

Thoughts re: 1992 Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan Review

I am a hunter and have lived in Yukon since 1975 by choice after having lived in the states for 25 years, and having lived in BC and Alberta. Two reasons I choose to live in Yukon are because of its wildlife and its small population. Unfortunately, wildlife and human populations are inherently in conflict. The “1992 Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan” contains worthy principles and goals but is diminished because of a lack of implementation of its recommendations. The most obvious oversight being that the final paragraph of the 1992 plan states that “The Department of Renewable Resources will produce a Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan implementation report after no more than five years. The Plan could then be publicly reviewed and amended accordingly.” Instead of reviewing the plan we should be reviewing an implementation report.

To review means to examine actions taken as a result of recommendations made:

It isn't easy to find out what has happened towards meeting recommendations made in the 1992 plan. I would like the public to have a copy of the management plan with a summary statement next to each recommendation itemizing what actions have been taken to date with regards to each recommendation. This would provide fodder for public review and discussion.

The first goal of the plan, as stated in the summary handout, was “to serve as a reference for all parties interested in the long-term survival of Yukon wolf populations.” If the plan is to act as a reference why not use it to also record actions taken? I am not asking for a report for each item, only a summary statement of what was accomplished and a notation where a person may find more information. It should also indicate if additional actions are needed.

For example, if one looks at 9.1. – Conditions Required Before Wolf Reduction Programs Can be Considered ...it states that ”The information must include the following: 9.1.3/ . . . iii) the number of ungulates, wolves and bears killed by people.”

A summary statement from Yukon Renewable Resources could answer this question by stating how many Non-First Nation hunters permits were filled, how many animals were killed by resource officers, how many animals were killed because of highway accidents, etc. What about First Nation information? According to the “Action Agenda 1997 – 2000 for the Alsek Moose Management Plan” page 10 “Moose harvest by First Nations is not being recorded for the Alsek . . . Past programs met with limited success and further attempts await a good design that would be acceptable to the hunters and CAFN government.”

By using the management plan as an action plan it could truly be a reference for discussion and decision making.

The meeting held in Haines Junction Feb. 28th seemed to be more of a discussion of how to control wolves than a discussion of The Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan and how its recommendations have or have not been implemented. Is the purpose of the review to throw out the 1992 plan and create a new one?

“Reducing wolf numbers by more than 60% for 5 years and liberalizing brown bear harvest in southwest Yukon failed to produce a substantial increase in moose numbers.”p39

Information found in the Nov. 6, 2010 “A review of wolf management programs in Alaska, Yukon, British Columbia, Alberta and Northwest Territories” seems to indicate that wolf control may not work in Yukon.

The Finlayson projects’ 7 years of wolf control (1983-1989) resulted in 451 wolves being shot, wolf numbers increased from 29 in March of 1989 to 260 in 1996 (17% higher than pre-control). “Farnell (2009), in retrospect, concluded that although the project resulted in the expected favourable response in the ungulate populations, the project failed as a long-term management solution because of a lack of long term management guidelines. Unsustainable harvest and unprecedented mineral exploration activity required emergency conservation measures to be implemented in 1998.” pp 36-37

The Aishihik project information indicates that the caribou herd increased during the wolf reduction by 14%. Both moose and caribou populations increased during wolf control. pp 37-38 An Aishihik project draft report on recent surveys in the Aishihik area is soon to be published by Environment Yukon. This report is vital information needed prior to this review.

During the 1982/83 to 1986/87 Southwest Yukon control program “The moose population in Rose Lake did not increase significantly after 5 years of reducing the wolf population by more than 66% and 4 years of liberalized bear hunting regulations.”p38

More of this information needed to be presented at the public meeting in Haines Jct. for discussion and clarification. I don’t think it is possible to review this management plan without having all the available information about Yukon’s six wolf control program during the past 30 years.

We Yukon hunters are a spoiled lot!

Yukon offers a great deal to its hunters. I may not always be able to hunt where I want, but at least I can hunt the animals of choice somewhere in Yukon. Let’s not forget how lucky we are to be able to hunt bison when that freezer is empty. Wolves are special and if I have to choose between seeing wolves in the wild and eating bison, I’ll eat that chewy bison and maybe a few more vegetables.

Killing wolves is a simplistic approach to a very complicated problem. The 1992 Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan 9.1 lays out an intelligent approach to the conditions required before wolf reduction programs can be considered. We need information on wolves, bears, ungulates, habitat, and people. What we are lacking is the will to obtain this information. Public discussion and YTG Renewable Resources should be able provide all of it except the First-Nations half of the people question. Yukon First-Nations have to do their part in obtaining accurate information on the harvesting of Yukon Wildlife. Without their contribution there can be no management plan.

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