

Proposal 178A – 5 AAC 92.107(b). Intensive management plans. Authorize a predator control program in a portion of Unit 1A.

(b) **Unit 1A Predation Control Area:** The Unit 1A predation control area consists of Gravina Island; it consists primarily of USDA Forest Service and State lands and encompasses approximately 248 km² (96 mi²) or approximately 2% of the total land area in Unit 1A; 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 Unit 1A.

- (1) The Unit 1A predation control area consists of Gravina Island (Wildlife Analysis Area - 101); it consists primarily of USDA Forest Service and State lands and encompasses approximately 248 km² (96 mi²) or approximately 2% of the total land area in Unit 1A; Gravina Island though near Ketchikan is semi isolated by the Tongass Narrows on the north side, Clarence Strait on the west and south sides, and Nichols Passage along the east side; 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 Unit 1A.
- (2) This is an experimental treatment program to evaluate whether (a) wolf control in a small portion of GMU 1A can reallocate a measurable proportion of deer mortality from wolves to humans and (b) whether population estimation techniques for both predators and prey can be refined enough to measure the effectiveness of the IM actions, and (c) whether 1-2 hired wolf trappers, operating during the established wolf trapping season and using standard trapping techniques, can reduce wolf numbers sufficiently to bring about an increase in the area's deer population; this is an experimental program that will have limited impact on the deer and wolf populations in Unit 1A, and is expected to make only a small contribution to the intensive management (IM) deer harvest objective in Unit 1A; at the end of the authorized period for removal of wolves, the control program will be terminated.
- (3) Deer and wolf objectives are as follows:
 - (A) the deer intensive management (IM) objectives established by the board for Unit 1A are for a population of 15,000 and an annual harvest of 700 deer;
 - (B) the deer harvest objective for the predation control area in Unit 1A is 60;
 - (C) there are currently no precise estimates for the wolf population in Unit 1A; population estimates for Unit 1A wolves are based on inferences derived from extensive wolf research (including radiotelemetry) conducted on neighboring Prince of Wales Island (GMU 2) during the late 1990s; based on estimates of average wolf pack and home range sizes in GMU 2, and similar wolf research work on Revilla Island located in Unit 1A during the early 1980s, we believe the pre-treatment wolf population in Unit 1A is approximately 250 (range 125-385); the wolf population estimate for the Unit 1A predation control area is approximately 12 wolves; a minimum population of 152 wolves in the remainder of Unit 1A will assure that wolves persist on a unit wide basis as part of

the natural ecosystem in Unit 1A and assure continued wolf hunting, trapping and viewing opportunities;

- (D) the wolf control objective in the Unit 1A predation control area is to reduce the wolf population by 100%; the estimated number of wolves in the predation control area is approximately 8-12, during the entire IM project attempt to keep Gravina Island free of wolves;

(4) board findings concerning populations and human use are as follows:

- (A) the 1A deer population and harvest objectives have not been achieved;

- (i) precise estimates of the deer population in Unit 1A are not available; estimated annual harvest in all of Unit 1A is 200–300 deer;

- (ii) precise estimates of the deer population in the Unit 1A predation control area are not available; prior to 2011, the Division of Wildlife Conservation estimated the Unit 1A deer harvest based on a regional questionnaire mailed randomly to 33% of deer harvest ticket holders; during 1990–2000 the estimated average hunter harvest within the proposed predation control area was 100 deer annually; during 2001–2010 the estimated average hunter harvest declined to 20 deer annually; based on resident testimonials, cost to obtain a deer has increased due to declining deer densities and increased fuel costs;

- (B) predation by bears and wolves is a potentially important cause of the failure to achieve deer population and harvest objectives;

- (i) studies from Prince of Wales Island and Heceta Island both located in GMU 2, have documented black bears as the primary source of neonatal fawn mortality, whereas wolves are the primary predator of yearling and adult deer; based on radio-collared adult female deer in Unit 2 (2003–2011), total annual adult female and yearling female deer mortality was 16%, of which 3% was from black bear predation and 6% from wolf predation, and 7% other; total annual neonate fawn mortality during the same period was 65% of which 50% by black bear predation, and 5% wolf predation, and 10% other; total annual adult male and yearling male mortality was 38% of which none were killed by bears and 5% by wolf predation, and 33% other;

- (C) a reduction of wolf predation within the Unit 1A predation control area can reasonably be expected to make progress towards achieving the Unit 1A intensive management objectives; wolf control alone likely will result in a positive response in deer abundance after 5 winters of control, including reallocation of some surviving deer to harvest;

- (D) reducing predation is likely to be effective to some degree and feasible utilizing recognized and prudent active management techniques and based on scientific information; reducing wolves in a small geographic area will likely result in increased

deer survival and additional animals available for hunter harvest; harvest data will be collected using harvest ticket hunt reports;

(5) authorized methods and means are as follows:

- (A) predator control activities will be conducted using department employed or contracted wolf trappers, operating during the established wolf trapping season and using legal trapping techniques;
- (B) hunting and trapping of wolves by the public in Unit 1A during the term of this program may occur as provided in the hunting and trapping regulations set out elsewhere in this title, including use of motorized vehicles as provided in 5 AAC 92.080;

(6) time frame is as follows:

- (A) during July 1, 2013–June 30, 2019, the commissioner may authorize removal of wolves in Unit 1A predation control area;
- (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 deer and wolf populations, and recommendations for changes, if necessary to achieve the objectives of the plan;

(7) the program may be reviewed and possibly suspended if one of the following conditions are met:

deer abundance;

- (A) if deer abundance is reliably determined to have doubled in the predation control area, control will be suspended;
- (B) if deer abundance has not increased significantly relative to the program objective (A) after 5 years we will reevaluate the program and make changes or suspend it;

wolf abundance;

- (A) if indices of wolf abundance indicate that wolf control has been effective (i.e. most wolves have consistently been removed from the treatment area each year), but indices of deer abundance have not measurably changed in the treatment area, the program will be reevaluated to determine if there are ways to make it more effective.