## STATE OF ALASKA

## DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

FRANK H. MURKOWSKI GOVERNOR

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September 6, 2006

Dr. Robert M. Timm, President American Society of Mammalogists Dept. of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology University of Kansas Natural History Museum Dyche Hall, 1345 Jayhawk Blvd Lawrence, KS 66045-7561

Dear Dr. Timm:

Governor Murkowski received your August 4, letter and referred it to me. In it you conveyed the American Society of Mammalogists' (ASOM) concerns regarding the State of Alaska's game management programs and transmitted a resolution passed at your most recent annual meeting. Although I question the basis for many of your assumptions, including that of "potential mismanagement," no one can argue with the basic conclusion that wildlife management should be based on the collection of sound data and appropriate design of management programs. That is why my administration supported and obtained an increment of more than \$3 million for the Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) within the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's (ADF&G) budget for the current fiscal year. In addition to annual survey and inventory programs for large mammals across the state, the division is also conducting long-term studies to document the need for and the results of predator management programs in a number of areas where low density ungulate populations have been limited by predation. As the Alaska Board of Game has expanded the number and extent of predator control programs in compliance with state laws, the expense of mounting the necessary studies has risen, requiring the additional funding mentioned above.

ADF&G has been collecting management information and conducting research pertinent to predator management decisions for well over three decades in Alaska. DWC staff have a long history of making significant scientific contributions to the study of large mammalian predators and their ungulate prey. For example, in just one of the chapters of the National Research Council report you cited, at least 28 peer-reviewed papers, monographs, or book chapters were authored or co-authored by DWC staff. Regarding the adequacy of our information, DWC biologists, most of whom hold advanced degrees in wildlife biology or related fields and many of whom are published in peer-reviewed journals, including the Journal of Mammalogy, have been accumulating data for more than a decade in some of the areas currently identified for predator control.

A striking feature of your letter is its own lack of reliance on data. Although you opine regarding the inadequacy of the information used for management decisions in Alaska, to our knowledge ASOM has never attended a Board of Game meeting to observe presentations by DWC staff, requested any information from the department, nor were Alaska representatives given any opportunity to inform your membership prior to the vote on the resolution at the annual meeting.

Given the representation of academic institutions on ASOM's letterhead, and the society's purpose as a professional scientific organization, it is surprising to see such a willingness to make qualitative and what could be considered political statements with so little interest in grappling with the scientific information that is at hand. As this state's wildlife managers, the Board of Game and the Department of Fish and Game have the obligation to take responsible actions based on the best available information. Unlike work in a laboratory, the collection of data on wildlife populations existing in a harsh, wild land is difficult, expensive, and dangerous. However, the information staff have amassed has been sufficient to sustain Alaska's predator control programs in the face of legal challenges in 2003, 2004, and 2006. I suggest that statements by ASOM regarding this state's management programs and data collection should be dependent on an actual understanding of our practices.

As you know, mammalian predators are being taken in control programs in other parts of the country, including wolves in states where portions of their range has remained or been reestablished. Does ASOM intend to issue similar advice to those jurisdictions? If not, I am curious why your attention is directed solely at the only state that has managed to retain its entire array of large mammals, including healthy populations of large carnivores in virtually all natural habitats. Alaska is proud of its wildlife heritage and our wildlife management record.

incerely,

Commissioner

cc: ASOM Board Members

Alaska Board of Game Members

McKie Campbell, Commissioner, Alaska department of Fish & Game Matt Robus, Director, Wildlife Conservation Division, Alaska Department of Fish & Game