



# Alaska Wildlife ECHOES

Fall 2012

A Voice for Alaska's Wildlife

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## AWA Petitions for Emergency Protection of Denali National Park Wolf Pack

By AWA Staff

In September AWA aggressively petitioned the Alaska Board of Game to re-establish a no-trapping buffer zone adjacent to the eastern boundary of Denali National Park after a trapper killed the only breeding female and caused one of the most easily viewed wolf packs in Denali National Park to disburse.

AWA, in collaboration with about a dozen groups and individuals, filed a petition requesting immediate action by the BOG prior to the beginning of the fall trapping season on Nov. 1. Without seeking public comment or holding a public meeting, BOG members unanimously denied the petition. In its decision, the BOG stated that the situation did not meet the state's criteria for an emergency suspension of trapping in the area. The petitioners immediately rebutted the reasons for the denial and asked the BOG to reconsider; it responded that it had no procedure for reconsideration.

Undaunted, AWA immediately filed a second emergency petition. This petition, still pending before the BOG, refuted all of the BOG's ill-informed reasons for denying the initial petition and presented new, compelling evidence to support a buffer zone. (**Update:** In late October the BOG unanimously denied AWA's second petition. We are currently exploring other options available to us, and we will keep our members informed as this fight continues.)

A contentious issue for many years, the need to re-instate a buffer zone became critical last spring. In April a local recreational trapper, using a horse he shot for bait, legally trapped and killed the last breeding female of the Park's Grant Creek pack when it ventured onto adjacent state land. The wolf was likely habituated to the sight and

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Photo by Johnny Johnson



Photo by Johnny Johnson



The **Alaska Wildlife Alliance** is a non-profit organization committed to the conservation and protection of Alaska's wildlife. We promote the integrity, beauty, and stability of Alaska's ecosystems, support true subsistence hunting, and recognize the intrinsic value of wildlife. AWA works to achieve and maintain balanced ecosystems in Alaska managed with the use of sound science to preserve wildlife for present and future generations.

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# Notes from the Director

## A Year of Big Changes

The last year has been the most challenging, in terms of threats to Alaska's wildlife, in the eight years I've been directing our many battles toward a brighter future for Alaska's incredible wildlife.

The state's ongoing – and in fact worsening - mismanagement of Alaska's wildlife resources on such a grand scale threatens the very survival of this unique ecosystem.

Major threats to that brighter future have only increased under Gov. Sean Parnell's administration. He has blocked any hint of diversity among members of the Board of Game, making that regulatory body an obedient servant of the trophy hunting industry. He also hired incompetent scofflaws to manage the state's wildlife. For examples of the state's irresponsible stewardship, please see "Emergency Protection" on page 1 and "Wildlife Officials" on page 9 in this issue of *Echoes*.

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Luckily we've been able to bring on two extremely talented replacements. Josh Klauder has assumed most of our electronic communications duties. Josh has jumped in with both feet, starting with a complete top-to-bottom re-design of our website, which we hope will be ready to launch at the end of the year. Nancy Wagner is our new graphic designer, and she eagerly volunteered to help create this (and future) great edition of *Echoes*. We welcome Josh and Nancy to our dedicated staff!



Photo by Johnny Johnson

Finally, our intrepid and long-time Vice President Art Greenwalt has assumed the responsibility of keeping our Facebook page up to date with the latest news on wildlife and AWA.

This re-organization phase has been slow and stressful, and we sincerely appreciate your patience. Our goal is to make our communications more responsive and timely to keep you – our loyal members – better informed about wildlife issues.

### Juneau's Wild Life

In September the AWA-Southeast Chapter in Juneau kicked off its third year of hosting *Wildlife Wednesdays*, and they are “wildly” popular. The monthly programs (fall through spring) provide a unique connection between people and wildlife – topics range from presentations on local wildlife issues to poetry readings or photography exhibits. Kudos to AWA President Tina Brown and her team for creating what have become AWA-SE signature events. If you live in Juneau, be sure to check out the next *Wildlife Wednesday* - information is available on AWA's website and Facebook page.

In addition, I need to recognize the amazing work being done by the Southeast Chapter of AWA. In addition to *Wildlife Wednesdays*, President Tina Brown and her volunteers make sure Alaska's legislators and Congressional representatives stay informed about wildlife issues. No matter if its wolves or whales, sea otters or bald eagles, Tina is a tireless advocate for wildlife. Hats off to you Tina!

### Membership News

You asked, and we listened. About six years ago during a changeover in computer database programs we stopped tracking membership renewal dates and sending renewal notifications. Many members have been asking when their membership expires (we've been counting anyone who donates at least \$25 within the past two years as a member), so we're going to re-establish our renewal system. We know some of you keep track of your renewal month and renew without being asked – thank you so much. We will try to assign you the same renewal month. Others will be randomly assigned to a month – if you would like the month changed to one that is more convenient for you, please let us know. Look for renewal reminders to start coming in

2013. We will use snail-mail notices until our system is up and running; at some point thereafter we will go “greener” with email notices for those who request them. Of course, anyone may renew a membership or make a donation anytime via our website: [www.akwildlife.org](http://www.akwildlife.org). Again, thank you for “bearing” with us during this changeover!

### Board of Directors Update

Longtime Board member Kneeland Taylor has changed hats and is now on our Advisory Board. Kneeland was an active, very well informed Board member for about four years and we are grateful for his ongoing dedication to our wildlife cause.

Another who made the switch from the Board to the Advisory Board is Alex Simon. We will miss his enthusiasm for and expertise on Alaskan wildlife issues. We wish Alex the best in his new professorship responsibilities in Logan Utah, and appreciate his voice on our Advisory Board.

Last but not least, in September Jenny Pursell of Juneau retired from our Board in favor of service on the Advisory Board. After nearly 15 years of serving on the front lines of wildlife activism with many organizations, Jenny will be spending more time traveling with her husband and pursuing her hobby, painting. Her heartfelt advocacy for wildlife will be missed on our Board, but we're grateful she will continue to share her passion for wildlife causes with AWA.

Also in September we welcomed a new Board member, Lauren Heine of Juneau. Lauren and her husband recently moved to Juneau from Bellingham, WA. She has a doctorate degree in civil and environmental engineering from Duke University. She is the Consulting Co-Director of the organization Clean Production Action, which works to create and promote the use of green chemicals and sustainable materials and environmentally preferable products. Lauren has a longstanding interest in conservation, and in designing engineering and other solutions so that humans and wildlife can both co-exist and thrive. 🐾



## Denali Wolf Protection

(continued from page 1)

scent of humans, and of course did not recognize artificial boundaries. (Alaska Wildlife Troopers determined the trapping was legal. However, the Department of Environmental Conservation launched an investigation because the equine carcass was deposited upstream and very close to a creek which serves as a homeowner's water supply. Apparently, no citations were issued.)

With the future of the Grant Creek pack in jeopardy, supporters of the buffer zone urged the Alaska Department of Fish & Game to issue an emergency closure to any further wolf take from state lands in the area of the former buffer zone. In its denial the BOG also stated that it was a "social" rather than a "biological" issue and refused to take action.

National Park Service biologists monitoring the Grant Creek pack – the most often viewed in the park - say that after the loss of the breeding female, the pack failed to have pups this year, abandoned its historic den site, and some wolves have dispersed from the pack. Some biologists feel the Grant Creek pack may have disintegrated permanently.

The most recent official survey (Spring 2012) found a total of only 70 wolves in nine packs in the six million acre park - one of the lowest populations in decades.

Visitor viewing of wolves in Denali was significantly decreased in the summer of 2012 compared to previous years, in part due to the demise of the Grant Creek pack. This reduced visitor experience may result in direct economic loss to Alaska in future years, and it will result in a lost opportunity to view a wolf in the wild for thousands of visitors from Alaska, from the Lower 48, and from all over the world.

A buffer zone to protect these wolves existed for a decade prior to 2010. That year, despite overwhelming support for expansion of the zone from biologists; local residents; local and state conservation groups; and the National Park Service itself, the BOG eliminated it. In addition it imposed a six-year moratorium on proposals to reinstate the buffer zone, meaning the BOG will not even consider any related proposals – if presented through its regular procedure - before 2016. Only a handful of recreational trappers ever expressed opposition to the buffer, and only two actively trap within the proposed buffer.

AWA is grateful for the support of several other conservation organizations and individuals who were co-petitioners. In particular we would like to recognize conservation biologist Rick Steiner of Anchorage for his invaluable research and diligent work on the petitions.

Regardless of the BOG's decisions, we will not give up our fight for this critical protection for the Denali wolves.

The full text of the Emergency Petitions to the Board of Game, press releases, a map of the proposed buffer and the BOG's letters of denial are available on our website. 

## Quotes from AWA's Petition Press Releases

**Tina Brown, AWA president:** "When the Alaska Board of Game denied the original petition, it refused to hear new information from park officials, concerned Alaskans, and potential park visitors regarding the wolf situation in Denali National Park. According to park officials, the chance of a visitor seeing a wolf in Denali National Park has dropped from 45 percent to 14 percent in the last three years. Trips to the park scheduled for 2013 have already been cancelled because of the reduced likelihood of seeing wolves there. The Board is entrusted with managing all of Alaska's wildlife for all Alaskans. It makes sense that Board members should have all available information and hear from all concerned parties before it sets its management decisions in stone."

**John Toppenberg, AWA director:** "We believe it is past time for the Board to make a decision that considers the needs of Alaskans beyond the trapping and commercial hunting interests. A perfect place to start is with the pocketbooks of Alaskans involved in the Denali Park tourism industry and the wolf viewing interests of tens of thousands of park visitors from around the globe."

"The State has an opportunity here to prioritize the interests of the 400,000 visitors to Denali park over those of the two individuals who trap along its boundary, and the rational choice here is clear."

**Rick Steiner, Alaska conservation biologist:** "Clearly, the state has been interpreting the emergency statute and regulation in error to suit its political agenda. It is time for the state to do its job, and manage wildlife for most Alaskans, who want Denali's wolves protected." 

# Wolves and Bears Win; Extremist Hunter Loses

By AWA Staff

## Kenai Wolves Win Reprieve from Aerial Shooting

Thanks to a huge public outcry (and a lot of behind-the-scenes hard work by AWA) the Board of Game's controversial plan to shoot wolves on the Kenai Peninsula this year has been grounded.

Two proposals to shoot wolves from aircraft beginning in 2012 were unanimously approved by the BOG at its January meeting. However, in early May, Doug Vincent Lang, acting director of the Division of Wildlife Conservation, announced that the program would be postponed until studies of wolf and moose populations were conducted, and causes of moose calf mortality were better understood.

Those studies will take at least two full years to complete. AWA is urging the state to delay any predator control program until the study is complete, rather than proceeding based on partial data gathered by the spring of 2013. Even as the BOG considered the proposals, opponents pointed out that no moose or wolf population statistics were available. Alaska Department of Fish & Game biologists did not know, even roughly, how many moose or wolves were in the targeted areas, so no one knew how many wolves could or would be killed.

The BOG's proposals to kill wolves in Game Management Units 15A and 15C on the Kenai Peninsula were controversial as soon as they were announced. The area is well-populated with year-round residents, it is an extremely popular year-round recreation area for Anchorage area residents, and it draws thousands of tourists each summer.

The BOG wanted to kill as many wolves as possible in order to increase moose populations for sport hunters, choosing to create a "game farm" with few predators, rather than gathering data and using it to create a science-based wildlife management plan. Most of the aerial killing would have taken place in late winter-early



Photo by Johnny Johnson

spring, when snow conditions are best for tracking the wolves from the air. This past winter's unusually heavy snowfall in Southcentral Alaska surely would have helped extend the optimal tracking conditions.

Many other factors besides wolf predation are known to adversely affect moose numbers on the Kenai. One primary factor is lack of sufficient food as a result of 1) the lack of - or suppression of - wildfires, which create new food-rich habitat; and 2) an overabundance of hares which decimate willows, a nutritional staple for moose. (In unit 15A, the ADF&G's own data concluded that poor habitat was responsible for fewer moose.) Other factors likely contributing to decreased moose numbers - but not researched - were the reproductive success of cows, the effect of bear predation on calf survival rates, harsh winters, and hunters' overharvest of bull moose, to name but a few.

As a result, Anchorage and Peninsula residents were virtually unanimously opposed to the proposals, and AWA and other groups organized and rallied the opposition. The proposals were originally on the agenda for the BOG's November meeting in Barrow - one of the most remote locations in Alaska where almost no one from the Kenai or Anchorage could attend, but the vote was postponed to the January BOG meeting in Anchorage. There, dozens of people testified and hundreds more submitted written comments opposing the aerial killing, (there were only six comments for it), but the BOG turned a deaf ear to the public outcry and voted unanimously to approve it.

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# To the Denali Wolf Dens with Tom Meier

by Marybeth Holleman, AWA Advisory Board Member

**Editor's Note:** *Last summer, Marybeth was one of just six artists and writers chosen from more than 300 applicants to participate in the Artist-in-Residence program at Denali National Park and Preserve. Each spent time living in the Park's historic East Fork cabin, where their view encompassed the braided channels of the East Fork River, multi-colored rock formations of Polychrome Mountain, and the snow-capped peaks of the Alaska Range.*

*Her essay below relates a day's hike and conversation with Tom Meier, a wildlife biologist at the Park and an expert on its wolves. Sadly, Meier, 61, died unexpectedly in mid-August at his home just outside the Park.*

*Meier began studying wolves in 1976 with wildlife biologist and wolf expert David Mech. He came to Denali in 1986 and stayed until 1993, when he left to pursue a doctorate degree. He worked with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service from 1996 to 2004 on the reintroduction of wolves in Montana before returning to Denali to lead the biological program and conduct predator/prey research. He was one of the co-authors of *The Wolves of Denali*, considered one of the most comprehensive and easily-read books on wolves, published in 2003.*

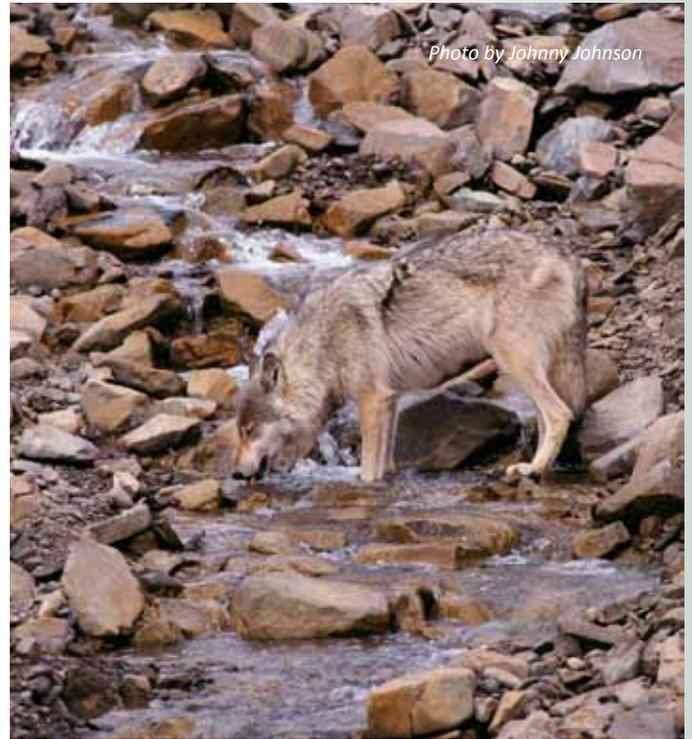
*Meier's death is yet another heartbreaking loss to the research and historical knowledge base of the Denali Park wolves, following the death of well-known advocate Gordon Haber in a plane crash in 2009.*

We stood amid the braids of the East Fork, and Tom pointed to the benches on the opposite side, behind which the multicolored mountains of Polychrome danced in sunlight slipping in and out of clouds.

"There," he said, "is where Murie sat, watching this den. Right in that cleft, where the land rises a bit higher, there's a nice flat spot."

"So now the den is somewhere up this bluff," he said, turning around, "there used to be a caribou skull around here that I'd use as a marker, but someone moved it."

We climbed through willow and alder, up the steep bench, to a grassy open spot. "You can tell where some dens are by all the grass and wildflowers around them,"



he said, "probably fertilized by bits of carrion and such from the wolves."

Just as he warned me to be careful not to step in a hole and twist an ankle, I looked down to find myself surrounded by deep holes in the ground, anywhere from seven to twelve inches wide and mostly covered over with tall grass. A few looked freshly dug, and I knelt and stuck my head in one. It smelled acrid and musky.

"Likely fox," Tom said, "they use the dens when the wolves aren't around." In another I found a tuft of fur.

"That's wolf," he said, "maybe from last year."

We sat above the den on the thick grass of late July and talked about wolves, about the Grant Creek and East Fork packs that have been the most viewed and longest lived in all of Denali National Park. The East Fork are direct descendants of the same wolf family Adolph Murie studied 70 years ago; this was their territory, these were their dens. The Grant Creek are an offshoot of the East Fork, and they used this denning area last summer, the first recorded use since 1979. It was an exciting development for many who followed the activities of Denali's famous wolf packs.

“Besides Yellowstone,” Tom said in his quiet, unassuming way, “Denali is the most likely place to see wild wolves anywhere in the world.”

We walked then to another den, this one in a copse of balsam poplar. Both dens were down the slope a bit; the top of the bench, Tom said with a chuckle, was where the adults rested, “away from the rambunctious pups.” Again, several holes were freshly dug; the Grant Creek wolves prepared both dens earlier in spring, part of mating season activities. A few faint prints remained in the fine, soft soil.

Here in the park for an artist residency, I’d been mourning the loss of the Grant Creek alpha female, trapped at the park boundary after mating and before pupping. She likely carried this year’s pups for the pack – for though they were seen at this den in early summer, the remaining members have since scattered. According to Tom and all the bus drivers and park rangers I’d asked, park sightings of wolves were significantly lower this summer, and no one has seen any Grant Creek pups. The loss of this one wolf, Tom told me, was affecting the entire pack, and the full effects won’t be known for some time, if ever.

For my residency I’d been most thrilled to think of staying at the East Fork cabin while the wolves denned just upriver from me. Perhaps, like one resident last summer, I’d be awakened in the mornings to wolves howling after returning from a night’s hunt with food for the pups. Or perhaps, like another resident, I’d look out to see a wolf on the cabin’s porch, wrestling with the broom. Instead, the wolves were nowhere to be seen or heard. So I was bereft, thinking of all that one trapper had taken from this renowned family of wolves, from me and from everyone else visiting the park this summer.

“Look on the bright side,” Tom had told me, “now I can take you to the den that Murie observed.”

We had planned to visit the unoccupied Teklanika den, but since the Grant Creek wolves weren’t using this one, we changed plans. And as we walked and talked, I did see a bright side: I was getting to see these dens with Tom Meier. There are very few people still alive who have been studying and tracking these wolves for as long as Tom, very few still around who know these wolves as well as him.

Tom was generous and open, talking about the wolves, and the politics of wolf management in Alaska, of Board of Game meetings and the frustration of working in a state with such strong resentments against federal management agencies. This was the first time I’d met him, but we’d emailed for over a year, as he answered questions for a book I was writing on Gordon Haber’s work with Denali’s wolves, and as we’d made plans for this hike.

Yet it was clear, in my short time with him, that Tom was a man who valued civil conversation above all else. He was able to work calmly and respectfully with people and groups with vastly different values and motivations on issues that raise more passionate emotion than almost any other. And he carried within him decades of institutional memory, the kind we especially need for issues such as these. Wolves, for whatever reason and through no action of their own, seem to bring out both the best and the worst in people. To have someone like Tom involved for such a long time was a rare and valuable thing.

So I knew I was fortunate to have this time with such a person. “At our weekly meetings,” a friend who works

*(continued on page 11)*



*Photo by Johnny Johnson*

# The Amazing Tale of a Lone Wolf's Trek

By Ned Rozell

**Editor's Note:** *In the following articles, Fairbanks author Ned Rozell chronicled the fascinating journey of a lone wolf in extreme northern Alaska. Thanks to a radio collar and the help of National Park Service biologist John Burch, we know the details of the wolf's amazing trek – and ultimate demise of natural causes.*

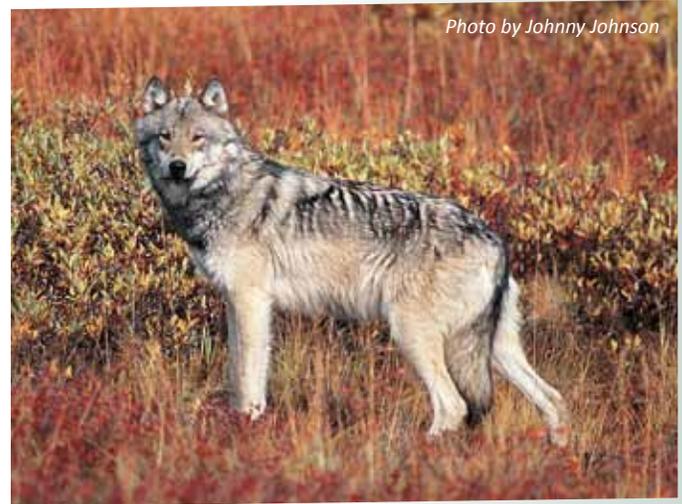
## Part One, August 31, 2011

Somewhere in the rolling tundra east of Deadhorse, a lone wolf hunts. The 100-pound male will take anything it can catch, or find - a ptarmigan, a darting tundra rodent, a fish, the scraps of a carcass, or, if lucky, a moose calf or caribou. Hunger is a common companion, but the wolf somehow survived when his mate probably died of it last winter.

That event may have triggered the lone wolf's incredible summer journey from south of the Yukon River to the crumbling shores of the Beaufort Sea. The wolf has traveled about 1,500 miles in four months, according to biologist John Burch, who works for the National Park Service.

Burch has studied wolves and the things wolves eat since the mid-1990s at Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve and Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. Last November, he was part of a team that helicoptered to Copper Creek, a remote tributary of the clear-running Charley River. There, he tranquilized a healthy male wolf and fitted it with a satellite radio collar. The collar transmits GPS coordinates from the wolf every few days, which has allowed Burch to follow the wolf's trans-Alaska trek this summer.

Burch would have preferred that the wolf remain near Yukon-Charley, 2.5 million acres where the Yukon flows into Alaska. The wolf's collar is expensive and would give useful information about one of a dozen wolf packs that use the preserve as part of their home range. But the lone male is telling the biologists a different story about wolf behavior — what happens when a pack breaks up.



The solo male's pack was a small one. In 2006, the biologists had collared a dominant breeding female in what scientists called the Edwards Creek pack, which - due to the rigors of living in hungry country - shrunk to its smallest possible size.

"She ended up being the only member of that pack," Burch said. "She didn't pair up for a while, which was unusual. We joked that she must have been kind of ugly."

But then, last August, there he was. A large male bonded with the Edwards Creek female. In November, they caught him and installed his collar.

The wolves' short time together ended in February 2011, when the female died, possibly of starvation. A wolverine had eaten her carcass when Burch and others investigated. They didn't see the male around; he traveled around the preserve for a while but didn't catch Burch's attention until later in the spring. That's when, for some reason, he took off.

From May until August, the wolf has been on the move. The animal dodged ice chunks as it swam the Yukon. Then it shook itself off and headed for the upper Kandik River. From there, it drifted into Canada for a few days, juked back into Alaska and plunged into the Porcupine River. Another water obstacle forded, it headed north into quiet country. It crossed back into Canada and crested the Brooks Range near the upper Firth River, trotted eastward towards the Mackenzie River and then veered for the northern coast, close enough to smell the ocean.

From there, the wolf made a straight line back into Alaska, where it got close enough to see the Dalton Highway, a boundary it hasn't yet crossed. The wolf is still up there, about 20 miles east of Deadhorse. It lingers at its peril if another wolf pack patrols that area, Burch said.

Because other wolves are territorial, the lone male has all summer snuck "through the gauntlet of these resident wolves," Burch said. "It's a dangerous game. If they find a strange wolf going through their range, they'll kill it."

Burch has also studied wolves at Denali National Park, finding them most at risk from their own species. "The primary cause of death in Denali was being killed by your neighbor," he said.

Why would the male in the prime of his life take such a risk? Burch said because usually only the dominant pair of a wolf pack breed, others might wander to find their own opportunities. And because it's such a tough life out there (a wolf that lives to 10 is doing well), the chance to join a new pack often exists.

"If one of the dominant pair dies, the other might accept a dispersing wolf as its new mate, or he might find a dispersing female," Burch said.

The lone wolf now roaming the tundra east of Deadhorse is now probably sniffing at scent posts - spots where other wolves have urinated, and using its other senses to weigh its chances.

"He could possibly determine that there's no breeding males (in the territory)," Burch said.

Wolves on the move have another species to avoid, Burch said. "When a wolf encounters humans, it's usually not good for the wolf," Burch said. "He's a fairly young wolf - he might not be too savvy around a fish camp or a dog yard."

The wolf's long-distance journey - a drama being played out all over Alaska all year long - may end with it becoming the dominant male of a pack roaming treeless country up north. Or it may conclude in a few months, with Burch recovering the collar on a pile of hair, or a hunter or trapper turning in a collar to an Alaska Department of Fish and Game office.

"The other possibility is he could come back (to the eastern Yukon River)," Burch said. "He could realize where he came from wasn't that bad."

## Part Two, May 15, 2012

*Thanks to information from a collar that communicated with satellites, a biologist has closed the book on the long journey of a male wolf that left its pack one year ago and wandered thousands of miles through northern Alaska.*

When I last wrote about the wolf in August 2011, the silvery black creature was somewhere in the rolling tundra east of Deadhorse, having traveled more than 1,500 miles from its former home in Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve on the Yukon River last summer. The wolf was on a journey of great risk/reward, said John Burch, a biologist who fitted it with a collar that transmitted GPS coordinates to satellites every few days.

Wolves from resident packs often kill "dispersing" wolves, such as the healthy 100-pound male from Yukon-Charley. But if the wolf on the move finds a territory in which the dominant male is dead, or if it finds another female on the move in country without a resident pack, it might form a new group, Burch said. The big Yukon-Charley male seemed to have had some luck at the latter, at least for a while.

"He appeared to settle down for a bit on the North Slope," Burch said. "I would guess he found a mate for a while. But they broke up for some reason and he headed south again."

After a few weeks of stability in the northern foothills of the Brooks Range, the wolf headed south as winter set in. It loped through a low mountain pass and padded down the Chandalar and upper Koyukuk river drainages. The wolf continued south to once again cross the Arctic Circle a few hundred miles west of where it last May passed the imaginary line going northward.

The satellite transmitter told Burch the wolf wandered to a manmade barrier border it never crossed — the Dalton Highway — and then retreated a bit northward to the Kanuti River, about a mile east of the road.

There, last October 18, signals from the satellite collar indicated the wolf had stopped moving. Burch and Seth McMillan went out to recover the collar from the wolf. They found it curled up under a spruce tree, dead.

"He was really emaciated," Burch said. "He weighed 69 pounds from the 103 he weighed when we collared him."

*(continued on page 14)*

## Wolves and Bears Win

*(continued from page 5)*

However, in the early May media reports, Vincent Lang was quoted as saying there were gaps in the basic science foundation needed to begin predator management and later determine whether the actions succeeded in increasing moose numbers.

“I thought it was worthwhile to spend some additional time to collect that foundational science to inform how best to proceed in the future,” he told the Associated Press. He also said ADF&G will conduct baseline population work to determine the number of moose and wolves on the Peninsula.

Given the state’s 180-degree reversal, it appears our opposition to these outrageous proposals was heard, and indeed helped change policy. AWA would like to offer a big “thank you” to everyone who commented or testified against the Kenai wolf killing. We will of course keep you informed if and when this program resurfaces again.

### Some Bears Escape Snaring – For Now

The use of baited snares to attract and catch bears (which hunters would eventually shoot) became another hot-button topic in Alaska last winter as several proposals came before the BOG to expand this inhumane practice.

The good news is that the Board of Game voted unanimously against a proposal which would have allowed bear snaring in six large game management units bordering several iconic national parks, including Denali and Gates of the Arctic national parks and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Snaring on lands surrounding these parks would have undoubtedly resulted in a decline in bears within the parks, hurting the tourism trade which brings valuable economic development to these remote areas of Alaska.

(AWA and other groups organized opposition and solicited comments in favor of a proposal with opposite wording, asking for a ban on snaring in those areas, which was a moot point after the other proposal was defeated.)

At its meeting in Anchorage the BOG heard public testimony and received hundreds of written comments overwhelmingly opposed to bear snaring. Among those

testifying – and bringing invaluable media attention – was former Gov. Tony Knowles. AWA also involved the media, placing a large informational advertisement against bear snaring in Sunday editions of Alaska’s major newspapers.

Unfortunately, our victory for the bears may be short-lived. The BOG members’ stated reasoning for defeating the proposal was simply to allow the Alaska Department of Fish & Game more time to study and fine-tune the snaring program, which will likely come before the pro-predator-control BOG again in the future.

Worse yet, other bears didn’t get any reprieve at all. The BOG approved proposals to allow baiting and airborne shooting of bears in game management units west of Anchorage, on the other side of Cook Inlet. The BOG members - all hunters and/or trappers - have consistently sought these and other extreme predator control programs to increase the number of moose available to sport hunters.

Regardless of the final outcome, the BOG heard loud and clear opposition to predator control from Alaskans and wildlife supporters worldwide. For example, in addition to the hundreds of written comments, an online petition sponsored by AWA and a similar one by the Alaska Center for the Environment gathered a combined total of more than 6,000 signatures against snaring. The petitions were hand-delivered to the BOG, and the offices of the governor and lieutenant governor. As a result, Gov. Parnell’s administration, ADF&G and most importantly the BOG know thousands of people vehemently oppose snaring. And they know those same people will be watching to see how Alaska manages its wildlife.

### Pro-Hunting Extremist Denied a Seat on the BOG

In April, the state legislature voted not to confirm the appointment of Lynn Keogh Jr. to the Board of Game.

Again, AWA helped rally opposition to Keogh and we ultimately succeeded in convincing a majority of legislators that he was far from a suitable choice for public service as a member of the BOG. The final vote was close – he fell just two votes short of the 31-vote majority necessary for confirmation – but his short stint on the BOG was over.

Gov. Sean Parnell nominated Keogh, an active guide, and hunter and trapper, to an open BOG seat, passing

*(continued on page 14)*

## To the Wolf Dens with Tom

(continued from page 7)

for the Park Service told me, “he’s our rock.” What I didn’t know then was that we would soon lose Tom as well.

In between the two dens, high on the bench in an open field, Tom pointed to a dead wolf, the older Grant Creek female who also died this spring, of natural causes. Only a few months dead, yet already she was no more than skin and bones, tufts of white fur scattered around her thin body. Nature is swift to reclaim her own.

“They turn white with age,” said Tom, “though some are white all their lives, it’s pretty rare.”

I turned to my son James, who joined me for these last few days of my residency because he wanted to see wolves, and because he wanted to see wolf dens. He’s been interested in wolves since his first visit to Denali at eight years old, when we sat by the road high above them as a line of four wolves trotted along this very same river.

“Sorry,” I said, “that all you get to see is a dead wolf.”

“That’s OK,” he said, “It doesn’t bother me to see one dead this way. This is how it’s supposed to be.”

On the walk back, Tom told us about one young white wolf. It was also killed just outside the park, by a sport hunter from the lower 48. On a visit to that hunter’s state, Tom saw the stuffed and mounted wolf, and told a friend he was glad, in a way, it had been preserved, so everyone could see what a gorgeous animal it was. His friend told him, no, I’d rather see it dead on the tundra, having died of natural causes, rotting into the ground.

“Well,” said Tom, “I guess I’d have to agree with him.”

*Marybeth Holleman lives in Anchorage and is the author of The Heart of the Sound: An Alaskan Paradise Found and Nearly Lost, and co-editor of Crosscurrents North: Alaskans on the Environment. Her essays, poems, and articles have appeared in dozens of journals and anthologies, including The North American Review, Orion, The Christian Science Monitor, Alaska Quarterly Review, Ice-Floe, Sierra and National Wildlife, and her commentaries have aired on National Public Radio.*

*She writes, “I like to work at the edges of nature and culture. I’m endlessly inspired by the intricate relationships of the natural world, and seek to illuminate what I find there, to see what hasn’t been seen, to awaken wonder.”* 

# Thank You!

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And a most sincere thank you to all of AWA’s loyal and generous members who help us give Alaska’s wildlife a voice.

***We deeply appreciate everything you do for Alaska’s wildlife!***

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# Who Do Alaska's Wildlife Officials Really Work For?

Commentary by Rudy Wittshirk

**Editor's Note:** *Cory Rossi pleaded guilty in May to one consolidated count for falsifying a bear sealing certification and one count of unlawful acts by a Big Game Guide. His plea agreement calls for a three year suspension of his Big Game License (two years suspended), a \$10,000 fine (\$5,000 suspended), and 60 days in jail (all suspended), three years informal probation and a one-year revocation of his hunting privileges.*

*He resigned in January after being charged with a dozen misdemeanor counts related to a 2008 big-game bear hunt, during which he allegedly helped two out-of-state hunters take three black bears and took another bear himself in Game Management Unit 16B. According to Alaska State Troopers, Rossi falsely submitted three different sets of reports to the state claiming that he killed all of the bears during the hunt.*

*The following is an entry posted January 15, 2012 from Rudy's blog, published on the Anchorage Daily News ([www.adn.com](http://www.adn.com)) website, offering his commentary on Rossi's resignation and the priorities of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game.*

Recently resigned Division of Wildlife Conservation Director Corey Rossi admitted to sleazy wildlife violations when he was an assistant big game guide in 2008. Regarding these rather casual and imprudent transgressions by her underling, Fish and Game Commissioner Cora Campbell felt compelled to say, "I think there are some people who would like to make this about the department's programs but it isn't...this is about an individual; it's not about our programs."

Really? Rossi lied about wildlife he killed, apparently so non-resident hunters, under the "guidance" of the guiding service, could kill yet more of Alaska's wildlife. Isn't that exactly what "our" wildlife management "programs" are all about? The state has filled top positions in Fish and Game with unqualified personnel because there is only one "program" - killing wolves and

snaring bears. And, despite rhetoric about the vanishing "subsistence" lifestyle and filling Alaskan freezers, predator control is geared to benefit non-resident hunters and Alaska big game guiding services.

Rossi is the substance, symbol and embodiment of the predator-killing "programs." He is a founding member of Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife and statewide spokesman for its sister organization, Sportsmen for Habitat (Utah) whose founder, Don Peay, bragged in a newsletter that "our members are politically positioned to help SFW."

Rossi officially handed out privileged access to Alaska's fish and game, giving four "governor's permits" to Peay's organization this year to be sold off at national conventions for big bucks. Despite constitutional guarantees giving residents equal access to fish and game in Alaska, Rossi also wanted to authorize special governor's permits when Alaskans were not allowed to hunt, such as before regular season openings, hunting anywhere in Alaska, hunting with one tag, same-day airborne hunting, and even using helicopters.

Rossi was brought on board precisely because he was just the type of scientifically unqualified wildlife exterminator the state was looking for to implement its simpleminded Intensive Predator Control program. The state has systematically gotten rid of wildlife biologists in the top ranks of Fish and Game and replaced them with incompetent oafs like Rossi. Former Gov. Sarah Palin fought to get Rossi into Fish and Game, where a special position was created for him. The state fought to keep Rossi on board despite a signed letter from 39 former Fish and Game supervisors and biologists in 2010 pointing out his glaringly obvious lack of education and scientific training for his position.



Photo by Johnny Johnson

While not quite so grotesquely unqualified as the man derisively called the “gopher choker,” Commissioner Campbell herself is a questionable appointee - part of Palin’s administration in fisheries who has a degree in education, not wildlife science. In testimony before the Alaska legislature, she clearly agreed not to interfere with the grisly experiments known as intensive predator-killing. So despite Campbell’s claims, this Rossi scandal is all about Alaska’s bloody wildlife management programs - and it ensnares her as well. Under her leadership, real wildlife biologists in Fish and Game are encouraged to keep their contrary scientific findings to themselves. This is right in line with Gov. Sean Parnell’s policy on polar bears and climate change - the science must never interfere with resource extraction.

The state is frantically killing wolves and bears to meet two impossible demands. With or without predator control, Alaska will never be able to meet residents’ ever-increasing demands for moose to shoot - even if that were its only goal. However, as the Rossi scandal implies, the state also has an agenda to satisfy Alaska’s big game guiding interests and their non-resident clients. That’s where the big bucks are and that’s why Fish and Game is top-heavy with guiding interests and unqualified, obliging managers like Cora Campbell. This scandal goes right to the heart of Alaska’s most controversial wildlife management practice and begs the question - for whom, exactly, is the state killing wolves and snaring grizzly bears? 🐾

*Rudy Wittshirk is a writer from Willow.*

## Kenai Moose Calves Fall Prey to Bears, Not Wolf Packs

By AWA Staff

Preliminary results from an ongoing research study by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game indicate that bears, not wolves, are the predators most responsible for fewer moose on the Kenai Peninsula.

Earlier this year the Alaska Board of Game approved an intensive management program involving shooting wolves from aircraft to boost the moose population for hunters on the Kenai Peninsula. The BOG then voted to temporarily halt the aerial shooting, pending the results of this study. This is the first data from the scheduled three-year research of predation on the Peninsula’s moose calves. (See Kenai Wolves Win Reprieve on Page 5). As this issue goes to print ADF&G has indicated that aerial wolf killing will “probably not” be implemented this winter, but AWA will continue to monitor the situation very closely.)

Although grizzly bears claimed the highest percentage of the calves (35 percent), unfortunately the second highest and very significant mortality (13 percent) resulted from the study itself, when frightened cows abandoned their calves to die of starvation.

*(continued on page 15)*



*Photo by Johnny Johnson*

## A Lone Wolf's Trek

(continued from page 9)

The wolf starved to death. Burch knows this from its body condition and because Alaska Department of Fish and Game veterinarian Kimberly Beckman examined the wolf and didn't find any debilitating injuries or a crippling load of parasites.

"I think (starvation in wolves) is more common than people think it is," Burch said. "I think there's some misconception about wolves being able to kill whenever they want to. Sometimes wolves can kill anything they want any time they want. Sometimes they can't."

The wolf had felt the ache of deep hunger before. A few months after his mate in Yukon-Charley and he were both fitted with collars, biologists noticed that the pair kept coming back to the same moose carcass, even after little remained but scattered bones and hair. The female died there, also of starvation. Soon after, the male took off northward on his impressive journey.

Burch found it interesting but not surprising that in its 2,085 miles of travel in half a year, the wolf never seemed to cross a road, though it probably came close enough to the Dalton Highway to hear the groan of trucks and smell burned diesel.

"He may never have encountered a road or vehicles," Burch said. "Wolves are cagy and reluctant with things that are unknown. It helps them stay alive."

The lone, wandering wolf has again showed Burch, who has studied wolves for decades, a few things about their behavior; one of them is that though life in the pack is good for many wolves, non-dominant wolves that don't get to breed will often split. And even dominant wolves take off.

"Biologists choose to capture and collar the alpha or breeding pair that are least likely to disperse, but still, even they disperse sometimes," Burch said. "It makes you think, 'Man, there must be a lot of wolves dispersing all over, all the time.' Those dispersing wolves are looking for a place to live, and it doesn't take long to repopulate an area once wolves have been killed. It's a big factor in wolf population dynamics.

"And it's not that wolves are doing something different," Burch said. "It's that we're able to see it now (with GPS collars in addition to radio collars tracked by airplane)."

*Ned Rozell is a science writer at the University of Fairbanks' Geophysical Institute. He has walked, skied, driven, and flown across Alaska, and is the author of several Alaska-based books, including Finding Mars, and Walking My Dog Jane: From Valdez to Prudhoe Bay along the Trans-Alaska Pipeline.* 

## Wolves and Bears Win

(continued from page 10)

over numerous well-qualified candidates who would have brought diversity to the BOG. Currently the viewpoints of non-consumptive users of wildlife, such as tourists and photographers, are conspicuously absent from the Board. Thus, 85 percent of Alaskans who neither hunt nor trap have no voice concerning the management of a resource that the State Constitution holds as equally owned by all residents.

However, in addition to being yet another strong advocate of extreme predator control measures, Keogh carried a number of questionable personal and professional qualifications to the BOG. In testimony during legislative committee hearings he demonstrated a lack of insight and knowledge about wildlife and wildlife management issues. His Alaska court system record revealed he lacked appreciation for state laws and overall demonstrated poor judgment. In addition, he was discourteous and dismissive when meeting with people advocating viewpoints other than his own

Prior to his confirmation vote in the legislature, as a BOG-appointee he participated in several recent BOG meetings, and voted in favor of the proposals to shoot Kenai wolves from the air (as detailed in the previous section of this article) and to expand bear snaring. Keogh is the second of Parnell's two BOG nominees to fail to pass legislative confirmation. Last year AWA helped to publicize the even more extreme views of Al Barrette, who was ultimately rejected by the legislature.

Yet again, AWA would like to say "thank you" to our members and supporters who wrote to their legislators, telling them that Keogh was a bad choice for the BOG. They listened, and we won. 

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## Kenai Moose Calves Fall Prey to Bears, Not Wolf Packs

*(continued from page 13)*

To conduct the study, state biologists radio-collared a group of cow moose in February, then monitored them by helicopter daily during the May calving period. When they spotted a very young calf they landed a small helicopter nearby, then quickly caught the animal by hand, weighed and radio-collared it. When a calf's radio signal indicated it had died, biologists went to the carcass to gather evidence of the cause of death, such as tracks or fur left behind. The study tracked the calves between approximately three to six weeks of age.

The study found that 45 of the 54 collared calves (about 83 percent) died during the time they were studied. Grizzly bears killed 19, and seven died from abandonment. Black bears killed two calves, and either grizzly or black bears killed five. Four died from unknown causes, an undetermined predator species killed three, another three drowned, and disease killed one. Just one calf was confirmed to have been killed by wolves or coyotes, a statistically insignificant 2 percent of the calf mortality.

The calf mortality study took place in Game Management Unit 15C, roughly the southern and western half of the Kenai Peninsula. The BOG approved aerial wolf killing in both Unit 15C and Unit 15A, which includes the north-

west corner of the Peninsula. Together the units comprise more than 1,500 square miles.

Previous research has commonly shown that across Alaska about half of moose calves die before they are a year old, most of them killed by bears within a few weeks of birth. As the calves grow older and are able to elude bears, wolves tend to be more of a factor in predation. However, many other factors affect moose populations, including availability of browse and weather conditions. Results from subsequent years of the study should reveal the impact of the record snowfall during the winter of 2011-12 on the area's moose population.

The ratio of bulls to cows in any particular area also has a significant impact on reproductive rates. Over-harvest by trophy hunters can result in too few breeding bulls and a low reproductive rate among cows.

Interestingly, ADF&G's own studies show that moose populations in Unit 15C are at adequate levels and holding steady. However, the state restricted hunters' take of bulls in 2011 because the bull-cow ratio declined. That meant that the established harvest goal was not met, and intensive control (aerial killing) of wolves was approved. 



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◆ We will be proudly launching our newly designed website ([akawildlife.org](http://akawildlife.org)) around the first of the year. New features will include improved menus and better organization; a search engine; much, much more information; and, most importantly, frequent updates. Of course the amazing Alaskan wildlife photography of Johnny Johnson, as well as images from many other talented photographers, will still be prominently displayed. We'll be sure to let you know when the new site is up and running!

Thank you for supporting AWA  
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