



Aerial Hunting Q & A

1. What is aerial hunting? Aerial hunting occurs when hunters use airplanes to track an animal in the snow, chase them to exhaustion and shoot them from the air, or when hunters in airplanes track animals in the snow, herd or chase them to exhaustion, land the aircraft and shoot them from the ground. People sometimes refer to this particular practice as “land and shoot”.

2. Doesn't federal law make aerial hunting illegal? Yes. The use of aircraft to shoot or harass animals from the air is illegal under the Airborne Hunting Act, enacted in 1972. The act was passed after a nationwide outcry against the aerial hunting of wolves in Alaska

3. How can Alaska promote aerial hunting? For more than 30 years, the state of Alaska has attempted to circumvent the intent of the Airborne Hunting Act by exploiting a loophole in the law allowing states to “administer” wildlife using aircraft. Under the guise of wildlife management, Alaska contends its current aerial hunting program is not hunting at all but constitutes legitimate wildlife management that artificially boosts wild moose and caribou populations.

4. Is Alaska's program “aerial hunting” or “wildlife management”? The circumstances surrounding Alaska's program make it clear that the state is allowing aerial hunting, which is banned by federal law. The state exploits a loophole in the AHA to allow private hunters and private pilots, rather than Alaska Department of Fish and Game personnel, to “control” wolves from the air or chase them to exhaustion and shoot them from the ground. The hunters are allowed to keep the pelts as trophies or sell them for profit instead of turning them over to wildlife officials. This spring, the state went so far as to offer a reward of \$150 for each left foreleg of wolves killed within designated areas and turned into state officials. A state court identified this as a bounty, which is illegal under state law, and halted the program before any bounties were paid. In addition, the stated purpose of Alaska's aerial hunting programs is to artificially boost game species populations for the benefit of hunters, even though the AHA clearly prohibits both aerial hunting and aerial harassment of animals. Finally, the state Board of Game has set target numbers for moose and caribou populations that are so high they will likely never be reached, allowing the aerial hunting program to continue indefinitely. These targets are often based on historical highs reached when there was extensive control of predators prior to statehood

5. How many wolves have been killed by aerial hunting? Since 2003, 671 wolves have been killed by aerial hunting. During the winter of 2003-2004, approximately 40 aerial hunting teams were issued permits, and 147 wolves were killed. During the 2004-2005 season, 275 wolves were killed. During 2005-2006, 152 wolves were killed. During 2006-2007, 97 wolves were killed, many less than the state expected, providing some evidence that the population estimates in the predator-control areas are flawed. Through aerial hunting, as well as ground-based trapping and hunting, the state aimed to remove up to 664 wolves this past winter, in the five control areas, to drastically reduce wolf populations by up to 80 percent in some areas.

6. Are bears also being killed? Same-day airborne (also known as land and shoot) hunting of black and brown bears has been approved by the Alaska Board of Game. The Board has approved three areas that total more than 12,000 square miles, where this method can be used.

7. Do most people in Alaska support aerial hunting? No. In 1996, 59 percent of Alaska voters approved a ballot initiative to ban same-day or aerial wolf hunting in Alaska, except in the event of a biological emergency. In 1999 and 2000, the state legislature passed legislation effectively overturning the ballot initiative and reviving aerial hunting in areas designated by the state. In late 2000, 54 percent of Alaska voters restored a ban on the use of aircraft by private citizens to kill wolves. In 2003, the Alaska legislature again overturned the will of Alaska voters and passed a law that exploits a loophole in the AHA to allow private hunters to kill wolves using aircraft in areas approved for predator control. In 2007, enough signatures were collected to place the issue on the ballot for a third time in August 2008.

8. Are moose and caribou threatened in Alaska? No. There are more than one million caribou in Alaska in areas as far north as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and as far south as the Aleutian Islands. State biologists estimate moose populations to be greater than 160,000, more than twice the number of moose found in the rest of the United States. Moose are seen frequently in Anchorage and are hunted on the outskirts of the city. Moose and caribou populations increase or decline in accordance with natural cycles. Wolves and bears play an important role in maintaining healthy moose and caribou populations, as they have done for thousands of years. Recently, the Alaska Board of Game even lifted a statewide ban on moose calf hunting in order to reduce large moose populations near Fairbanks, where wolf and bear control has been occurring for years. Such “eruptions” of moose populations are typical after intensive predator control. Previous eruptions have resulted in habitat destruction by moose and caribou, and ultimately, a crash in the population.

9. Does similar aerial hunting occur in other states? Alaska’s aerial hunting program is unique among states where large predators such as grizzly bears, mountain lions, wolves and black bears still roam. However, encouraged by Alaska’s example, several states, mostly those with growing populations of gray wolves in the lower 48 states, have announced plans to use aerial hunting to dramatically reduce or in some cases eliminate wolf packs once they are removed from the endangered species list. Wyoming’s plan called for “aggressive” techniques including “aerial hunting and hazing” of wolves in clear violation of the AHA. Idaho’s governor, C.L. “Butch” Otter, has publicly announced he wants to kill more than 80 percent of the state’s wolves, and the state has already begun planning large scale wolf-eradication efforts through both ground-based hunting and aerial hunting.

10. What would the Protect America’s Wildlife (PAW) Act do? The PAW Act would close a loophole in the Airborne Hunting Act that Alaska legislators and officials are exploiting, a loophole that could potentially be exploited by other states to hunt wolves and other animals from the air, under the guise of wildlife management. The bill would clarify the conditions in which states can use airplanes and helicopters to aid in the management of wildlife, bar states from using aerial hunting to artificially boost game species populations, and place a specific, new restriction on inhumane “land and shoot” hunting.

11. Under the PAW Act, could aircraft be used to control predators if game populations were in serious decline? Yes. If a true biological emergency existed and the use of aircraft to kill predators was the only option to save a particular moose, caribou or other population, then the PAW Act would allow the state to conduct science-guided predator control from the air, provided it was conducted by U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services program or state wildlife personnel.

12. Could the state use aircraft to control predators in other situations? Yes. The PAW Act maintains the ability of states to use aircraft to control predators in order to protect livestock, domestic animals, endangered species, and, of course, human health and safety. It also clarifies how states can manage game populations when they are, or may be, severely impacted by predation.