

PROPOSAL 86

5AAC 92.113(a). Intensive Management Plans III.

Reauthorize the Upper Yukon–Tanana Predation Control Program as follows:

5AAC 92.113. Intensive Management Plans III. Section (a) is amended as follows:

(a) Plans established. Intensive management plans for the following area is established in this section:

(1) Upper **Yukon–Tanana** [YUKON/TANANA] Predation Control Area in Units 12, 20(B), 20(D), 20(E), and 25(C);

(b) Upper **Yukon–Tanana** [YUKON/TANANA] Predation Control Area in Units 12, 20(B), 20(D), 20(E), and 25(C): the Upper **Yukon–Tanana** [YUKON/TANANA] Predation Control Area (UYTPCA) is established to increase the Fortymile Caribou Herd (FCH) throughout its range to aid in achieving intensive management (IM) objectives; the control area includes that portion of Unit 12 north of the Alaska Highway, that portion of Unit 20(D) within the Goodpaster River drainage upstream from and including the South Fork Goodpaster River drainage, and within the Healy River, Billy Creek, and Sand Creek drainages, that portion of Unit 20(B) within the Salcha River drainage upstream from and including the Goose Creek drainage, and within the Middle Fork of the Chena River drainage, all of Unit 20(E), and that portion of Unit 25(C) within the Birch Creek drainage upstream from the Steese Highway Bridge, and within the area draining into the south and west bank of the Yukon River upstream from the community of Circle, encompassing approximately 18,750 square miles; this predation control program does not apply to any National Park Service or National Wildlife Refuge lands unless approved by the federal agencies; notwithstanding any other provisions in this title, and based on the following information contained in this section, the commissioner or the commissioner's designee may conduct a wolf population reduction or wolf population regulation program in the UYTPCA in Units 12, 20(B), 20(D), 20(E), and 25(C):

(1) this is a continuing control program that was first authorized by the Board of Game in 2004 for wolf and brown bear control to increase the moose population and harvest in northern Unit 12 and in Unit 20(E); in 2006 wolf control was expanded by the board to increase the FCH population and harvest in its entire range; in 2009 bear control was deleted from the program because control methods available at the time were ineffective; **it is currently designed to increase FCH caribou numbers and harvest by reducing predation on the FCH by wolves and is expected to make contributions to achieving the intensive management (IM) objectives for the FCH;**

(2) caribou and wolf objectives are as follows:

(A) The IM population objective established by the board for the FCH is for a population of 50,000–100,000 caribou; the annual IM harvest objective

established by the board for the FCH is 1,000–15,000 caribou; [THE FCH-IM POPULATION OBJECTIVES ESTABLISHED BY THE BOARD ARE FOR A POPULATION OF 50,000–100,000 CARIBOU AND AN ANNUAL HARVEST OF 1,000–15,000 CARIBOU;]

(B) the wolf population [CONTROL] objective for the wolf control area is 88–103 **wolves**; the pre-control wolf population in the wolf control area was estimated in fall of 2004 at 350–410 wolves; a minimum population of 88 wolves is approximately a 75 percent reduction from the pre-control population and will ensure that wolves persist in the plan area;

(3) the board's findings concerning FCH populations and human use are as follows:

(A) the FCH population and harvest are within the [LOWER] range of IM objectives;

(B) continued recovery of the FCH to a higher population and harvest within the range of the IM objectives is needed to provide for high levels of human consumptive use of the herd;

(C) predation by wolves is an important cause of a failure to achieve FCH population and harvest objectives;

(D) a reduction of predation by wolves can reasonably be expected to aid in achieving prey population objectives;

(E) reducing predation by wolves is likely to be effective and feasible utilizing recognized and prudent active management techniques and **is** based on scientific information;

(F) reducing predation by wolves is likely to be effective given land ownership patterns;

(4) authorized methods and means are as follows:

(A) hunting and trapping of wolves by the public in the UYTPCA during the term of this program may occur as provided in the hunting and trapping regulations set out elsewhere in this title;

(B) notwithstanding any other provisions in this title, the commissioner may:

(i) allow department employees to conduct aerial, land and shoot, or ground-based lethal removal of wolves, using state-owned, privately-owned, or chartered equipment, including helicopters, under [AS 16.05.783](#);

(ii) issue public aerial shooting permits or public land and shoot permits using fixed-wing aircraft as a method of wolf removal under [AS 16.05.783](#);

(iii) issue public permits to allow the use of privately-owned helicopters to trap and snare wolves, and retrieve wolves trapped, snared or shot under this program; including using a helicopter to land and dispatch wolves on the ground that have been trapped, snared or wounded by fixed-wing permittees as a method of wolf removal under [AS 16.05.783](#);

(5) time frame is as follows:

(A) **during July 1, 2020–June 30, 2026** [THROUGH JUNE 30, 2020] the commissioner may authorize removal of wolves in the UYTPCA;

(B) annually, the department shall, to the extent practicable, provide to the board a report of program activities conducted during the preceding 12 months, including implementation activities, the status of the FCH and wolf populations, and recommendations for changes, if necessary to achieve objectives of the plan;

(6) the commissioner will review, modify or suspend wolf control activities when wolf surveys or accumulated information from department personnel, hunters, trappers, and permittees indicate the need to avoid reducing wolf numbers in the UYTPCA below the control objective of 88–103 wolves specified in this subsection.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The Upper Yukon–Tanana Intensive Management Plan will expire on June 30, 2020. The program was first authorized by the Board of Game in 2004 to benefit moose in southern Unit 20E. Wolf and bear control began in 2005. The wolf control portion of the program was expanded to include the Fortymile caribou herd (FCH) in 2006. The bear control portion of the program was suspended in 2009 because it was ineffective at removing bears from the control area due to a combination of ineffective methods and a lack of incentive to program participants. Reauthorization of the plan is recommended to continue recovery of the Fortymile caribou herd to a higher population and harvest within the range of the Intensive Management (IM) objectives established by the Board of Game.

This proposal will reauthorize the program for a six-year period from July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2026. It includes options for aerial wolf control conducted by public permittees and the department.

Although predation control is currently suspended in the Upper Yukon–Tanana predation control area so that the department can conduct studies of predator–prey interactions as the wolf population rebounds, retaining the ability to resume wolf control is important. Scenarios under which wolf control could be resumed during 2020–2026 include a combination of completion of the predator–prey studies in 2023; stable or increasing caribou nutritional status; and continued demand by the public to reallocate additional caribou from wolves to harvest by humans, as indicated in the Fortymile Harvest Management Coalition’s Harvest Management Plan and in the Operational Plan for Intensive Management of the Fortymile caribou herd in Game Management

Units 12, 20B, 20D, 20E and 25C. As indicated in the Harvest Management plan, the Alaska public and our partners in Canada support continued use of predation control, when it is appropriate.

As part of this reauthorization, helicopter use to retrieve wolves and to tend traplines is added in 5AAC 92.113 to make this long-standing use more transparent. Since 2010, permittees have been allowed under regulation 92.110 to use helicopters to trap wolves and to retrieve wolves trapped, snared or shot under this program; including using a helicopter to land and dispatch wolves on the ground that have been trapped, snared or wounded by fixed-wing predator control permittees. This use is small, as helicopter operation is expensive. However, it is useful to retrieve wolves taken under this program because of the difficulty of landing fixed-wing aircraft due to heavy vegetative cover and rough terrain and the remoteness of this predation control area.

Additional details will also be made available for public review in an updated IM operational plan prior to the board meeting.

The minimum population estimate of the FCH in July 2017 was 73,009 and the FCH harvest during regulatory years 2014–2015 through 2016–2017 ranged 1,007–1,039 and was 1,960 during regulatory year 2017–2018 and 2,421 during regulatory year 2018–2019. Public wolf control has been conducted in the majority of the FCH range since 2006 and department wolf control was conducted in the same area during winters 2008–2009, 2009–2010, and 2011–2012 through 2017–2018. The FCH population is near the mid-point of the IM population objective and harvest is within the lower end of the range of IM objectives; however, continued increase in FCH harvest within the range of the IM objectives is needed to provide for high levels of human consumptive use of the herd.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F19-149)
