

## Fish and Game Should be Honest About Killing Wolf Pups

I am a longtime hunter. Like many Alaskans, I was disturbed by the revelation that Department of Fish and Game personnel had killed 14 infant wolves this June on the Alaska Peninsula by shooting each one in the head.

But let's shove aside mere emotion -- this is, after all, a state-sanctioned predator control program, where, in the words of Director of Wildlife Conservation Doug Larsen to Fairbanks Daily News-Miner reporter Tim Mowry, "When you have a specific objective and it's the way to achieve that objective, sometimes you have to do things you don't like." Instead, let's examine the facts.

In March, the Board of Game approved a predator control program aimed at reducing wolf numbers near the calving grounds of the Southern Alaska Peninsula caribou herd. The board specifically authorized department employees to shoot wolves in this area from a helicopter (italics mine).

On June 27 the state issued a press release that reported that a total of 28 "wolves from three packs were shot from a helicopter (again, italics mine) by Alaska Department of Fish and Game staff."

No mention whatsoever was made in this official release of shooting wolves on the ground, let alone at den sites. Area biologist Lem Butler and director Larsen later admitted this was not the case, and that the pups (at least half the wolves killed in the control effort) were indeed shot on the ground, so this press release contains a demonstrable falsehood.

Mr. Larsen stated on the public record that this misleading statement "wasn't an attempt to hide anything, by any means."

Now let's consider the language of 5AAC 92110 (i): "Denning, the killing of wolf young in the den, is prohibited."

This comes from the department's own predator control regulations. There is no exception noted, and this prohibition has been in effect for 40 years. To put the weight accorded to this regulation in context, the Board of Game, at that same 2008 meeting, expressly refused to consider a request to allow "denning."

Furthermore, statements made by biologist Butler place Ken Taylor, ex-deputy commissioner of Fish and Game, and director Larsen at or near the control site around the time of the killing. The presence of upper-level department officials at a field operation is a highly irregular circumstance, to say the least.

It appears that the Department of Fish and Game may have violated its own regulation against the killing of wolf pups at a den site -- a rule that carries the power of law.

Then they seem to have deliberately misled the public to conceal this apparently illegal act.

Finally, top-level officials seem to have been directly involved in some capacity.

It's also hard to forget that these are professional, highly competent biologists who know exactly what any healthy wolf pack is up to in June: They're raising pups. Claiming that the presence of pups came as an unpleasant surprise and unavoidable collateral damage is patently absurd.

I can only conclude that these dens were specifically targeted from the start -- which is the only way, helicopter or no, one could manage to kill 14 adults and 14 pups in a relatively short time, without snow cover. From my personal experience, most adult wolves will not desert a den and so would become easy targets.

I furthermore can't imagine that the biologists could capture the infant wolves without forcing them out of their den by

some means -- likely digging or smoke. If this was not denning, I invite the department to explain.

One more fact: As of this writing, the department has stalled in responding to a duly and legally filed request for public information regarding all the circumstances surrounding this control effort. The department's answer is now overdue and subject to litigation.

If there is nothing to hide from the public, why do so? We, the people of Alaska , whom the department serves, deserve a full, forthright, and immediate explanation. If there's nothing to hide, let's get the facts in the open.

Writer/photographer Nick Jans is a longtime Alaska hunter, ex-trapper and outdoorsman. He is co-sponsor of Ballot Measure 2, which seeks to restrict the state's current predator control program.