

On Tuesday, May 13, 2025, the Alaska Superior Court ordered the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) to shut down its extremely controversial grizzly bear killing program in Southwest Alaska. Over the last two years, using helicopters, ADF&G has gunned down almost 200 grizzly bears in one area of southwest Alaska. This state-run program is quite probably the most extensive grizzly bear killing in world history.

The Judge spent 16 pages reprimanding ADF&G. The killing was done with no credible up to date science, insufficient public notice and clearly didn't take into account the welfare of the bears. And then in a very sketchy move, three days before the judge's ruling came out, ADF&G, went out and killed 11 bears and one wolf, even though a previous Judge on March 14, 2025, had ruled the bear killing program to be unlawful.

Alaska's grizzly bears are a world class resource. This is one of the last places on earth that still has a somewhat healthy although declining grizzly population. Alaska's iconic wolves and bears are a symbol of a wild and unspoiled place. Unlike black bears, grizzly bears have notoriously slow reproduction rates. Ironically both ADF&G and Alaska's Board of Game go to great lengths to persuade the public that they use science to manage wildlife and yet in this massive slaughter of grizzlies, virtually no science was used.

Regarding the Mulchatna caribou herd, whose decline is the stated reason for this extreme action, there is increasing evidence that climate change (a scientific fact the State of Alaska still refuses to accept), is actually the culprit. Warming temperatures in Alaska have been some of the most dramatic of anywhere on earth. Anyone who lives here is aware of this in multiple ways. This warming has led to dramatically longer growing seasons. The lichens and tundra vegetation that caribou eat are being replaced by shrubs in what is called "shrubification." Basically, these areas can no longer support caribou at the levels they once did. Every Alaskan caribou herd, except the Porcupine herd, is declining. In addition, brucellosis, a disease that, in part, inhibits reproduction is present in the Mulchatna herd. Also, ADF&G admits that human poaching of the herd is a big problem, yet it has done little to prevent it. Remember, the wolves, bears and caribou herds have gotten along just fine for the last 10,000 years. These declining caribou numbers are not the grizzly bears' fault.

The history of wildlife management is rife with ignorant, misguided and counter-productive policies. Wildlife managers, when they look back are flabbergasted at many of the policies of the past. (Why in the world did they do that?) I think this bear slaughter will be in that category. At this point ADF&G and the Board of Game are lucky this has all taken place somewhat out of sight out of mind, because this grizzly bear killing is so brutal, so offensive. But if anyone ever managed to film these highly intelligent animals, including newborn cubs, being chased down from the air and fired on from helicopters, it would likely force a permanent end to this horrendous practice.

Will the ADF&G attempt to revive this bear killing program? Unfortunately, under the Dunleavy administration, with this Board of Game, they probably will.