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ALASKA BOARD OF GAME

BOARD REPORT ON STRATEGIC WOLF MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR ALASKA

November 6, 1991

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## PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING STRATEGIC WOLF MANAGEMENT PLAN

### ALASKA WOLF MANAGEMENT PLANNING TEAM.

At the direction of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the Alaska Board of Game, the Alaska Wolf Management Planning team was formed in November of 1990 to try to forge an agreement on new approaches to wolf management in the state. Comprised of individuals from many different communities and backgrounds, and representing a broad spectrum of individuals with interests in wolves, the team met monthly over a six month period beginning in November 1990 and concluding in April 1991. A final report was submitted on June 3, 1991.

### ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME.

Following completion and submission of the final report by the Alaska Wolf Management Planning Team, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game prepared a draft Strategic Wolf Management Plan for Alaska, as well as several draft proposals to the Alaska Board of Game to implement the plan and to also address certain issues involving seasons and bag limits and methods and means for the harvest of wolves in Alaska. The draft plan and the ADF&G proposals were then widely disseminated for review and comment.

### ALASKA BOARD OF GAME.

The Alaska Board of Game discussed the Planning Team report and the ADF&G draft Plan on October 23 and 24, 1991, during a workshop preceding its 1991 fall meeting. The Alaska Wolf Management Planning Team was present along with members of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. The final report of the Planning Team was reviewed in detail, and differences between the Planning Team's final report and the draft Strategic Wolf Management Plan were discussed.

Following preliminary matters and staff reports on October 25, the Board began taking public testimony on the draft plan and the various proposals by ADF&G and the public addressing various aspects of wolf management. The Board heard considerable testimony over the next two days from the public, all of which was recorded and is available for review. Following the completion of public testimony, the Chairman of the Board of Game referred the draft Management Plan to a Committee of the Whole. The Committee was directed to invite "certain individuals from the Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and from the Public to sit as nonvoting members of the Committee." Three members of the Alaska Wolf Management Team who had also presented public testimony to the Board (Larry Holmes, Valerie Brown and Ann Ruggles) were among the public members invited to participate in deliberations. Three other members of the public who had provided public testimony to the Board (Richard Bishop, David van den Berg,

and Byron Haley) were also among the public members invited to participate in deliberations. After several days of deliberation and subcommittee work, the Committee of the Whole rose and reported a recommendation for a Strategic Wolf Management Plan for Alaska to the Board. The Board of Game then began deliberations on the recommendation of the Committee, as well as on proposals relating to management of wolves: 1(Seasons and Baglimits for Wolves Statewide), 14(Same Day Airborne Hunting of Wolves), 16(Permit for Taking of Wolves from Aircraft), 30(Control of Predation By Wolves), and 32(Repeal Wolf Predation Control Programs). Representatives of the ADF&G and the U.S.F.W.S., as well as the members of the public who had been invited to participate in deliberations of the Committee of the Whole, were then invited to participate in the deliberations of the Board on the Committee recommendation and on the proposals. The Board first amended and then unanimously adopted the Strategic Wolf Management Plan for Alaska. The Board also amended and then adopted the proposals relating to management of wolves. Deliberations concluded on October 31, 1991.

INTENT OF THE ALASKA BOARD OF GAME IN ADOPTING PLAN

INTRODUCTION.

The intent of the Alaska Board of Game is primarily reflected in the Strategic Wolf Management Plan for Alaska, and in Proposals 1, 14, 16, 30, and 32, as amended and adopted by the Board of Game, copies of which are attached to this Report.

During the process of amending and adopting the Plan and the Proposals, several issues were discussed which the Board felt merited additional discussion in this Report. Those issues follow.

WILDLIFE "CONSERVATION".

The Committee of the Whole concluded early in the deliberations that a definition of conservation was required, since the term was sprinkled throughout the draft Plan. The Committee, after considerable discussion, settled upon the following definition:

For the purposes of this plan, "conservation" means "the care, protection, management and wise use of wildlife and other natural resources."

This definition, in particular the use of the term "wise use", caused some uneasiness in several Board members as well as in several members of the public invited to deliberate. "Wise use" has a traditional meaning in wildlife conservation, which includes the care, protection and management of natural resources. The concern was expressed because the term in some parts of the country has a different meaning, one which includes exploitation of resources as a primary goal. The Committee concluded that the concept of "wise use" in a definition of conservation of natural resources, as traditionally understood, is appropriate. That recommendation was made to the Board, and was adopted.

PREY AS WELL AS PREDATOR MANAGEMENT.

The Committee of the Whole also concluded early that effective ecosystem management had to focus on management of the prey as well as the predator. As a result, the Committee recommended to the Board that the goals of the Plan should be:

1. to ensure the long-term conservation of wolves throughout their historic range in Alaska in relation to their prey and habitat.
2. to provide for the broadest possible range of human uses and values of wolves and their prey populations that meet wildlife conservation principles and which reflect the public's interests.

3. to increase public awareness and understanding of the uses, conservation and management of wolves, their prey and habitat in Alaska.

The Board agreed that managing prey is an important component of the Plan and incorporated this recommendation.

#### CONFLICTS BETWEEN USER GROUPS

Significant parts of the Planning Team Report, and the adopted Strategic Wolf Management Plan for Alaska, focus on user conflicts. In the Introduction, under "Principles", it is stated as follows:

10. Conflict between user groups must be reduced.

The Committee of the Whole concluded that this principle reflected a finding as well as a statement of intent. The Committee believed that "conflict between user groups" has an adverse impact on the ability of the Board and the Department of Fish and Game to provide for the sound management of Alaska's wildlife resources. In particular, the "conflict between user groups" on wolf management has resulted in unproductive confrontations. The Board accepted this finding. The Committee also believed that a major goal of the Board of Game, in amending and adopting a Strategic Wolf Management Plan for Alaska, should be to ease and reduce the potential for confrontation in wildlife management. The Board accepted this recommendation in adopting the Plan.

Under the heading "Strategy for Producing a Fair System for Wolf Management in Alaska," the adopted Plan states as follows:

ADF&G may not be able to satisfy all legitimate demands for wolves in the same place at one time.

This statement generated considerable discussion in the Committee of the Whole. One voice in the debate maintained that non-consumptive uses for wolves were unequivocally incompatible with consumptive uses of wolves in any given place. Another voice in the debate maintained that non-consumptive and consumptive uses of wolves in any given place were never incompatible. The Committee concluded that even though it was likely true that non-consumptive and consumptive uses of wolves would be incompatible in some places, that this might not always be the case. The Board accepted this conclusion in adopting the Plan. Indeed, the very basis for the zonal system adopted in the Plan is the assumption that uses in some areas should be kept separate.

#### HABITAT "MANIPULATION".

The draft Plan, as submitted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, made references to habitat "manipulation" as a permissible activity in certain management zones. The Committee of the Whole recommended deleting any references to habitat "manipulation" in the zones because the Committee felt that

questions related to such activity were best left to other processes. The Committee did not believe that the Board should take a position either for or against habitat "manipulation" other than a recommendation for a general reference under the heading "Area-Specific Management Plans" that

Techniques including such things as prescribed burning and mechanical disturbance to maintain or enhance habitat may be encouraged in those areas where naturally-occurring fires cannot be tolerated.

In accepting this recommendation from the Committee, it is the Board's intention that if there are some areas where naturally-occurring fires cannot be left to burn as part of a policy to improve moose browse, then it is permissible to consider prescribed burns and mechanical disturbance for the purpose of maintaining or improving habitat for wildlife. The Board does not intend this statement to be approval of habitat "manipulation" for any other purpose than to improve wildlife habitat.

#### FUTURE PLANNING.

The Strategic Wolf Management Plan for Alaska provides for the establishment of seven different zones for the purposes of managing wolves and prey at different levels of intensity. The Committee of the Whole and then the Board, after considerable deliberation, provided for zones that give future planners a wide range of management options to meet desirable use patterns. Although several of the zones will likely occur more frequently on federal lands in Alaska than on state lands, the Board's intent is that all zones are appropriate for discussion during the development of Area-Specific Management Plans. The Board believes the most appropriate focus for the zones is on areas of wolf and prey habitat, and not on areas according to federal, state or private ownership patterns.

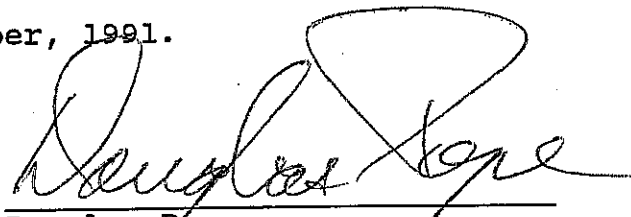
The Committee of the Whole recommended and the Plan provides that at several stages of any planning process for wolf population regulation or reduction measures, "professional wildlife biologists from a pool designated by the Commissioner from outside ADF&G will be asked to review the ... plans and comment on whether the affected wolf population will remain viable over time." This provision was seen by the Committee as an opportunity for peer review for ADF&G on questions concerning viability of the populations if any plan is implemented. However, several members of the Committee expressed concerns that the process provided might be misinterpreted as a directive that the peer review include all aspects of wolf and prey management planning in Alaska. The Board accepted the recommendation with the intent that the peer review be expressly limited to questions concerning the long-term viability of the wolf populations if the plan under consideration is adopted.

The Committee of the Whole also discussed the role of private land owners in future planning. The Committee contemplated that,

during any future planning process, ADF&G would actively work with private land owners that had large enough holdings to employ land managers. Other land owners would be able to provide comment to ADF&G during development of any future plan. The Board accepted this recommendation.

Wherever public meetings are mentioned in the Plan for future planning processes, the Board intends those meetings to be held in conjunction with local advisory committees and others. However, it is to be emphasized that the meetings are for all the public to attend and participate. Public participation has made the Strategic Wolf Management Plan for Alaska possible. Future planning will not succeed if wide public participation is not included.

ADOPTED this 6th day of November, 1991.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Douglas Pope", written over a horizontal line.

Douglas Pope  
Chairman  
Alaska Board of Game