

**** DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE * ALASKA WILDLIFE ALLIANCE ****

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**SCIENCE-BASED WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT FURTHER JEOPARDIZED
AS HOUSE PASSES GOVERNOR'S BILL TO IGNORE VOTERS AND EXPAND
AERIAL HUNTING**

Alaskans' right to vote on this issue could be denied

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA – Defenders of Wildlife is condemning a move by state legislators who today passed House Bill 256 by 25-12, a bill that is intended by the governor and sponsoring legislators to deny Alaskans a vote on aerial hunting later this year.

More than 56,000 Alaskans signed a petition to put the initiative on the ballot, a vote that is threatened if HB 256 becomes law. By making changes to the same-day-hunting provision, the legislature is enabling the governor's office to once again subvert the will of Alaskans who twice voted to restrict the aerial hunting of wolves only to see the Alaska legislature overturn the laws they enacted.

The bill, introduced in the legislature by Gov. Palin, increases the role of politics by allowing the Board of Game to move even further away from science-based wildlife management and allows the Board of Game to permit the same day airborne shooting of brown bears by private persons.

“This bill will further damage the credibility of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game by forcing it once again to implement so called “predator control plans” that are even more lacking in sound scientific backing than those now in operation,” commented Defenders of Wildlife Alaska representative, Tom Banks.

This bill thus further weakens Alaska's Intensive Management law, making it easier for the Board of Game to approve unscientific programs to eliminate predators. It eliminates the requirement that the state develop a Game Management Plan, and it frees the Board of Game to implement programs to eliminate predators, regardless of whether wolves or bears are affecting game populations. It removes an existing requirement that the Board rely on scientific information presented by the Department. The board is currently operating five programs that have resulted in the aerial killing of 748 wolves, including at least 81 just this season. In March, the board added a sixth program in western Alaska.

“It appears that the governor and her legislative allies are sponsoring the bill specifically to deny Alaskans the opportunity to vote on an August ballot measure regarding the use of airplanes to kill wolves and bears,” said Banks. During consideration of the bill in front of legislative committees, several lawmakers attempted to get clarification from the State's attorney as to whether the bill would negate the pending August ballot measure and he

evaded the question, declining to give a clear answer. In response, Alaska Wildlife Alliance, Alaska Center for the Environment s for Wildlife, Alaska Public Interest Research Group and Defenders of Wildlife sent a letter to Gov. Palin asking her to address the question, but no response was provided prior to the vote.

“As our letter said, in her election campaign Governor Palin pledged to listen to the voices of Alaskans and promised us open government. This bill flies in the face of those promises and the majority of House representatives have simply towed the line, rather than listen to their constituents,” said John Toppenberg, Director of Alaska Wildlife Alliance. “There is a strong belief that knowing that Alaskans have twice approved restrictions on aerial hunting or wildlife, the governor and legislators are working with special interests to deny Alaskans another vote. This in spite of the fact that the initiative is already scheduled to be on the ballot. It’s time the governor made her intentions clear, before the special interests persuade the Senate to also overturn Alaskans’ right to vote on this subject.”

A Senate companion bill, SB 176, was also introduced by the Governor last spring and is still to be considered by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

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Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities. With more than 1 million members and activists, Defenders of Wildlife is a leading advocate for innovative solutions to safeguard our wildlife heritage for generations to come. For more information, visit www.defenders.org.

Alaska Wildlife Alliance is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection of Alaska’s wildlife. The AWA promotes an ecosystem approach to wildlife management with an emphasis on the nonconsumptive values of wildlife. This mission is carried out through citizen mobilization, advocacy and education. For more information, visit www.akwildlife.org.