



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY ALASKA CHAPTER

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The Alaska Chapter of The Wildlife Society is a professional society founded in 1971. With over 200 members, the Alaska Chapter is one of the largest chapters of The Wildlife Society, an international organization representing wildlife biologists and managers employed by state, federal, and borough resource agencies, academic institutions, non-governmental conservation organizations, and private industry. Our mission is to enhance the ability of wildlife professionals to conserve biological diversity, sustain productivity, and ensure responsible use of wildlife resources in Alaska for the benefit of society.

9 March 2012

Governor Sean Parnell
P.O. Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

Dear Governor Parnell:

The severe winter in Southcentral Alaska has resulted in understandable public concern about the high incidence of vehicle collisions with moose. As a result, a private organization, the Alaska Moose Federation (AMF) has received funds from the Alaska State Legislature to implement a diversionary feeding program in an attempt to attract moose away from transportation corridors. The AMF also received State funds to contract with a federal agency to capture and relocate some moose away from roads. The Alaska Chapter of The Wildlife Society believes these efforts are questionable at best, and at worst may result in unintended harm to wildlife.

Winter feeding of ungulates, even for diversionary purposes, is not a recommended wildlife management practice, and The Wildlife Society strongly discourages such practices for the following reasons:

- In winter, the digestive system of moose is adapted to consuming the stems and bark of woody shrubs and trees, not hay. Moose are unable to adequately digest hay and its consumption may result in digestive problems that can lead to death of the animal.
- The web site of AMF (<http://www.growmoremoose.org/>) indicates that they will feed moose alfalfa and grass hay. Alfalfa is not grown in Alaska, indicating that forage is to be shipped from other regions. This raises the possibility that pathogens such as Chronic Wasting Disease that are currently not found in Alaska's moose could be inadvertently introduced. Chronic Wasting Disease has severely affected ungulate populations in other regions of North America and can be transmitted through contaminated forage. Even locally grown forage could result in transmission of pathogens from domestic livestock to moose.
- Winter feeding may concentrate moose at high densities that further raises the possibility of disease transmission and makes them vulnerable to predation.

- Diversionary feeding establishes a precedent that may encourage implementation of winter feeding to reduce ungulate mortality in future winters. This could result in efforts to maintain populations above natural carrying capacity.
- This program contradicts long-standing recommendations by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to not feed moose in winter. Few people make the distinction between diversionary feeding to attract moose away from roads and supplemental feeding to reduce mortality. This program may encourage more individuals to feed moose near their homes, which raises the potential for acclimated moose that are inherently more aggressive toward people.

AMF also received State funds to implement a program in which moose that pose a threat along roadways will be captured and transported to remote areas. They have contracted with a federal agency, The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Division of Wildlife Services, to conduct captures. We find it objectionable that public funds have been provided to a private organization to contract with a federal agency to relocate State-managed wildlife. We think that when a wildlife management problem is identified in the State, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game is the appropriate agency to address the problem, and should be provided the necessary support to engage the issue. Personnel within ADF&G have the professional training needed to develop an appropriate response and the field experience necessary for effective implementation. We further think this effort will have little benefit because the number of moose likely to be relocated will be small and areas where they can be relocated are limited.

We understand these programs are well intentioned. However, because they have been implemented without adequate consultation with professional wildlife biologists, and veterinarians, their effectiveness is questionable and may actually be counterproductive. We believe that in the future, State funds would be better directed to State-led efforts to improve winter habitat to attract moose away from roads and to reduce the quality of forage adjacent to transportation corridors. Such programs have far more potential to create long-term benefits to moose populations and reduce roadway collisions than ill-conceived diversionary feeding and relocation efforts.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,



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