of the white men. Take, for instance, Lt. Allen, who in 1885 led the first exploration of interior Alaska after the purchase from Russia. His party traveled the Copper River from salt water to the head, floated the Tanana River from near the head to the confluence with the Yukon, traveled overland from that point 100 miles to about the location of Hughes on the Koyukuk, floated down the Koyukuk and back into the Yukon, floated the Yukon to its mouth without seeing a single big game animal alive. (Members of his party saw sheep on the Chitina River they traded for some spoiled caribou meat at Mentasta.) The Natives at that time, he tells in his journal, subsisted largely on rabbits and salmon, while moose were a rare delicacy. Today it would be difficult to float 50 miles of the Tanana without seeing at least one cow moose on one of the islands, although 15 years ago you would have seen a dozen with calves.

It's a sorry day for the hunting public when we have to face up to the fact that over 35 million dollars have been spent for wildlife management (excluding enforcement) in Alaska since statehood, and all that we have to show is dwindling or decimated big game populations, reduced seasons and bag limits and probably the largest wolf population in our history-All at a time when the people could utilize game for food. We can't grow corn or raise cattle in most of Alaska, but we could "farm" the country to produce a lot of game for human consumption, if we had a chance.

Wolves are at very high levels throughout most of Alaska at this time. Hunters, trappers and game department reports and figures show it. Since up to 50% of a healthy wolf population can be cropped annually without affecting the population level the next year, a lot of economic value from a renewable resource is being wasted. At least 2,000 wolves a year, presently. This type of utilization is quite aside from taking wolves for predator control purposes in areas where that might be desirable. The trappers don't make a dent in a wolf population. If a trapper can get one or two out of a pack he is doing very well.

The Steese-Forty Mile caribou herd is currently figured at about 8,000 animals, down from about 40,000 12 years ago. These remaining animals had 57 calves per hundred cows on June 6th this last year and by September 18th it was down to 16 per hundred. Biologists in the field reported the major mortality was predation, mostly wolf and some bear. Moose in the same country and along the adjacent upper Yukon River are way down from the early fifties.

The Nelchina caribou herd on the South side of the Alaska range has probably shown the most dramatic fluctuation. Concurrent with the most extensive predator control effort in Alaska, this herd grew from about 4,000 animals in the early '50's to about 70,000 animals by 1965. Today it is back down to about 10,000 animals and suffering poor calf survival.

Closer to Fairbanks, we have a small resident population of caribou on the North side of the Alaska range some 80 miles south of town which formerly numbered about 4,000 animals. These caribou are fairly accessible to hunters with airplane and ATV equipment. Currently this group has dwindled drastically to the point where their survival is questionable. Hunting is closed.

A friend who lives year-round in this area, and who is a graduate biologist, told me last winter that he found where wolves killed 16 sheep at one time. Two trappers in this area has been consistently taking 12 to 36 wolves a year each - a fantastic figure for a trapper.

The Tanana Flats south of Fairbanks, cut off from easy access by the large Tanana River and void of any improved roads is an area approximately 80 to 100 miles. As late as ten years ago, after a concentrated predator control effort and little hunting, the area had a tremendous moose population of about 12,000 animals. Even in the summer time with the leaves on a low flying pilot was seldom out of sight of moose. I have a hunting camp in the Alaska Range and have made trips across these flats each fall for 25 years. I often count moose to break the monotony of the 80 mile trip. Flying a straight line I have counted as high as 70 moose on a fall morning. Forty was not unusual. The past five years I get between four and seven moose. This last fall two or three. Two weeks ago, on an overcast Saturday morning I flew in these area for about 1 1/2 hours. I found two fresh moose kills with wolf tracks around them and didn't see a single live moose - an incredible experience in view of the recent past.

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## Wolves Hit Sheep At Usibelli Mine

Wolves have recently descended on the Dall sheep in the Usibelli coal mine area, according to Warren Mattielli, a foreman at the mine.

According to Mattielli, about 100 sheep were wintering on the ridge between Healy River and Cody Creek. Many of them are in sight of the mine most of the time. They come down off the slopes to eat the bunch grass that grows profusely on the area where underground coal fires have warmed the ground.

To date the men at the mine have located five sheep heads, "predominately middle

age rams," Mattielli said. There are two other large rams still alive and getting around with disabled hind quarters. Any effort to determine the actual number of kills in these rugged wind-blown hills would be impossible in the opinion of the men working at the mine. To date the employees at the mine have witnessed two actual attacks by wolves. One pack frequently seen number 19. On at least two occasions a pack of 12 have been seen, but it is thought these might be part of the larger pack, temporarily split off.

Workmen are carrying their rifles and to date between 50 and 60 shots have been fired at the wolves, but so far none have been killed.

ED GELVIN

has worked at mining, lumbering, trapping, building and construction work

When we first came to this section of Alaska 20 years ago, the moose and caribou were abundant and remained that way every year until the mid-60's. The area was a "meat basket" for Alaskan hunters. Today the caribou are practically non-existent and moose are so scarce that if a family had to depend on one they would be in danger of starving to death.

I am talking about a vast area in the Hot Springs-Central-Circle area and upstream on the Yukon to Eagle, including the tributaries accessible by riverboat. In former years, during the winter months, it was the rule to see a herd of moose where each creek and river dumps into the Yukon feeding on the willows that grow in these deltas. Now we are lucky to see a solitary animal at these locations.

The reason why is obvious to anyone who has kicked around the bush for any length of time. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in pre-statehood years had some very efficient predator control agents such as Frank Glaser and Joe Miner. Poison baits were placed strategically on every river drainage. Joe Miner was stationed at Circle Hot Springs for a month each year. He and his gunner hunted wolves. In 1957 Joe told me they killed 156 wolves between Circle City and Eagle on the Yukon River and its tributaries.

The result was a healthy ratio of cows with calves and a continuing supply of caribou and moose for the hunter and his winter meat supply. Also enough wolves were still left around to howl and leave their tracks on sand bars or stare from the brush to thrill the hunter and non-hunter alike.

What has happened with our present game managers? The animals haven't suddenly changed their way of living. Any game biologist or ordinary woodsman without a degree knows the prime winter food supply of the wolf is the ungulate population. And when our head game manager, the Commissioner of Fish and Game, thinks that a handful of trappers can control wolf populations it appears something is definitely wrong. Let's put the pressure on these .22 caliber type politicians to begin thinking of hungry Alaskans instead of idealistic preservationists in the lower '48.

Let me mention just one of the many early day travelers and explorers who referred to the Alaskan game in his writings. Dr. Alfred H. Brooks, who traveled the entire territory from 1898 to 1923 for the U.S. Geological Survey, many times stated the lack of moose and caribou was due to the wolf. In his book "Blazing Alaska's Trails" he writes of the settling of Alaska by miners, trappers, etc. and said, "It is to be noted that the killing of wolves, on which there should be a bounty, has done much to promote the increase of both caribou and moose."

ESKIMO REINDEER HERDER  
Tom Brower  
Relates 25 Years Experience

Reading about, also seeing the T.V. program "Wolf Men", anyone in his right mind can understand what angle the producers are trying to put across in the minds of the public.

I was born in Alaska and loved nature and set thousands of specimens to most of the large museums in the lower states. Living out in what we call the bush country, for over 25 years, trapping fur bearing animals and having reindeer as cattle on a range covering 1,250,000 square miles.

I feel I am qualified to make a few remarks regarding the wolf. First, the whole North Slope of the Brooks Range once contained over 200,000 reindeer-now there are none. Second, I estimated one spring about 20,000 caribou went through the Anaktuvuk Pass moving northward to roam the flat rolling hills and give birth to their young.

My reindeer herd was the last to go of all the domesticated reindeer north of the Brooks Range. What I saw the wolf do to the other herds east and west of my grazing area made me more vigilant and I had to keep night and day herders. Still the wolf waited. When a blowing storm came he did not take the sick and the lame but cut out 40 to 100 from a herd and would slaughter nearly all he took and did not even touch any for feed. If he did take time, all he cut out was the tongue. This same story of the wolf killing the vast domesticated reindeer does not jive that he kills only to eat.

Illustration: One day one of my reindeer herders and myself watched a large caribou herd stalked by 14 wolves. The herd was uneasy. When the time was ready, four wolves appeared from behind the herd and a stampede started which would head this herd straight toward a bluff which would be impossible for any game to descend. As the momentum grew more wolves appeared and as the herd approached the bluff the attack started from both sides. There were dead caribou, also many that could hardly move due to the leg sinews having been cut.

Again regarding the caribou, before the large wolf packs were hunted down by bounty hunters from small planes, they, the caribou, were not holding out but were becoming more and more scarce.

I am one who has very little love for a killer that kills for lust. Surely wolf pups can be raised and played around with, but his instinct to kill can be noticed the minute he does not have his way. He is a coward when cornered.

I have caught a number of wolves by trapping and shooting and each time make a remark I have learned from my full Eskimo uncle, "Be thankful many game spared."

SYDNEY HUNTINGTON  
Native Indian born on the Koyukuk River

The fact that the number one moose killer is the sneaky and crafty wolf is finally being realized by some of our classroom-trained biologists and big game specialists. Fortunately for them they don't have to live off the land.

This killer is making monkeys out of silly human beings who class the wolf almost as a pet.

Me, an ordinary dumb Indian along with thousands of both white and indian can see the sign writing on the wall, placed there by people who live in the cities in Alaska and "outside". What does it say? "Stop Wolf Hunting by Air". Let them (killer wolves) multiply without control! Let nature use its hand of fate!"

Some of our boys used to hunt wolves by airplane with good success. They held them down. Then government stopped them from hunting about three years ago and the wolves increased fast. With great regret some of our older men, such as Chief Henry, 90 years old; L. Beatus of Hughes, 89 years old, said white men crazy to stop airplane hunting. "No airplane to hunt wolf, pretty soon indians go hungry, no meat, wolf kill all". They are so right. This land supported those men for years and they know without all the book learning what is happening, These people who make the law against it make mistake. Laws can be changed. Just because they want to be hard headed and not proven wrong they don't change the law. A wrong don't make a right. Why create a hardship upon the people they govern, that is not common sense. It's selfishness with shame.

We have a depression looking us right square in the face. Our inflation prices forbid us to buy meat and yet our government says don't kill the wolf, save him so you and your family can do without meat so their friend the wolf can multiply and wipe out the moose. Then they can issue food stamps and welfare checks to take away the necessity of working from the people who try to earn a living. This makes these very individuals a ward to our government.

For the last two or three years we have had float airplane moose hunters come to this area in the fall. Complaints have been made by the people here but no action was ever taken by the law enforcement people. Some very drastic measures has been taken such as damage to these airplanes, etc. to discourage this practice. There are not enough moose for the people here.

Let's stop being damn fools in destroying what little we have and start using common sense. Get action on wolf control by airplane or helicopter. The moose will multiply again along with the caribou, beaver, etc. Conditions will improve for both man and animals. I and hundreds of other Indians say control the wolf by any means possible.

SAM O. WHITE  
Alaska's first flying game warden

I have put in many years in Alaska and most of my time was spent in Alaska's wilderness. I was never a casual observer of the game animals, I was a most interested observer.

It isn't hard to imagine a wolf population explosion in Alaska today. Most all of the restraints have been removed. Trappers don't use poison anymore, the bounty is off, aerial hunting of wolves is outlawed and you can't dig out their dens. Why wouldn't they increase if there is any game around for them to eat?

I have watched wolves kill moose and caribou while I was flying overhead. There are often snow conditions that aid the wolf and penalized the moose, like deep snow with a crust on or near the top that holds the wolf but causes the moose to flounder. I have seen many moose brutally mauled and torn and left alive to die a horrible death.

At the coming of winter a colony of moose will congregate in a valley where winter feed is available. The wolves will move in and kill many and drive the rest out to roam and search for food in other less favorable places. Indian Mountain, near Hughes, is one big wolf den on the east side. One winter 24 moose moved into a valley just east of there; the snow was deep, the feed was plentiful but the wolves came and by January there were 18 moose left. The snow was so deep the moose could not travel. By early April there was not one moose left.

One time over on the Nation River in the upper Yukon-I was up there with a mounted policeman-Clarence Rhodes was with us too-we were watching caribou in the winter. There was a bunch of nine wolves, they weren't all pups either. There were some big ones and they were chasing a caribou. They caught up with him and we watched what happened. Well, they hit that caribou and knocked it down and they all started eating on it right then. They got their mouths full and you could see them bolting it down, right from the air.

It was a big bull. He got up and ran-took off. They let him go. They didn't pay any attention to him till they got their meat swallowed and then they took after him again. They had the caribou down five times before he stayed down and each time they got a meal, got a feed off him. Boy, was the blood flying all over the snow, squirting out on both sides! Caribou are awful tough to kill you know-tougher than moose.

GLEN GREGORY  
Alaska Air-taxi operator

I have been flying in Alaska for 27 years and I have seen a lot of it, from the ground and from the air.

When I first came to Alaska in 1946 there were moose for everyone that hunted hard, but not lots of moose. Just before 1950 they started the wolf control program that drastically reduced the wolf populations-especially in caribou country. Then we started, in about 1953, seeing moose up on the Colville, the Noatak and Kivalina Rivers, and in the Selawik and Buckland country (northern and western Alaska). I prospected the winter and summer of 1949 in the Selawik River area and never saw a moose all the time I was there! By 1953 there were lots of them. (predator control work was being carried on around the reindeer herds of northwestern Alaska).

North of the Yukon the caribou limit went from one to two per year, then to five and finally to no limit and no closed season due to the increase after reducing the wolves in northern Alaska. By contrast, in the Canadian arctic, the Eskimo people were starving and on relief because they lost their caribou. (Their biologists were still trying to decide if they should have predator control).

I read the other day that there was no such thing as a 60,000 caribou herd. I estimated 120,000 in one concentrated herd myself and U.S. FWS employees confirmed my estimate later.

I have seen nature at it's cruelest. During the deep snow winters three and four years ago I had occasion to witness sights that made me sick. The route from Tanana to Ruby is over the Yukon River all the way. At that time there was a good moose population that congregated on the willow covered islands of the river in the winter. On several occasions I spotted moose standing in the deep snow with chunks eaten out of them, bleeding to death. The snow would be red all around them. There was no pattern to where the wolves bit first, although the rump seemed to be the favorite location. Probably because it is less protected.

I have contacted a number of people here in Tanana, both native and white and everyone I talked to said they were in favor of killing wolves from the air and they aren't particular who does it as long as there is a reduction in wolves.

But something that gripes us more is having people in the lower '48 not only tell us, but influence the way game is managed here in Alaska. If the people in New York City want to write our game laws then they should let some of us in the bush design their traffic laws. It would make about as much sense.

November, 1972  
Galena, Ak. 99741

Alaska Wildlife Digest

Charles Gray, Editor:

I would like to thank you for my copy of "Alaska Wildlife Digest", and also air a few of my views on the wolf, and the ban on aerial hunting.

I have hunted wolves, by air, for the past 10 to 12 years here, in unit 21, as a fair weather weekend pilot. Over the years I have taken upward of 200 wolves, and as of last spring, I can assure you there are many more wolves in this unit than when I started hunting, and this does not take into account the numerous other hunters in the unit.

Mr. Brooks has noted that the trapper will still be able to harvest wolves for fur. I live in a village on the Yukon of over 350 population. In the entire village there is not one person that derives a fraction of his living from trapping, and why should he, what with food stamps, welfare, and governmental handouts. Trapping for a living is a thing of the past.

I might also point out I know, and have known a number of natives who are now drawing old age pension who never shot, or trapped a wolf in their entire lives. This is an example of how hard they are to come by on the ground (the wolf).

It is nothing less than a fantasy to think the wolf can be properly controlled by trapping.

The wide spread fallacy of the wolf only attacking the old, crippled and diseased is a lie that should be stopped, if at all possible. I have seen two wolves bring down a bull moose in the winter, it was done by cornering him against a cutbank on the river, and hamstringing him, then wait until he was too weak from loss of blood to defend himself.

In the years I have hunted wolves I have always looked on, and every wolf I've shot, as of yet, I have still to find one carrying a little black bag with his stethoscope, thermometer, etc., so he could determine the health of the animal before they slaughter it, and slaughter they do.

A couple years ago, my gunner and I saw a moose kill, the moose was, at most, 1/4 eaten. The next weekend we flew by and there were three more dead moose laying within a square block of the first. These three were less eaten than the first.

We watched these kills the remainder of the year, and all that fed there were crows and fox. To me, this is a tremendous waste of good meat, just to satisfy the killing lust of the wolf. In conclusion, I don't believe the big game in this state of ours (moose, caribou, sheep) can stand two predators, wolf and man, at the same time. One has to go, the wolf by reasonable harvests, or man by outlawing hunting of all kinds, and, of course, this is exactly what the do-gooders in America (South 48) want, as for me I won't give up easily.

Sincerely,  
Harvey Strassburg

Petersburg, Alaska 99833  
Box 158  
January 15, 1975

Dear Editor,

Concerning the revelation by the Game Department that moose are down in the interior Alaska, I was wondering if the Department would ever come around to facing the facts concerning depletion of our game animals. In our area it is deer and goats that supply the eating habits of wolves plus the smaller fur bearing animals.

I made two goat hunting trips this past fall into an area that I have hunted with good success for years, but didn't see a track. I only saw wolf droppings with goat hair in them. No doubt the goats that supplied the hair were either sick or wounded. I saw one deer track after the snow came and there were wolf tracks following it. The deer are gone as well as beaver and muskrats. The mystery is what are the wolves eating?

Our local Department biologist is feeding some. I don't know how many, but there sure is a lot of wolf tracks around his place. The local people resent this because these are the wolves that depleted our deer.

The wolves are down, however. I guess they have had to move to the goat cliffs or swim to the mainland to get at the moose herd on the Stikine.

I don't think any outdoorsman in our area would object to a closed hunting season if a predator program was initiated, but the predator program would have to start first. Why stop hunting to feed the wolves? Even with a good predator program it would be many years before we would have any number of animals in our area, in spite of what Commissioner Brooks says. One doesn't have to be a mathematician to figure that one out. In the first place, we no longer have anything left to start building with.

I believe the hunters in Southeastern Alaska would support the Department if they would drop the propaganda and do something about the wolves. They aren't fooling many people and the Department is about as popular in our area as a rattlesnake in a flower bed.

I made a trip to the interior this past fall and found the outdoorsmen there about as bitter toward the Department as we are in the Southeast.

I had hopes that our new Governor would replace Brooks with somebody who had some interest in saving some game animals from the wolves. Needless to say, I am disappointed in this respect.

Sincerely,  
Marion Henke

By MIKE STULTZ

Mike Stultz received a Bachelor of Education Degree from the University of Alaska. Since graduation he has served in several sections of Alaska as a Protection Officer for the Department of Fish and Game. He now teaches at Circle City, Alaska.

I arrived in Yakutat, Alaska in November of 1970 with my wife and two children to take the position of District Game Warden of the area reaching from Cape Fairweather on the south to Katalla to the Northwest. This is a 300 mile stretch of land with the Gulf of Alaska on one side and the mighty coastal range crowding the other. It is one of the most beautiful places in the state with the immense peaks of the Saint Elias Range towering 18,000 feet above dense forests of spruce intermingled with fjords, glaciers, and river systems. Inside Yakutat Bay lay a string of islands with white sandy beaches that provide refuge and food for deer, bear, coyotes, and wolves along with species of small game. Fishing in the East, Itallo, and Situk Rivers is some of the best to be found anywhere. The forelands which start at the base of the coastal range and extend five to fifteen miles west where it ends in the wide sandy beaches bordering the Gulf of Alaska, teemed with big game such as moose, back, glacier, and brown bear. The mountains are dotted with the white mountain goat. It was at that time one of the most sought after districts in the state as far as game protection officers were concerned-it as an outdoorsman's paradise.

Little did I realize that I would personally witness the destruction of one of the great moose populations in Alaska through the forces of nature and the blind stupidity of the Department of Fish and Game, and this experience would leave me with a feeling of frustration so great I can never work for the Department again.

Predating my arrival in Yakutat by about forty years, moose, the largest member of the deer family, had begun a slow migration through the Chilkat Pass in Canada, down the Tatshenshenini River, and finally along the Alsek River into Alaska and the Yakutat forelands. Here they found a habitat ideally suited to them. There was plenty of food-willows, sedges, pond weeds, and lots of alder. The vicious coastal winds kept snow blown off the willows and alder along the major rivers providing abundant food even in years of large accumulations of snow. The moose continued northwest to Yakutat Bay and here, thanks to their dense long hollow hair which acted both as a life jacket and warm insulator, swam across the Bay and established herds around Malispina Glacier, the largest icefield in the world outside the polar icecaps, to Icy Bay. Here the moose was separated from his perpetual nemesis, the wolf.

Wolves, not having long buoyant insulating hair of the moose, could not swim the frigid waters of the Bay. Neither could they walk around Yakutat Bay because of Russel Fjord, impassable glaciers, and the five mountains surrounding the Bay that run from waters edge to heights of over 15,000 feet. The moose that crossed the Bay, free of the wolf, contentedly spread westward and multiplied, while those to the south suffered a far different fate.

South of the Bay wolves came by the same path as the moose and multiplied. What they saw they liked. Things began to change. The Indians, use to a diet of fish and seal, begin to acquire a taste for moose. People from larger population areas discovered the treasures of Yakutat and came in increasing numbers to enjoy its hunting and fishing. The U. S. Forest Service put in cabins and airstrips to accommodate people. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game established a three month either sex hunting season.

This was the scene I so unsuspectingly stepped into upon my arrival in Yakutat. There were moose everywhere. You could fly in any direction except out to sea and see literally hundreds of moose. Who would ever expect that something was about to happen? Who would ever think that within a few years moose hunting would be just a memory in Yakutat?

That winter, flying with Dick Nicholes and Terry Holliday of Gulf Air Taxi based in Yakutat, I begin to see things I found very difficult to believe. Everywhere we went south of Yakutat Bay I observed large numbers of moose kills by wolves. Like most people I was of the belief wolves did not or could not kill healthy moose. I was worried and upset that the moose in the area were suffering from a serious food shortage or ailment that made them so weak they fell prey to wolves.

Going to Juneau and discussing the problem with the game biologist who was supposed to study and control the animals in the Yakutat area, I met with only polite indifference and disbelief concerning my observations of the moose situation. You just had to look at the computer printouts from the returned harvest tags to see the moose population there was in great shape. Yes, he would try to get up to Yakutat sometime this winter and explain to me why healthy looking moose were falling over dead for the wolves to eat. I didn't really believe that wolves could kill healthy moose, did I? how long had I been there? Wasn't I imagining just a little? I left this important man's office and went back to Yakutat determined to make right my grievous error in suspecting the poor wolf.

Flying with Holliday every hour we could get into the air I examined dead moose, live moose, and stomach contents of dead wolves we shot. I visited the fenced off moose browse study areas the Department, along with the U. S. Forest Service, put in the more densely populated moose areas. I also observed, from the air, my first battle between a live healthy four year old cow moose and

five wolves. It wasn't a battle really. The wolves just took so many fist size bites of meat out of the rump, side, and shoulders of the cow that within fifteen minutes the snow was red in a thirty foot radius around her, and in twenty minutes she was dead. This was the first (but not the last) time I saw an actual fight between the two species and it sickened me then as it still does now. I landed and examined the dead cow. I took a tooth, looked at the heart, lungs, and liver, cracked the leg bone to look at the bone marrow, but I couldn't see anything wrong with her except she was dead from wolf bites. She appeared a fine, fat, healthy moose that was in the wrong place at the right time.

There had to be a key somewhere, yet I couldn't find it. The browse was in good shape-it was hard to tell the difference between the fenced off study plots and the foliage surrounding it. In the stomachs of the wolves I found mainly large concentrations of moose hair, bone chips and big chunks of rotten meat, some deer hair, a few salmon bones, and unidentifiable assortment of smaller bones. The moose, from both the air and ground, appeared to be healthy, vigorous animals. Why was I spotting up to twenty fresh moose kills a week?

Risking chastisement again, I called our area biologist in Juneau. No, he couldn't make it up just yet. Possibly he could make it up sometime before or during the summer.

Summer came and went. I was so busy with commercial and sports fishermen I didn't have time to think about either moose or wolves. Even if I had the time to work at the problem I wouldn't have been able to see anything of value. The heavily forested area hid what I would have been looking for. Wolves, difficult to spot in the winter, are impossible to see in the summer. The biologist must have felt the same way, because he still hadn't come around. Apparently no one cared until that fall's hunting season rolled around and the previous winter's predation by the wolves begin to show its effects.

I flew hundreds of hours during that moose season visiting all the hunters and their camps. Almost everywhere I went the questions and statements were the same: "I have been hunting this area for five years and never failed to get my moose within a half mile of camp the first or second day out. I haven't even seen a moose this trip, and I have been here a week," "What are all those big dog tracks doing on all the river bars?" "If things get much worse I will have to have to go to the Interior to hunt next year." "If there aren't many more moose around here anymore, why do you guys have a three month either sex hunting season on them?" "I don't see how hunting can get much worse." That statement was wrong. The hunting would be much worse next year as the wolves kept right on killing moose when the hunters quit and went home. Two years from this time hunting would be stopped by the Department on the south side of Yakutat Bay. Right up to the dying gasps of this herd the Department maintained a three month either sex season.

By this time the difference became very noticeable between the moose herds on the north and south sides of Yakutat Bay. This was the key I had been searching for. The moose on both sides of the Bay received the same human hunting pressure. The food situation, cover, terrain all were almost identical on both sides. The only observable difference was in presence of wolves. In one area wolves enjoyed a twelve month either sex moose season and on the north side of the Bay moose hunting was closed to this four legged predator.

It was apparent that something had to be done and quickly. Hunters would soon discover unbalanced moose populations on the north side and flock to that side and do what the wolves could not do. I again called Juneau to bring it to the attention of the biologist in charge at Yakutat. I wanted some emergency hunting regulations put into effect immediately. I felt we should stop hunting cows on the south side of the Bay and cut down on the three month season. I also wanted the season cut on the north side of the Bay to correspond with that on the south to keep the herd from being overhunted. I received a negative reply to all these requests. There remained a three month either sex hunting season on both sides. What the Department did do was to give in to pressures, mainly from outside Alaska, and stop all aerial wolf hunting.

I could not convince the Department of the danger I saw for the Yakutat moose, or that Yakutat was no longer a good place to hunt moose. Alaska Airlines showed a fifty percent reduction in the amount of moose meat hauled out of Yakutat over the previous year. I was told this was probably due to hunters flying out more of their own moose. To my argument that aerial wolf hunting was important to control wolves in the area since no one could hunt or trap them effectively from the ground, I was informed that wolves were most likely not involved in any reduction in the number of Yakutat moose at all. However, that fall's moose count would show if there was any problem.

That fall's moose count was again a failure. It is held so late in the season that it was impossible to fly much at all. Even when you can fly visibility is limited in a bouncing airplane in moderate to severe turbulence. The biologist again failed to assess the situation in Yakutat from his armchair in Juneau. He could not ignore that fall's return of harvest tickets from his trusty computer. The hunter's harvest of moose in Yakutat was way down. Still no change in seasons or any predator control work.

Flying my personal airplane that winter, moose became almost as hard to spot as wolves. I would fly hours and maybe see a dozen moose. Wolf trails and dead moose invariably intersected. The moose herds on the Italo and East Rivers--two of the largest winter herds around--were all but wiped out in a three month span by wolves that were no longer bothered by aerial hunting. As winter progressed moose became so scarce that even the wolves couldn't

find them. They then started to look for other food sources. For the first time in memory wolves were spotted in town eating out of garbage cans. Stray dogs running loose disappeared. People with dogs chained outside woke up to find nothing left but blood and tufts of hair. The era of the moose in Yakutat was shortlived. They were for all practical purposes gone.

I left Yakutat that summer and came back to Fairbanks where I went back into teaching. This was a considerable letdown for a confirmed outdoorsman, but it was infinitely preferable to helplessly watching the final act in Yakutat. The Department finally woke up after two and a half years of warning and limited the moose season on the south side of the Bay. Predictably the hunting pressure became intense on the north side and that herd was seriously overhunted. They had compounded the problem instead of helping it. Still no predator work. The only positive action the Department took was to not transplant wolves on the north side of the Bay to complete the destruction.

The winter of 1973 saw the Department finally put away their comic book entitled "Never Cry Wolf" and admit that wolves were indeed as responsible as hunters for eliminating the Yakutat herds--a peculiar statement since wolves hunt twelve months of the year without regard to season, limit or sex--but it was a definite improvement over their past utterances. Realizing at this late date that predator control was necessary they organized a Department wolf hunt in Yakutat.

Using a great amount of money they assembled a Fish and Game Air Force with visions of eliminating at least half of the four legged predators so the moose herds would spring back. After all, they had seen the television "documentary" Wolfman. It would be easy. Just sit back in a nice warm airplane, spot a pack, drive them to the nearest clearing and then shoot them. Nothing to it. Maybe not very sporting, but very effective and much preferable to poison.

They found out a number of things they didn't know on that first outing. You can sit in a nice warm airplane until you see a wolf, but then you have to open a door or window. Once you do that the chill factor becomes so great inside the aircraft that the warmest parkas, gloves, and hats are not very effective. Facial muscles tighten. Your hands and fingers become stiff and cold. They become so clumsy and unfeeling that it is difficult to load a gun, let alone handle it safely. If you take your gloves off your fingers freeze. If you leave them on you have no feeling for the split-second accurate shooting demanded when coming in at 65 mph over a running dodging wolf who uses every snowbank, stump, tree, or stack of driftwood to put between him and you just when it is time to pull the trigger. Your eyes begin to freeze as tears run and you can't focus them. The wolf is safely across the clearing and into the timber--again!

They also found they could not drive a wolf from an airplane except in very rare circumstances. At the first sound of an airplane engine they hide or take off for the nearest cover if they are in the open. Once they get to the trees, which they are never far from, nothing can get them back in the open.

One simple careless moment in a hunt that allows no room for error on the part of either the pilot or gunner finds the participants suddenly without an airplane propeller, a wing strut shot off followed by a crash, a ski or tire shot off, a load of buckshot through the wing or gas tank, crashing into trees because you let your airspeed drop below stalling speed, or just plain crashing into something because the pilot was watching the wolf instead of where he was going.

After spending an unknown amount of dollars and a lot of their supposedly valuable time the Department finally got one wolf as the spring thaw arrived. Wolf hunting from the air, they decided, was a very skillful, intricate, and dangerous art that requires the utmost of nerve, teamwork, and stamina. Armchair biologists did not have the experience. I understand the Department has contracted Terry to hunt wolves for them in Yakutat this winter. I wish him luck for the sake of the moose.

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## *Watch Out for Phoney Network TV 'Documentaries'*

A subcommittee headed by Rep. Harley Staggers (D.-W.Va.) has turned up evidence that television is using faked incidents to exploit fears that man is ruining the environment and unnecessarily destroying various animal species.

The subcommittee, for instance, recently probed a wildlife documentary show on TV only to discover the producers staged a sequence purportedly showing polar bears being illegally hunted with a helicopter.

The program "Say Goodbye," broadcast on Jan. 8, 1971, by NBC, dealt with the threatened extinction of various species of wildlife. But Wolper Productions, which produced the show, did not, it turns out, film any of the original events for the dramatic four-minute sequence depicting the death of polar bear.

Rather, film from five different sources was clipped out and edited into various pieces "to tell an entirely different story from what any of the original five films were saying," William T. Druhan, special consultant on the House Special Subcommittee on Investigations, told HUMAN EVENTS.

He said the phony segment, in fact, was constructed by intermixing 45 splices from the original films. "Some of these films

are 12 years old that they just dug out of archives. It's a cut-and-paste job as opposed to an actual staging of an event."

Testifying before the subcommittee, Druhan said only one of the original films had scenes of hunters shooting polar bears. That movie was taken in Alaska by Dr. Boyd A. Skille, an Anchorage ophthalmologist, who emphasized the hunting was done legally and that no helicopter was used.

Druhan continued, "The remaining four original films (from Walt Disney Productions, Penn State University, an employee of the Alaska Fish and Game Department and an Anchorage photographer-business promoter) do not contain any hunting scenes at all; they were taken during scientific expeditions conducted by government and private parties for the purpose of helping to preserve the species."

Druhan said scenes of a helicopter used in a scientific expedition were interchanged with scenes of hunting so that it appeared the sportsmen were using the helicopter. Hunting polar bears with a helicopter is illegal, but Druhan told HUMAN INTEREST no one has ever been known to have hunted the animal in such a manner.

*(Reprinted from Human Events.)*

Very few people in the "Lower Forty-eight States" were aware that there was a serious conflict over wolf predation raging in Alaska in the mid 1970's. Yet, the average Joe in Alaska, the trapper, the guide, or the Eskimo that made his living raising reindeer, was led to believe it was the people in the lower States that were applying the political pressure to protect the wolf. I suspect there were people in the lower States involved alright, but I also suspect that it was only those close to key environmental organizations that participated.

At any rate, I feel it is important for all of us to stop and analyze what has been taking place in Alaska since that time. Basically the people of Alaska that had depended on the regions wild recourse for their livelihood have either been greatly restricted or put out of business. While at the same time and during the years that followed, a different type of industry has emerged stronger and more powerful than ever, that of bureaucracy. During the early 1980's a rush of Wildlife Refuges, National Parks, National Forest, Wilderness Areas, and National Monuments were designated all across the state.

#### Losses to Alaskans:

- Loss of 50-60 percent of statewide sheep harvest.
- Loss of 10-12 percent statewide moose harvest.
- Loss of 25-30 percent of statewide brown/grizzly bear harvest.
- Loss of 122 guide areas with displacement or loss of livelihood of these guides and an estimated 915 additional assistants.
- Loss of revenues from the guiding estimated at a minimum of 4-6 million dollars annually.
- Estimate eventual loss of harvest of 11,780 furbearers at an annual value of \$543,000.
- Reduction of income to Fish and Game Fund at a minimum of \$330,000 annually.
- Estimated \$500,000-\$1,000,000 increase in game management funds needed for more intensive management.
- Loss of indeterminate amount of revenues generated from air taxi operators, lodges, and resident sport and quasi-subsistence user.
- General deterioration in the quality of hunting experience on remaining lands.
- Increased competition for limited subsistence resources outside monuments.

# Biologists can't figure out die-off of moose in Alaska

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — The small moose herd on Alaska's North Slope is dying off and wildlife biologists say they don't have a clue.

A year of trying to figure out what is causing adult moose to fall dead on the tundra has Geoff Carroll stumped.

"This is all I've been thinking about for the last year," the Alaska Department of Fish and Game biologist said from his office in Barrow last week. "I've got lots of theories."

During the past three years, Carroll has watched Alaska's northernmost moose herd of about 1,600 animals fall to perhaps just a third of that number, and the decline continues.

Some biologists are wondering if this could be the end for moose north of the Brooks Range. Moose habitat there always has been marginal, and it is only in relatively recent times that the animals managed to stake a foothold.

"The story of the North Slope moose (is that) they only moved into this area relatively recently," Carroll said. "There were very few north of the Brooks Range prior to the 1940s. Then they moved over (from the south side) and established breeding populations, and they seem to have been gradually expanding."

By the late 1970s, almost every North Slope river valley with willow bushes — the tallest growing plants in the area — had moose. The food supply was limited and the weather was notoriously harsh, but moose seemed to thrive in every available niche.

"From 1970 to 1991," Carroll said, "there was just a very stable population. It was unusually stable for moose."

During that period, moose on the eastern portion of the North Slope — the animals' main habitat north of

the Brooks Range — fluctuated from 1,300 to 1,600 animals.

Then, in 1993, came the first hint of trouble.

Six calves per 100 cows were noted in surveys that fall, down from an average of 41 to 45 calves per 100 cows in previous years, Carroll said. By 1994, the cow-to-calf ratio had slid to three per 100.

"Last year," Carroll said, "I could not find a single calf in (the trend area). That was pretty dramatic. ... There was obviously something going on there."

An expanded survey this spring found half to three-quarters of the entire moose population had disappeared.

"We've had a lot of adult mortality as well as poor calf survival," Carroll said.

Biologists have been pondering those adult deaths since 18 mature moose turned up dead in one river valley last summer. Summer die-offs are highly unusual, and these animals dropped over so quickly and in such a small area that scavenging bears, wolves and wolverines couldn't consume the bounty of suddenly available protein.

Carroll has several theories:

—Copper deficiencies, which have ravaged moose populations in parts of Sweden as well as some North Slope moose. But on the other hand, the copper deficiency in Alaska moose doesn't appear as serious or widespread as in Sweden, where the chemical treatment of lakes to buffer acid rain apparently started problems.

—Brucellosis. An infectious, bacterial disease, brucellosis can cause havoc among domestic cows and sheep. Fish and Game veterinarian Randy Zarnke of Fairbanks said vets were shocked to find a high incidence of brucella bacteria in live North Slope moose examined this spring.

"Any (moose) that get it usually die," Carroll said, which could be

why the bacteria appears rarely in live moose here. Zarnke once checked more than 1,000 Alaska moose in a search for the bacteria and found only three animals that had been exposed.

Veterinarians working with Carroll on radio-collaring moose this spring found twice that many indications of brucella in 30 cows. One out of five had been exposed.

—Predation. "Both the bear and wolf populations appear quite high," Carroll said, and both species are efficient predators, particularly on moose calves. The deaths of half to three-quarters of the calves born on the North Slope each year could be due to predators that thrive on the old, the weak, and, most of all, the young.

—Insects. The biting bugs were as bad as anyone can remember on the North Slope last summer, Carroll said. He had reports of bedraggled moose running from swarms of flies and mosquitoes. It's possible, he said, that the insects literally bugged moose to death, although biologists generally consider this unlikely. Moose are well adapted to survive against most insects.

—Range deterioration. It's possible, biologists agree, that the North Slope moose population simply has grown too large for the limited shrubbery available to support it. If that were the case, however, adults would be expected to end the winter in poor condition, and North Slope moose did not look bad at the start of this summer, Carroll said. Range deterioration alone cannot explain the summer die off of adults, a phenomenon that seems to have ended.

—A little of everything. Food-stressed moose, enduring long winters with harsh weather and ceaselessly harassed by summer bugs, could become more vulnerable to predators, brucellosis or even copper deficiencies, some biologists said.