

# Commentary

## Clarifying wolf control position

---

by Rep. Irene Nicholia

---

Let me be very clear from the beginning concerning my position on wolf control: I support wolf control.

Growing up in rural Alaska and having been involved in resource issues on many fronts, I feel very comfortable with my views on wolves. Wolf control has always been an important measure to protest subsistence of wolf control.

When I came to Juneau I found I had to deal with people who view wolves from an entirely different point of view. Opinions vary widely...from those who believe we should kill off every wolf to benefit urban hunters to those who think wolf pups are cute and find it outrageous that the state would consider killing them. A lot of what has gone on these past several years has made state and national news. The arguments and emotions of the issue have impacted wolf control, not in

the back yards of many of those who feel so strongly on the issue, but in our back yards.

Areas of our state—three areas of our district—have a tremendous problem with growing populations of wolves. The McGrath region, Game Management Unit 19, stands out among them. In response to intensive Game Management legislation passed by the legislature last year, the Board of Game authorized wolf control for Unit 19. Subsequent to the board's action, the Governor put a stay on all wolf control, until the results of a National Academy of Sciences report were received. This effectively delayed implementation of wolf control for Unit 19 until 1997.

At the Board of Game meeting this past week the Board reconsidered the issue of wolf control for the McGrath region, based on a petition filed by Tanana Chiefs Conference, and moved the effective date

## • Clarifying wolf control position

2

to July of this year. Over the coming months, the Department of Fish and Game will be working with Tanana Chiefs Conference and local villages over the summer to develop a program for next winter. I believe this has potential for becoming a win/win situation.

In the meantime, Senator Sharp has had a new version of intensive Game Management legislation making its way through the legislature, Senate Bill 77. The bill came to the floor for a vote last week, and at the time it was calendar, I thought I was going to vote for the bill. But after I took a careful look at the legislation, I was dismayed to see this is another case of "the devil is in the details." Let me mention some of the glaring problems:

- The bill would require the department to provide for one-third of the game

population to be harvested by humans. Even if we were successful in killing off all the wolves; even if we had a very harsh winter and the moose populations were low, one third of the number of newborns would be harvested each year. In the long term, we can't sustain such high harvest levels.

- The bill narrowly defines management tools by allowing human consumptive uses to be the only consideration in management of game populations.

- Senate Bill 77 requires the commissioner to implement regulations, management plans and intensive management

programs requested by the board. The Board of Game and the Department already have all of the tools necessary to manage wildlife and regulate wolf populations. This provision is aimed at mandating widespread wolf and bear control across most of Alaska. In most places it is not necessary.

While I respect the fact that the Senator had good intentions for wolf control, much of Senate Bill 77 would have had negative implications for us. Senator Sharp's intensive game management bill doesn't protect subsistence. We should be very careful about changing laws that can

give those of us in rural Alaska an advantage over urban hunters when it comes to the game populations in our back yard. For those of us in rural Alaska who are concerned about protecting subsistence uses of game, I think it is important to preserve the board process. This past week, the Board of Game worked for us. Not just the decision regarding wolf control for McGrath, but also in their decisions relating to prohibition of airboats and in authorizing memorial potlatches.

Please feel free to call me if you want to discuss the issues further.