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Fish and Game Staff to Conduct Predator Control in Eastern Alaska

Beginning this weekend, ADF&G staff will take wolves from helicopters in eastern Alaska in an effort to meet Intensive Management population and harvest objectives for moose and caribou in a predator control program.

The Upper Yukon/Tanana Predator Control program is designed to allow the Fortymile Caribou herd and moose populations to increase. To date, the program has been conducted by volunteers who have obtained permits to take wolves with the use of fixed wing aircraft.

“We have experienced three years of unfavorable weather and snow conditions,” said Regional Supervisor David James. “To make the program successful we need to remove enough wolves to substantially reduce the level of predation on the Fortymile caribou herd, and our staff will be working toward that goal.”

Regulations allow Department staff to use helicopters in predator control programs, but members of the public are restricted to using fixed wing aircraft.

The ADF&G effort will begin on the Fortymile herd’s calving grounds and extend outward to other areas of their annual range. However, the Yukon-Charley National Preserve is off limits to ADF&G as well as public wolf control efforts. Wolves will be tracked and spotted from ADF&G chartered fixed-wing aircraft, and ADF&G staff in a helicopter will be called in to shoot wolves. Wolf carcasses will be retrieved, specimens will be collected, and pelts will be auctioned to the public at a later date.

The Fortymile calving grounds are adjacent to Yukon Charlie National Preserve, where National Park Service biologists are conducting a research project on wolves. Some wolves collared by NPS staff travel outside preserve boundaries, and may be susceptible to this program. The National Park Service and ADF&G staff have agreed on a protocol that will minimize the impact on the NPS study packs.

Radio telemetry will not be used to locate wolves. Airplanes will be used to locate wolves, and a helicopter will be used to shoot wolves. ADF&G has not collared any wolves in this area.

The current Upper Yukon/Tanana Control Program was established in January 2005. The program requires that a population of at least 88-103 wolves be maintained in the control area. Based on recent wolf population estimates, 290-328 wolves would need to be removed through ADF&G and public control efforts, and hunting and trapping, to reduce the number of wolves to the required level.

Although the public wolf control permits are still valid, permittees will not be allowed to work in the same area at the same time as the ADF&G project. They can continue efforts in other parts of the control unit. Permittees have been notified of the Department's plans.

"We've seen a remarkable donation of time, aircraft use and aviation fuel toward these wildlife management programs," said James. "Five intensive management programs in the state have depended 100% on their efforts. We have not been able to achieve wolf removal objectives in this program for the past three years due to poor weather and snow conditions, and this year we would like to achieve our objectives."

ADF&G actions will be suspended for the year when wolf population objectives are met, or snow and weather conditions deteriorate, or on April 30.

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