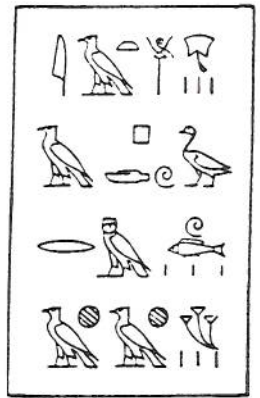


# THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

## ALASKA CHAPTER



### The Wildlife Society & Alaska Chapter - The Wildlife Society

#### Policy on Wolf Management in Alaska

##### INTRODUCTION

The Wildlife Society, both as an international organization, and as a state Chapter, appreciate the invitation of Governor Hickel to attend the "wolf summit" and share our professional organization's perspective on this wildlife management issue. The 9,000 member Wildlife Society, founded in 1937, is a nonprofit scientific and education organization of professionals active in wildlife research, management, education and administration. The Wildlife Society publishes the *Journal of Wildlife Management*, the *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, and *Wildlife Monographs*. The Society employs a Wildlife Policy Director who tracks national and regional items of interest to wildlife professionals and coordinates policy statements. The state Chapter currently has about 250 members composed of wildlife professionals from government, industry, and academia. The Chapter has worked with our parent organization to develop the following perspective on wolves and their management within Alaska.

##### BACKGROUND

As professionals, we believe that wildlife management and conservation should be based on accepted ecological theory and sound science. In addition, wildlife professionals back to Aldo Leopold recognized that wildlife management is also an art in that ecological systems often do not work as predicted, and human social systems, values, and laws are important for providing direction for wildlife management systems. Few ecological systems are unaffected by humans and almost all require some form of management. Even parks and wilderness areas are affected by external influences such as air pollution and internal activities such as visitor use.

Active management to regulate predator numbers, including "predator control," is an example of human efforts to manage other species to achieve human goals and to provide long-term benefits to their prey. These types of programs have been applied throughout the world, with varying degrees of success and failure. Predator control programs which employ modern wildlife management techniques should seek to maintain viable populations of predators, while providing the opportunity for their prey populations to increase. Active programs still exist to control vertebrate predators such as the coyote and American alligator, to name two. Predator control programs based on the payment of bounties, such as formerly for wolves, bald eagles, owls, and seals, have proven ineffective even where control may have been justified, and they were abolished.

Several aspects of wolf biology are essential considerations for wolf management. Wolves have been well-studied in Alaska, and throughout most of the state their habitat and populations remain secure. It is well-documented that wolves have high reproductive rates and can disperse long distances, making their populations resilient to high local harvest rates along with the ability to rapidly recolonize areas. The ecological relationships of wolves in relation to their prey populations are complicated, thus, the ability to decrease wolf numbers and increase ungulate populations is situation-specific.

The Wildlife Society recognizes the long tradition within the United States that states have primary responsibility for managing resident species such as the wolf. However, many people view Alaska's wildlife as a national treasure owing to our intact ecosystems, the presence of species that are indigenous to Alaska and nowhere else in the United States, and abundance of species such as the brown bear and wolf that have been eliminated from much of the Lower 48 states. This view that Alaska's wildlife is the nation's wildlife, as well as the considerable use of wildlife for subsistence, complicates wildlife management, especially management to reduce predators. Alaska is unusual among the 50 states in the degree to which many of its residents depend on wild ungulates for subsistence, and the priority granted to rural residents under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

Wildlife management issues involving regulation of predators are known to engender considerable public debate. Wildlife professionals often seek to deal with the various public views through agency planning efforts. This was the case with the most recent wolf planning effort in Alaska, with many groups being represented on the planning team. Our Society applauds these efforts and recommends their continuation. It is desirable to enlist and enfranchise all groups with an interest in wolf management in Alaska.

Given this background information, the policy of The Wildlife Society and the Alaska Chapter - The Wildlife Society regarding wolf management in Alaska is to:

1. Recognize the wolf as an important component of Alaska's biodiversity and promote management that ensures the long-term conservation of wolves and other native wildlife species to meet a variety of human uses.
2. Recognize that wolf populations are currently generally healthy throughout Alaska.
3. Recognize that viable prey populations are necessary to the long-term viability of wolves, and that suitable habitat must be maintained and its productivity assured to allow prey populations to thrive in areas where habitats may become altered or ungulate range becomes degraded.
4. Recognize that the State of Alaska has primary management responsibility for wolves within its boundaries (provided the wolf remains unlisted as a threatened or endangered species).

5. Recognize that wolves represent a public resource and that management decisions regarding wolves should be reflective of the public interest locally, statewide, and nationally.
6. Recognize that some aspects of wolf management remain controversial as wildlife managers attempt to balance diverse and often conflicting public desires.
7. Recognize the need to apply appropriate methods of monitoring wolf populations across the state, and that intensive study of ecological relationships of wolves and their prey is necessary prior to anticipated control of wolves.
8. Encourage education among interested groups on (a) wolf biology, ecology, population status, predator-prey relationships, and habitat needs; (b) the diversity of human values related to wolves and their prey; (c) Alaskan wildlife values; (d) Alaskan subsistence values; and (e) the Alaska Board of Game process.
9. Given the above, the key policy of The Wildlife Society - Alaska Chapter and The Wildlife Society is to recognize that control of wolf numbers can be an effective wildlife management technique under certain circumstances and if the following conditions are met: (a) adequate scientific data indicating that the action will have the desired result has been assembled and peer reviewed; (b) balanced public input has been obtained; (c) public support for manipulating local ecological systems to provide more prey for human uses has been obtained; (d) management actions are confined to localized areas; (e) wildlife management techniques to be used are biologically appropriate; (f) a diversity of management options has been offered; and (g) management actions will be monitored and a written report will be prepared evaluating the efficacy of the program.

15 January 1993