

Nuisance Wildlife Management

By Rod Arno AOC Executive Director

It's hard to think of wildlife as being a nuisance but when animals interfere with human development and activities that is what they become to some people. Waterfowl near airports bring down planes when they fly into the props, beaver flood highways, martin destroy the interior of cabins, bears break into caches and attack fisherman on the rivers, and moose stomp people and cause highway collisions resulting in human fatalities and vehicle damage. That is the price Alaskan's have to face because fortunately over 90% of the state's wildlife habitat is still intact today.

In the past, native villages, trapper's cabins, and early mining settlements all had to deal with the same problem of wildlife endangering life and property. Animals that became habituated to human presence got trapped or shot. Today as less people living in Alaska have any hunting or trapping experience they have to either depend on state agency's or private companies to take care of their problems with nuisance wildlife. The Anchorage area is a good example of how expensive this can get for state agencies such as, the Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) or the Alaska Bureau of Wildlife Enforcement. With that in mind the legislature has recently passed statutes dealing with these habituated animals. Individuals can now make a living by getting permits to remove nuisance animals.

That's all well and good until the "nuisance moose" statute is used to manage game by taking state funds to rebuild wildlife populations on public lands. The state has allowed this abuse to occur by approving capital funding to the Alaska Moose Federation (AMF) for a Statewide Moose Safety and Rebuilding Task Force. Now the Alaska Moose Federation has asked for support from AOC to release orphaned moose calves into GMU 13, claiming that the appropriation for the Task Force is evidence that the State supports private moose rebuilding efforts.

AOC's By-Laws make it clear; our purpose is to support state management of natural resources by professional managers. Neither AOC, the Board of Game, nor the Governor support state funding for game rebuilding programs created outside of the legislatively created public process.

Nor does AOC approve of state general funds appropriated for the Statewide Moose Safety and Rebuilding Task Force being spent on hiring office staff for the Alaska Moose Federation or any other wildlife advocacy group for that matter. The Alaska Moose Federation had asked the legislature for \$200,000 to hire staff and purchase office equipment. We were glad to see Governor Murkowski state that none of the money appropriated to AMF could be used for administrative expenses. Public wildlife interest groups funded with state general fund money defeats the purpose that the legislature had in mind when they created the fish & game advisory committees and boards of Fisheries and game process.

AOC remains a strong advocate for public involvement through the fish & game advisory committees and board's process for determining game management programs. AOC would work willingly with state agency's to help mitigate injuries to people and damage to property caused by moose, these are legitimate concerns. What Alaska doesn't need is the nuisance caused by private wildlife managers competing with professional state game management.