



Hunting or Wildlife Management?

Congress passed the federal Airborne Hunting Act (AHA), which was enacted in 1972, to stop private hunters from harassing and shooting wolves and other animals from aircraft. The act contains appropriate exceptions for wildlife management based on sound science. But the Alaska state legislature and the Alaska Board of Game have repeatedly adopted legislation and regulations respectively that exploit one of the act's exceptions in order to allow aerial hunting to be resurrected.

- Currently, private citizens with state permits can either land and shoot wolves or shoot them from the air in almost 60,000 square miles of Alaska, and land and shoot bears in more than 12,000 square miles
- The hunting is done in many of the same regions of the state in which wolf hunters operated before the Airborne Hunting Act was passed.
- The hunters and pilots who have received permits include some of the same aerial wolf hunters from those earlier years.
- These hunters use their own planes, pay all expenses of the hunt and are entitled to keep or sell the pelts.
- The only major thing that has changed since pre-AHA years is that hunters and pilots must obtain a permit from the state and hunt wolves and bears only within predator-control areas designated by the Board of Game.

Moreover, the goal of the program, as acknowledged by the Board of Game, is to artificially depress predator populations solely for the purpose of increasing moose or caribou numbers for hunting. This is clearly outside the scope of the AHA's letter and intent.

Predator control in accordance with scientific wildlife management would be much more limited geographically and would be conducted more efficiently by professional personnel employed by the Department of Fish and Game. It would also be limited to those situations where there is a serious biological problem, not based on Alaska politicians' desire to boost hunting opportunities.

The bottom line is this: In Alaska, private hunters are once again using aircraft to harass and shoot wolves and bears from the air. That is a clear violation of the letter and spirit of the Airborne Hunting Act as passed by Congress.