

Guest Editorial—

Alaska, 1967---

'Wolves are in Trouble Again'

Wolves are in trouble again.

It isn't that wolves are getting scarce. Like the bald eagle, a companion on the national list of rare or endangered animals, the wolf still thrives in Seward's Folly.

The trouble is that the wolf still wears the hair shirt of tradition. It's a haunted tradition of werewolves and Red Riding Hood, firebrands from the cave and strychnine on the trail.

A lot of people hate wolves, because hate is the easy way out.

It's easy to hate, when, emptyhanded, a hunter sees a wolf track beside the bones of a moose. It's easy to hate, when you've been paid to show another man where the big sheep live and can't find any. It's easy to hate, when a dead wolf means \$50 in the pocket and a valuable hide to boot. It's alot easier to hate than to think.

A lot of people like wolves, maybe because they know Nature has to work hard to produce one.

They love to hear a wolf call from the frosty dark.

They like to stare beyond the sparks, imagining a wolf behind the twisted spruce.

They love to see the trail beside the stream, and to write about it to the folks back east.

So like and dislike battle across the land, skirmishing in the newspapers, warring in the house of politics. One day the wolf will be gone, and only argument will remain.

What's really going on out there in the snow and the dawn?

One thing is sure: if a wolf still lives in that wilderness, it is looking for something to eat. Something big, like a moose or caribou, because that's what a wolf is built for, survival, and there never was a predator that killed of all its prey, and lived.

You can almost picture the uncounted centuries of uneasy balance--a continuous thread of existence sometimes frayed to the breaking point, but never breaking.

Yes, it's easy to see why wolves thrive when the animals they hunt are abundant.

But what happened when we came on the scene?

It stands to reason that when two predators live where one lived before, they compete. And quite likely, the two together take more prey than ei ther along (though it doesn't always work out that way).

Does taking two moose instead of one result in fewer moose? Ah! There's where the blue sky meets the choppy waters!! Because the truth is that the answer sometimes is YES, and sometimes NO, and where it was once YES, it can be NO a few years hence. Sometimes when more moose are eaten, fewer of the living die of starvation. Sometimes more calves are born.

Should we kill wolves to increase game?

The man who shouts an unbdnding Yea! or Nay! is setting himself up to be called a fool.

You have to ask where, and when.

You have to ask why.

You have to ask who will benefit, and how much it will cost.

You have to ask how, and by whom.

You have to ask where to stop short of extermination.

-ALASKA CONSERVATION SOCIETY