

PROPOSAL: Prohibit the take of wolves on lands in GMU 20 adjacent to Denali National Park

[What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?]

- 1. Declines in the population of wolves that den inside Denali National Park have been associated with significantly diminished wolf viewing opportunities for park visitors. For 2015, the likelihood that a visitor would see wolves along the park road was 5 percent, down from 45 percent in 2010.**

Updated survey information on wolves that den inside Denali National Park and venture onto state lands outside the park (<http://www.nps.gov/dena/learn/nature/wolves.htm>) points to continued low numbers and densities of wolves. It also addresses the particular risk of additional population decline due to harvest of wolves that den in eastern parts of the park. In spring of 2015, three wolves were taken on state lands in the Wolf Townships by hunter/trapper activity, all three from the East Fork Pack, and one of them a pregnant female. Unfortunately, these are also the wolves that are among the most easily viewed by the park's half-million annual visitors. The East Fork pack did not produce young in 2015, and was down to 2 individuals in spring 2016. Even a documented yearly human take of 4-6 wolves will be significantly detrimental to Denali's five eastern packs, which at last count numbered 27 individuals, and whose numbers did not increase between the 2015 spring and fall 2015. The risk is compounded by the regionally low population of wolves (total for the park was 49 in spring 2016), and when breeding females are taken. Adequate evidence exists that the taking of one wolf, if a pregnant female, can disrupt an entire pack.

- 2. Wolves that den inside Denali National Park are particularly vulnerable to hunting and trapping in winter and spring when they take hunting forays onto lands north and east of the park.**

Hunting forays onto lands north and east of Denali National Park (in GMUs 20A and 20C) have been noted and recognized by wildlife scientists since the 1980s. Radiolocations have shown over many years that wolves that den within the park tend to follow caribou into the Wolf Townships in spring. They have also been known to cross to the east and take forays into the Yanert River valley. This makes them specifically and predictably vulnerable to hunting and trapping during these times.

- 3. The Alaska Board of Game acted in the past to create *no wolf take* areas in GMUs 20A and 20C adjacent to Denali National Park and Preserve, to enhance their numbers for the viewing public. This idea makes economic sense and fulfills ADF& G management goals for wolves.**

Acknowledging that the park wolves were a valuable resource for visitors, in 2001 and 2002 the Board of Game approved no-take closed areas (Stampede and Nenana Canyon) adjacent to the park. This was at a time when the wolf population was double the current number (a 2002 spring count of 97 wolves).

This decision - to allocate wolves from hunting and trapping to viewing and enjoyment by tourists and Alaskans - is within the power of the Board and makes sense in this particular area, where economics support it and Alaskans have repeatedly requested it. Neither Unit 20A nor Unit 20C is identified for intensive management to control predator numbers. Additionally, one of the world's premier scientific wolf study programs has been collecting data in this region for almost 30 years.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game management policies include management for non-consumptive uses of wolves. Note below, from the *Wolf management report of survey-inventory activities, 1 July 2008 – 30 June 2011* (Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation) [p. 160]:

MANAGEMENT GOALS

ADF&G will manage wolf populations to provide for human uses and to ensure that wolves remain an integral part of Interior Alaska's ecosystems. Compatible human uses include hunting and trapping (both for personal use and commercial sale of furs), photography, viewing, listening, and scientific and educational purposes. We recognize the aesthetic value of observing wolves in their natural environment as an important human use of wolves.

Unquestionably Denali National Park's iconic wolves are high on visitors' lists of animals they hope to see. Those visitors spend money that has an enormous impact on the local Denali economy. A recent NPS report showed that the more than 530,000 visitors who came to the park in 2014 spent \$5.24 million in nearby communities. That spending supported almost 7,000 jobs in the local area – including 300-plus employees of the park's largest concessionaire - and had a cumulative benefit to the local economy of \$7.48 million.

[What solution do you recommend?]

We are asking the Board of Game to establish a no-wolf-take zone in a small portion of GMU 20, subunits 20A and 20C, adjacent to Denali National Park. *Please see the 2016 Board of Game Proposal Boundary map accompanying this proposal. The proposed boundaries coincide approximately with the Denali National Park wolf population area, delineated by telemetry locations.*

DRAFT REGULATORY LANGUAGE:

Take of wolves is prohibited on lands (GMU 20), in the area bounded on the west by the east boundary of Denali National Park; extending east to one mile east of, and parallel to, the Anchorage-Fairbanks Intertie Electrical Power Line; on the south by Carlo Creek; and on the north by a line from the southeast corner of Township 11S, Range 9W (Latitude 63 degrees, 55 minutes North), due east to the George Parks Highway, then south along the Parks Highway to a line running due east from the Highway through the town of Healy, to one mile east of the Intertie Line; inclusive of all lands west of the George Parks Highway commonly referred to as the "Wolf Townships," and/or "Stampede Trail".

[What will happen if nothing is done?]

Human take of park wolves on lands adjacent to the park will continue. The wolf population within the park and adjacent lands will be at significant risk for continued declines in numbers and viewability.

[Who is likely to benefit?]

Reallocation of use from hunting/trapping to viewing wolves will enhance the economic benefit of this area to all Alaskans. The local and state tourism economies will benefit when visitors have an improved chance of seeing wolves. Almost thirty years of collaborative scientific study of wolf ecology in the Denali region will benefit.

[Who is likely to be inconvenienced?]

This proposed buffer would inconvenience a few recreational hunters/trappers. Trappers would have to set their traps farther away from the park boundary. Likewise, hunters would be prohibited from taking wolves on land closest to the park. This "no-take" zone is quite small in the context of the entire state.

[Submitted by]

Alaska Wildlife Alliance and Denali Citizens Council

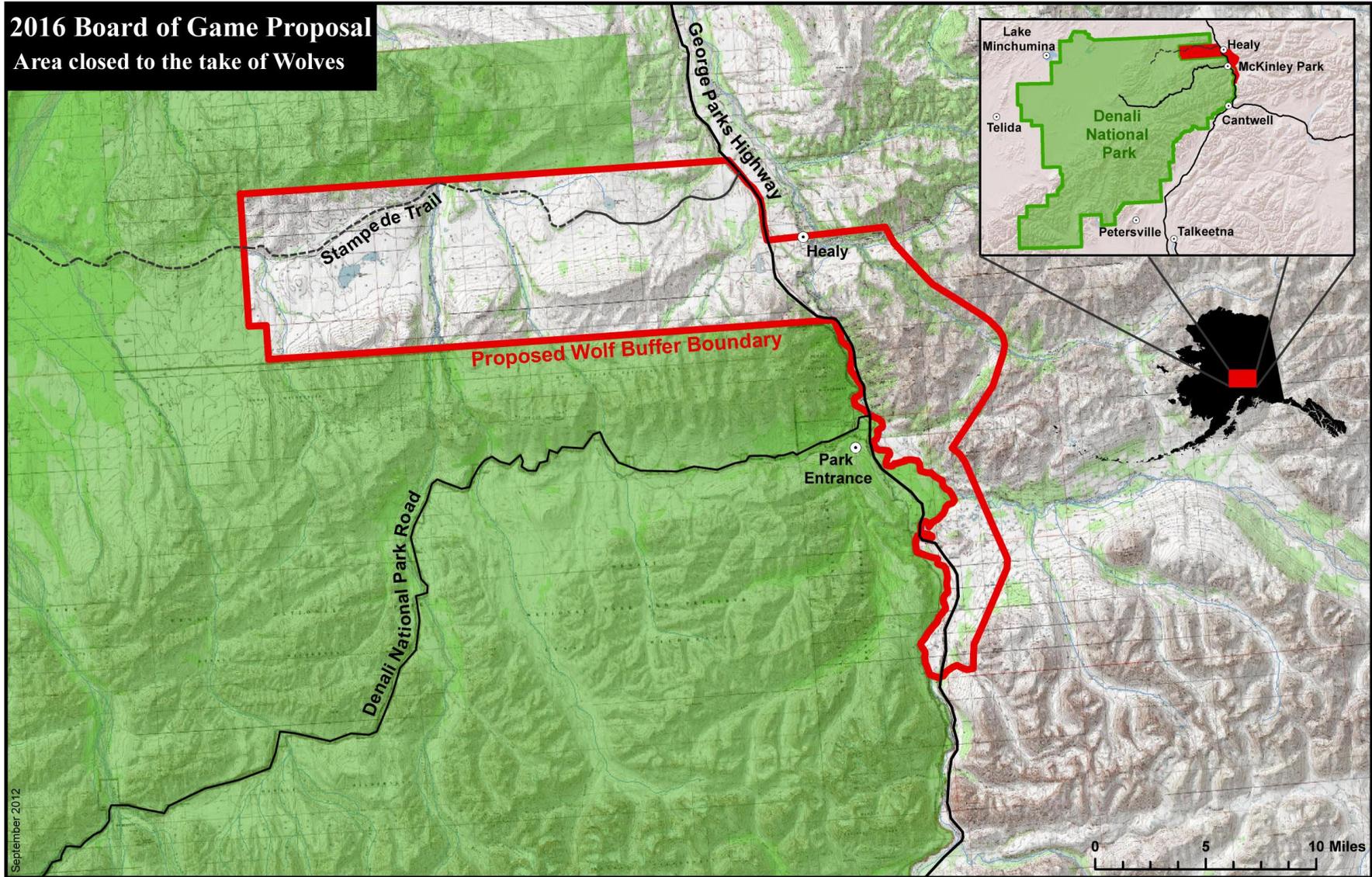
Relevant Literature

1. Harper, P., ed., *Wolf management report of survey-inventory activities, 1 July 2008-30 June 2011*, Species Management Report ADF&G/DWC/SMR-2012-4
2. Updated information on wolf surveys, pack narratives and other data.
<http://www.nps.gov/dena/learn/nature/wolves.htm>
3. Borg, B.L, Brainerd, S.M., Meier, T.J. & Prugh, L.R. (2015) *Impacts of breeder loss on social structure, reproduction and population growth in a social canid*. Journal of Animal Ecology, 84, 177–187.
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1365-2656.12256/abstract>
4. Borg , Arthur, Broman, Cassidy, McIntyre, Smith, Prugh (2016) *Implications of Harvest on the Boundaries of Protected Areas for Large Carnivore Viewing Opportunities*
<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0153808>
5. Economic Importance of Alaska’s Wildlife
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=ongoingissues.economicstudy>

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Map of proposed closed area

The red line encloses a proposed buffer or area closed to the take of wolves on state lands in the Wolf Townships and along the Nenana River in Units 20C and 20A.