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PRESS RELEASE

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Moose Calf Killed Near Delta Junction

Fish and Game biologists and Alaska Wildlife Troopers are investigating the death of a calf moose on Fort Greely near Delta Junction on Monday, June 17.

A necropsy performed on the calf showed symptoms that were consistent with severe dehydration caused by being separated from its mother for more than 12 hours, and death from drowning, likely from being force fed a large volume of water. There were no puddles, ponds or other sources of water near the calf.

Several people called the Fish and Game office on Monday to report that the calf was alone with no cow nearby, and asked what to do. Fish and Game staff asked people to leave the area, minimize disturbance and allow the calf to reunite with its mother, which was likely nearby.

Later that day, a group of people gathered near the calf. Delta Area Biologist Darren Bruning and staff of Fort Greely's Environmental office traveled to the site and asked people to leave the area and minimize the stress level of the calf. Several bystanders told Bruning they believed the cow had abandoned it, and were concerned that the calf didn't have enough water.

AWT is conducting an investigation regarding the circumstances that led to the death of this calf. State laws prohibit handling, disturbing, attempting to capture and feeding wildlife without a permit. There is also significant risk for people in approaching a moose calf, or any moose.

"If we learn someone acted negligently in causing the death of this animal, particularly if they disregarded guidance by ADF&G, we may refer charges for prosecution," said Alaska Wildlife Trooper Sergeant Justin Rodgers. "These types of investigations are not common, and they generally involve a member of the public who was trying to help. But, ignorance of applicable laws is not a valid defense, particularly when wildlife professionals provided appropriate guidance to the public."

Bruning said it's not safe to assume that young animals found alone are orphaned or abandoned. Often the mother is nearby and will return once people leave. Mother moose often walk out of sight from their young. Cow moose may become separated from calves by fences or roads, but usually find each other again. A healthy moose cow will rarely abandon a healthy calf that is more than 1 or 2 days old. The calf on Ft. Greely incident was about a week old.

"We really appreciate the fact that people are concerned about the welfare of this moose calf, and of all wildlife in general, but when people try to help young wildlife, the results are usually bad," said Bruning. In this case, the presence of people may have contributed to the separation of the calf and its mother, which ultimately resulted in the death of the calf. In addition, someone apparently tried to force water into the calf, which hastened the death.

This calf may not have survived if it was left alone, but wild animals in general don't respond well to human interaction, Bruning said. Using techniques that can help livestock or pets can be detrimental to a wild animal. Introducing water to a wild animal in a stressed and compromised condition can cause numerous reactions that can injure or kill it. Successfully rehydrating a moose calf requires extensive training from a wildlife health professional.

"Most times well-meaning people pick up or try to help young animals, the animals die. People can't do as good a job with a moose calf as the cow can. The best chance a moose calf has is to be with the cow, and that's less likely when people are close by," Bruning said.

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