

Proposal 179A – 5 AAC 92.107(a). Intensive management plans. Authorize a predator control program in a portion of Unit 3.

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(a) **Unit 3 Predation Control Area:** the Unit 3 Predation Control Area consists of Mitkof Island, Woewodski Island and the Lindenberg Peninsula on eastern Kupreanof Island in Unit 3; encompassing approximately 648 square miles; 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 3:

- (1) the Unit 3 Predation Control Area consists of Mitkof Island, Woewodski Island and the Lindenberg Peninsula on eastern Kupreanof Island, (including Wildlife Analysis Areas (WAAs) #2007, #2008, #5135, #5136, #5137 and #5138); the wolf reduction area consists primarily of federal lands (USDA Forest Service) and encompasses approximately 648 square miles surrounding the community of Petersburg, or approximately 22% of the total land area in Unit 3; the Unit 3 Predation Control Area does not delineate a deer or wolf population and is not intended to distinguish animals from within the Predation Control Area from populations in Unit 3; the purpose of the Unit 3 Predation Control Area is to focus wolf control in an area where deer are accessible to hunters; wolf control will be conducted only within the 648 square mile Unit 3 Predation Control Area:
- (2) this is an experimental predator control program to evaluate whether (a) wolf control in a small portion of Unit 3 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 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; the predator control program will have limited impact on the deer and wolf populations in Unit 3, and is expected to make only a small contribution to the intensive management (IM) deer harvest objective in Unit 3; 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 3 are for a population of 15,000 and an annual harvest of 900;
 - (B) the deer harvest objective for the predator control area in Unit 3 is 250 annually;
 - (C) there are no precise estimates for the wolf population in Unit 3; population estimates for Unit 3 wolves are based on inferences derived from extensive wolf research 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, we believe the pre-control wolf population in Unit 3 is approximately 250 (range 125-385); the wolf population control objective for Unit 3 is approximately 200 wolves; a minimum

population of 200 wolves is approximately a 20 percent reduction from the pre-control population and will assure that wolves persist as part of the natural ecosystem in Unit 3 and assure continued wolf hunting, trapping and viewing opportunities;

- (D) the wolf control objective in the Unit 3 predator control area is to reduce the wolf population by 80%; the estimated number of wolves in the control area is approximately 60;

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

- (A) the 3 deer population and harvest objectives have not been achieved;

- (i) precise estimates of the deer population in Unit 3 are not available; prior to 2011 the Division of Wildlife Conservation estimated the Unit 3 deer harvest based on a regional questionnaire mailed randomly to 33% of deer harvest ticket holders; during 1997-2006 the estimated hunter harvest in Unit 3 was 840 deer annually; during 2007-2010 the estimated hunter harvest in Unit 3 declined to 542 deer annually;

- (ii) precise estimates of the deer population in the Unit 3 Predation Control Area are not available; during 1999-2006 the estimated hunter harvest was 216 deer annually; during 2008-2010 the estimated hunter harvest declined to 86 deer annually; based on resident testimonials, cost to obtain a deer has increased due to declining deer densities and increasing fuel costs;

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

- (i) we have no quantitative information on deer body condition in Unit 3; hunters report that deer are in excellent condition with large reserves of body fat during the hunting season in October; there is no evidence indicating that deer are nutritionally stressed in Unit 3;

- (ii) studies from Prince of Wales Island (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; no estimates are available for neonatal fawn or annual adult deer mortality rates in Unit 3;

- (C) a reduction of wolf predation within the Unit 3 predator control area can reasonably be expected to make progress towards achieving the Unit 3 intensive management objectives; deer abundance should slowly increase in response to wolf control that increases yearling and adult deer survival; 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 and feasible utilizing recognized and prudent active management techniques and based on scientific information; if wolf predation is

an important source of mortality, 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; deer population data collection will include fecal pellet-group surveys, motion detecting camera trap surveys and aerial surveys of deer in alpine areas to measure changes in deer abundance;

- (E) reducing predation is likely to be effective given land ownership patterns (primarily federal lands), ease of access for conducting predator control, proximity to traditional deer hunting areas for the community of Petersburg, and habitat suitability;

(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 3 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 1 predator 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 triples in the predator 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 predator control area each year), but

indices of deer abundance have not measurably changed in the predator control area, the program will be reevaluated;

- (B) if the wolf population estimate for the control area reliably falls below the minimum management objective of 10 wolves, predator control activities will be suspended (see: Section 2.);