

Helicopter Based Snaring and Bear Baiting Program in Unit 16

The ADF&G claim the bear snaring and bear baiting program in Unit 16 is a "tightly" controlled program. Defenders of Wildlife disagrees.

The Facts -

- The snaring program regulations provide no details of the specific requirements for the training program that will "certify" resident citizens for snaring bears. Simply handing them a pamphlet would suffice;
- Allows the ADF&G to conduct the snaring program under the proposed direct supervision of government contractors. These can be residents or non residents, paid by the state, or volunteers from extreme pro hunting groups;
- There are no regulations requiring bear snaring camps to have direct supervision by either an ADF&G employee or private contractor. The ADF&G say they will have in the field staff or representatives - but there are no regulations requiring it;
- There are no experience, skills or certification requirements for either ADF&G staff or government contractors that may directly supervise the snaring program in the field;
- The bear snaring regulations do not define who will pay for the helicopters, bait, foot snares, food, camp equipment, etc. What costs are the ADF&G going to cover;
- What is the liability for the state should a resident, paid contractor, or volunteer become injured, possibly by a female brown bear that has a cub caught in a snare;
- Bear baiting and snaring regulations allow helicopters to transport off road vehicles, such as 4 wheelers, into remote camps for use in accessing trap lines and bait stations. This will expand the range and increase the habitat damage of both programs. Illegal "cutting in" of fixed wing landing strips is also a very serious concern;
- There are no in the field - direct supervision requirements for the black bear baiting sites which will be accessed using helicopters and the ADF&G is not proposing any direct supervision either;
- Residents can choose to "sport" hunt brown bears from helicopter accessed camps, bait stations or trap line locations using a rifle and stalk and shoot methods. The hunter can then transport the brown bears hides and skulls using helicopters;
- Helicopters can be used to spot brown bears for subsequent sport hunting;
- The snaring regulations allow the use of two types of snares, both ground snares and bucket snares. Ground snares are set on the ground along trails. Bucket snares are often placed off the ground and have "openings" in the lids that can be made small enough to exclude large brown bears. Ground snares are far less species specific and offer substantial risk of catching non target species such as brown bears and moose. Wildlife Troopers testified that they did not support the use of ground snares. A Canadian biologist who gave a presentation also testified that Bucket snares offered much less risk for catching non target species;
- Who is going to be checking the residency status of each individual using a helicopter to access bait stations when they are departing from private landing strips or private business's? Enforcement is virtually impossible;
- The Department of Public Safety Wildlife Troopers testified against the use of helicopters by residents stating they did not have a helicopter for wildlife enforcement use and could not enforce the regulations effectively since they could not access helicopter based camps unless under emergency situations;
- The Board of Game allowed the lethal harvest of up to 10 brown bears. One member of the board described this as "collateral damage";
- Bear snaring can potentially harvest very high numbers of black bears. Permittee's are allowed to keep the hides and skulls and then sell the black bear hides and skulls to commercial fur buyers who then are allowed to legally resale them. The ADF&G is proposing to further support this commercialization of the predator control program by stating they intend to pay for a "camp assistant" to help the trapper prepare all the hides for sale;

- Allowing snaring and baiting during the summer puts other residents at great risk when recreating, fishing or camping in the area, especially when off road vehicles expand the range of these baiting and snaring camps accessed by helicopters;
- Guided black bear baiting regulations were liberalized to allow, for the first time, the guide to personally register up to 10 bait stations in addition to the clients allowed bait stations. Also, for the first time, guides are allowed to not be with the clients while hunting over bait. This allows the guide to simply take large groups of hunters and drop them off at bait stations;
- There are no limits on the overall number of bait stations that can be created. Each permittee is allowed four bait stations and the number of permittee's is unlimited;
- For the first time, bait station permittee's in the predator control program will be allowed to transfer the right to hunt over their bait stations to other permittee's that are not registered for that particular bait station;
- The daily bag limit for harvesting black bears using a bait station or a snare is unlimited, including sows and cubs;
- There is no limit on the number of snares a permittee can place in the field.

Does this sound like a tightly controlled program to you?

Snaring of bears is an experimental procedure and should be conducted only by trained ADF&G biologists with the skills and abilities to tranquilize non targeted species that are caught in snares, such as moose and brown bears.

The use of helicopters by private citizens has long been illegal – for good reason.

--Wade Willis, Alaska Representative, Defenders of Wildlife