

# Unjustified Attacks

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We recently observed an unprecedented low extreme in the performance of the State Senate with the passage of Senate Resolutions 12 and 13 by voice vote. The effect of this action is shocking indeed because it forces a choice as to whether Alaska's wildlife resources will be managed according to modern conservation concepts implemented with maximum public participation or by political considerations, generously laced with personal vindictiveness, emotional prejudice and vested interest.

Senate Resolution 12 censures Commissioner of Fish and Game Walter Kirkness and Director of Game Jim Brooks for issuing an emergency regulation aimed at allowing a normal harvest of polar bear but safeguarding against overexploitation by the largest number of guides and bear hunters ever to assemble with their aircraft or the arctic coast. If weather conditions provided sufficient hunting opportunity, this regulation might have caused a few guides to cancel hunting contracts already arranged. The impassioned pleas of a few guides prompted the Senate to threaten that failure of the Department to relax the ruling would result in action to limit the rule making powers and substantially reduce appropriations of the Department of Fish and Game. A fine choice is offered: risk overexploitation of the polar bear population or risk loss of the Department's regulatory powers which are vital to the most elementary conservation effort, and of appropriations which are essential to any game management program. Surely the people of Alaska hope that responsible individuals in the Department of Fish and Game, with the backing of the Governor and all citizens who cherish Alas-

(Continued on Page 2)

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(Continued from Page 1)

ka for what it is, will stand firm against these shortsighted and reckless attacks and threats.

Senate Resolution 13 is without question the most irresponsible, distorted, and vindictive document to emanate from an Alaska legislative body in many years. It makes reference to "high-handed, arrogant actions of the Department of Fish and Game, served by a rubber-stamp Fish and Game Board" and threatens that "a reactionary legislature will rise up against the Department and remove its vicious, dictatorial powers and slash the game budget to a skeletal force." What inspired this tirade was the Board's decision to retain a closed season on wolves in the Nelchina River Basin where the caribou population is erupting, and the decision to continue permit control over aircraft hunting and summertime trapping, measures which were wisely promulgated by the Alaska Game Commission prior to statehood. The Senate furthermore blames the Department for deficiencies in bounty appropriations; but surely the height of hypocrisy is reached when it attributes such deficiencies to the Department and states that it is "a despotic attempt by the Department to force a 'no bounty' system on the people of the state."

The real facts involved, as any legislator who makes a minimal effort to inform himself would know, is that the Board of Fish and Game classified the wolf as a big game animal as well as a fur animal in response to recommendations from the Outfitters and Guides of Alaska and several advisory committees representing a majority of Alaska's total population. The intent was to promote the trophy significance of the wolf and the economic returns of this action are already well demonstrated. By retaining permit control over aircraft hunting and out-of-season trapping, the Board was attempting to give native hunters and trappers in the arctic a fair chance to harvest the resources instead of funneling the bulk of the bounty funds into the pockets of a few aircraft hunters. In addition, controls on summertime trapping are necessary for the protection of other valuable fur bearing animals.

Certainly where wolves are killing game animals that can be harvested by men, then the wolves should not be tolerated in more than token numbers, but in the arctic where the enormous caribou herd has become decadent, with disease and malnutrition conspicuous, largely as a result of the reduction in wolves by aircraft hunters and the failure of humans to harvest sufficient number of caribou, the total extirpation of wolves seems ridiculous. Yet the Senate demands that all limitations on wolf killing be rescinded.

Undoubtedly many senators and many average citizens believe the wolf is inimical to the best interests of Alaska and should be destroyed at every opportunity and at any reasonable cost. While such attitudes are planted in nursery rhymes and nurtured by adventure stories that always take place in some distant locale, they are not really in harmony with the known facts relating to the wolf as a predator. Have these people contemplated that life does not exist apart from death; that individual life must come and go if life is to continue? Our most esteemed game animals must die so that more may live, and this remains true whether we tolerate the existence of wolves or not. Will Alaska really be a better place when the Senate's objective of exterminating the wolves has been realized?

The first state legislature displayed great wisdom in establishing the mechanism for a top-flight Department of