



HB 256 Ignores Alaskans' Views on Aerial Gunning and Further Weakens the Scientific Integrity of State Laws Regarding Wildlife Management

Introduced in the final days of the 2007 legislative session and at Governor Palin's request, House Bill 256 would further erode the state's Intensive Management law by eliminating the few remaining standards governing predator control. The current Intensive Management law has already been used to implement predator control programs on more than 56,000 square miles of the state. These programs allow for the aerial gunning of wolves and other liberalized hunting methods to reduce predator populations in order to artificially and unsustainably increase prey populations. Rather than correcting the mistakes made by Governor Murkowski and his administration, which ignored Alaskan voter sentiment regarding the use of airplanes to kill wolves and the management of Alaska's predators, Governor Palin's legislation would pave the way for the Board of Game to expand the control programs.

Governor Palin introduced these bills because of successful and pending litigation that challenge the predator control programs. It attempts to thwart further legal challenges to the Board of Game's implementation of these laws. With the Governor's support, these bills are likely to be heard in part two of the legislative session (beginning January 2008). The bills are assigned to the Senate Resource, Judiciary and Finance Committees and to the House Resources and Judiciary Committees.

The proposed legislation guts the intention of the voter-enacted bans on same-day airborne shooting of wolves:

Despite the public's approval of two ballot measures restricting same-day airborne shooting of wolves, Governor Palin's bill ignores the will of Alaskan voters. Not only does the bill add brown bears to the list of game species that may be hunted by aerial gunners licensed by the state to conduct predator control in certain areas, it also deletes the requirement that there be a game management program in place prior to enacting the extreme measure of using airplanes to track and shoot down wolves and bears. Palin's bill

would leave all decisions about public hunting with airplanes completely within the discretion of the Board of Game without reference to any scientific information.

The proposed legislation makes a bad law worse:

The existing law has no scientific standards for predator control and is a bad system of wildlife management because it fails to represent all users and provide for the long-term conservation of all wildlife species and habitat. The proposed law would be significantly worse because it would eliminate the requirement that the Board of Game determine that "predation is an important cause for the failure to achieve" prey numbers and hunter success, and that "a reduction of predation can reasonably be expected to aid in the achievement of the objectives." Instead, the Board would merely need to conclude that airborne or same-day airborne shooting "would be conducive" to meeting one of its prey objectives or harvest levels. The requirement that Board of Game decisions be based on information from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game would be eliminated.

The proposed legislation gives no recognition to the importance of healthy ecosystems:

Like the existing legislation, the proposed bill fails to acknowledge the role carnivores play in keeping ecosystems healthy and would continue the unwise and excessive removal of predators across large areas of the state, totaling more than 56,000 square miles. This widespread, intense culling of predators results in long-term loss to ecosystem function and is costing the state millions of dollars each year.

In conclusion:

The solution to legal problems with the State's predator control reduction programs is not to liberalize the existing, already bad, intensive management law. Alaska needs wildlife management laws that promote science-based, effective, economically feasible wildlife planning that address the views of all user groups. Senate Bill 176 and House Bill 256 must not pass.