

July 14, 2009

RE: The Protect America's Wildlife Act

Dear Senator Feinstein:

As former members of the Alaska Board of Game, we endorse the modest but crucial changes to the Federal Airborne Hunting Act (16 USC 742j1) contained in the Protect America's Wildlife Act, which you are sponsoring in the U.S. Senate.

The Alaska Board of Game (hereafter Board) is a seven member citizen board appointed by Alaska's governor and confirmed by the state legislature. The Board promulgates Alaska's hunting and trapping regulations and establishes wildlife policies including those for predator control.

The Protect America's Wildlife Act is largely a response to Alaska's current predator control programs, which clearly circumvent the federal Airborne Hunting Act (AHA) of 1972. The legislation would clarify the intent of the AHA so that the exception that allows a state to authorize the use of aircraft to shoot wildlife must be based on the finding of a biological emergency and not used to increase prey populations just to meet increasing hunter demand. It further provides that when a state authorizes aircraft shooting under the exception, it must be supported by adequate scientific data and the shooting must be conducted by government personnel only.

The Protect America's Wildlife Act is in conformance with the laws that Alaskan voters passed by initiative in 1996 and 2000. The state legislature reversed the will of the people both times.

Extensive wolf control is being conducted in Alaska at present. Aerial predator control is now occurring on more than 60,000 square miles of Alaska—the largest predator control program since statehood. Since 2003, more than 1,000 wolves have been killed by private hunters through shooting directly from airplanes or from the land and shoot practice. This past spring, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game killed 84 wolves in 5 days in eastern Alaska. In March, the Board reauthorized aerial predator control for five more years and has eased the regulations further by allowing private aerial gunning teams to now use helicopters to kill wolves.

Many Alaskans object to using state personnel for ongoing airborne wolf control as a standard game management tool unless there is a serious biological problem. And even more strongly object to the use of private pilots for these activities because of the long, well documented history of abuses and violations of the AHA.

We also note that the long, detailed history of predator control in Alaska and elsewhere clearly demonstrates that control is often poorly supported by sound science, ignores other options, and often becomes institutionalized and perpetual. The Protect America's Wildlife Act would help curb these problems by restricting lethal control programs to those that are well justified and truly necessary. We are aware that other control options are available and effective including non-lethal control and habitat management.

In summary, we strongly support The Protect America's Wildlife Act and believe that it would improve the management of wildlife in Alaska as well as settle some long-standing, controversial issues related to predator control.

Sincerely,

Former Alaska Board of Game Members:

Vic Van Ballenberghe
Anchorage, Alaska
1985-1988, 1996

R.T. Skip Wallen
Juneau, Alaska
1990-1993

Joel Bennett
Juneau, Alaska
1980-1990, 2002

Bruce Baker
Juneau, Alaska
2002

Leo Keeler
Formerly Anchorage, Alaska
2000

Nicole Whittington-Evans
Anchorage, Alaska
1997-2001

Tom Meacham
Anchorage, Alaska
1975-1976

Jack Lentfer
Homer, Alaska
1989-1992, 2002

George Matz
Homer, Alaska
2001-2004