



September 26, 2008

Dear Viveca,

In your recent fact check piece on the Defenders of Wildlife Action Fund ad on Governor Palin and Alaska's aerial killing of wolves, you clearly did some digging on the issue, but I am not sure you dug deep enough. You report the opposition's response to the ad content but fail to point out where those responses are inaccurate, misleading, or even simply disputed.

I also wanted to point out that the state's predator management document that you cite a number of times in your article was and is a highly controversial document, the veracity of which was highly disputed at the time of its release.

First, with regard to the issue of hunting vs predator control, You repeat the state's claim that the program is predator control and not hunting, but fail to highlight several key facts that undermine that argument:

- The people doing this are private licensed hunters, flown in private planes by private pilots. They are not professional wildlife management or wildlife agency personnel. Numerous states "control" their wildlife, but they used trained wildlife management personnel to do so, which most wildlife organizations, including Defenders, does not object to. Only Alaska lets private hunters do this.
- The private citizens doing this get to keep and sell the hides of the animals they kill.
- Many of the same hunters doing this now are the same ones who hunted wolves from airplanes when it was legal. They signed up for the program once it was reinstated.
- Numerous pictures are available of these so-called "predator control" hunters posing with the carcasses of the animals they take much in the same way a hunter would pose with a successful kill, complete with ear-to-ear grins.

Second, the notion that this is being done to boost moose and caribou populations to make sure there is enough game for hungry Alaskans to eat, while often asserted by the state, is laughable. If this is true then:

- Why are sport hunter groups the biggest advocates of the aerial killing program as opposed to advocates for the poor or hungry?

- Why does the Palin administration allow out of state hunters to hunt and directly compete with rural hunters for supposed limited resources in most of the areas where aerial hunting is done?
- Why, in most of the areas where aerial hunting is done, are a majority of the moose taken by urban and non-resident hunters instead of true subsistence hunters?
- Why does Palin oppose what is called "rural preference" which would give true rural subsistence hunters priority access over sport hunters to the areas where aerial hunting is conducted?
- Why did Palin appeal a court decision that allowed the Cheesh-na Tribal Council to expand their subsistence hunting in key areas and gave them priority access over sport hunters to those regions?

Palin says this is about feeding Alaskans, yet she opposes all efforts to ensure that true rural subsistence hunters – those who actually need to hunt to eat – get first crack at prey populations instead of sport hunters. It is also important to note that under Alaska law, everyone is considered a subsistence user, even if they don't eat what they kill and even if they live next door to their neighborhood grocery store.

Finally, regard to the point you made about predators taking 70 to 80 percent of the moose and caribou that die each year in Alaska. This may be true for populations subject to heavy predation by more than one predator species, but that includes many different predators other than wolves. And there are many, many moose and caribou populations that experience much lower rates of mortality due to predation. Failure to qualify the statement implies that predation is always heavy which it is not, let alone predation by wolves alone.

Also omitted is the fact that many of the animals killed by predators would die of other causes in the absence of predation. And even in cases where predators do take a high percentage of animals that die, many of the prey animals are very young, very old, sick or injured, that is, the kind that human hunters do not seek when they embark on a hunting trip.

Your article also raised the specific number of moose and caribou taken by an individual wolf each year - you cite 12-13 moose and/or 30-40 caribou. So let's do the math: If there are 11,000 wolves and they each consume 13 moose, the total wolf kill would be 143,000 moose per year. This is 82% of the total moose population (175,000) in the entire state of Alaska. Clearly, this is not the case. Some wolves have no access to moose and many of those that do eat a lot more than just moose.

You also state that aerial hunting is only conducted in 9% of the state, but the practice is far more widespread than the state's document implies. The 9 percent figure is calculated from the state's total land area and does not exclude areas in southeast Alaska with no moose or caribou. It does not exclude islands, including Kodiak, or high mountains and glaciers with no moose or caribou, or federally held lands that are not under state control. When these areas are excluded, predator control occurs on at least 18% of the state – nearly one square mile for every five available.

Finally, you're right in saying that the wolves in Alaska are not endangered. But our ad does not assert or imply that they are.

Our organization does not oppose hunting. We object to this Alaska's aerial killing program, as hundreds of thousands of our members do, because it lacks a credible, scientific foundation and because it really just a hunting program masquerading as predator control. But moreover, it is a brutal and unethical practice that has no place in the world today. Like you said, that is a personal judgment, but we are finding that Palin's support for this is shocking to many voters.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Yours,

William Lutz
Senior Director
Defenders of Wildlife Action Fund