

To Board of GAME MEETING REGARDING MULCHATNA PREDATOR CONTROL

Regarding the recurring efforts to eliminate predators from the Mulchatna Caribou Herd's Range, let's examine the facts. The first population survey in 1949 estimated the population to be 1,000, in 1965 to be 6,000, rising to 200,000 mid '90s, falling to 18,000 in 2013.

ADF&G's studies indicate that brucellosis, body condition, nutritional stress, wounding and illegal harvest are all factors affecting herd numbers. Wolf predation was not determined to be a factor.

Over the time frame that inventories were conducted, climate change has intensified, particularly in Alaska. In lock step with climate change, significant vegetational shifts have also occurred, resulting in advancing woody vegetation to the detriment of some forbs and lichens. There has also been a large increase in storms that result in ice coating the ground and layering within and topping the snowpack.

Almost a half million dollars has been spent on the predator control program, sacrificing hundreds of bears to date and yet, the herd decline continues. To calculate a cost-benefit figure would result in a large negative.

This herd has maintained a balance with pressure from climate, predation and indigenous peoples with natural fluctuations for close to 10,000 years. What has changed? Sport hunting, illegal take, climate change and ADF&G management. It is irrational to conclude that bears are responsible for a decline of 218,000 animals over a few years and that eliminating bears will have an appreciable effect on population levels.

Do you have a recent rigorous census of bears in the area? Have you an estimate of caribou numbers taken illegally? Have you considered using the funds for enhanced monitoring by law enforcement? Experts are opposed to continuing this program. Nutritional stress is brought on by either numbers too high for the carrying capacity or, in this case, probably climate change. Predators can perform a benefit in disease control by removing brucellosis infected animals. Wolves are determined not to be a factor, so why are they included? The money and effort spent in implementing this ethically challenged exercise would be better spent in studying the root causes for the decline in hopes that a solution is found. It may be that the major factor is climate change in which case no amount of predator control or other expenditures will effect a

difference. In the meantime, a valuable resource of bears and wolves will be wasted, needlessly.

This program should be discontinued.