

SENATE RESOURCES COMMITTEE, WRITTEN TESTIMONY ON HB 105

BY VIC VAN BALLEMBERGHE, MARCH 23, 2018

I AM VIC VAN BALLEMBERGHE AND I LIVE IN ANCHORAGE. I AM A WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST AND I SERVED ON THE BOARD OF GAME THREE TIMES BETWEEN 1985 AND 2002.

IN 2002 I WAS A BOARD OF GAME MEMBER WHEN IT CREATED A BUFFER ADJACENT TO THE NORTHEAST CORNER OF DENALI NATIONAL PARK TO PROTECT PARK WOLVES FROM HUNTING AND TRAPPING WHEN THEY VENTURED OUT OF THE PARK DURING WINTER. SEVERAL TIMES IN PREVIOUS YEARS WOLF PACKS WERE SEVERELY REDUCED OR ELIMINATED IN THIS AREA BY LEGAL AND ILLEGAL HUNTING AND TRAPPING THEREBY REDUCING THE OPPORTUNITY OF PARK VISITORS TO EXPERIENCE WOLVES. THE BOARD RECEIVED HUNDREDS OF WRITTEN COMMENTS ALONG WITH ORAL TESTIMONY STRONGLY URGING CREATION OF THIS BUFFER. WE THOROUGHLY DEBATED THE PROPOSAL, AMENDED AND PASSED IT.

PREVIOUS BOARDS CREATED OTHER BUFFERS STARTING IN 1992 INCLUDING IN THE AREA NORTH OF THE PARK ALONG THE STAMPEDE TRAIL, BUT DURING 2002-2010 WOLVES CONTINUED TO BE TAKEN, PACKS WERE DISRUPTED AND VIEWING OPPORTUNITIES WERE REDUCED. IT WAS GENERALLY RECOGNIZED THAT THE BUFFERS WERE TOO SMALL. IN 2010 THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SUBMITTED A PROPOSAL TO ENLARGE THE NORTHERN BUFFER AS DID CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS WITH ADDITIONAL PROPOSALS. DESPITE STRONG PUBLIC SUPPORT, THE BOARD NOT ONLY REJECTED THESE PROPOSALS, BUT RESCINDED THE EXISTING BUFFERS.

DURING THE PAST SEVEN YEARS WITH NO BUFFERS IN PLACE, THE PROBLEMS HAVE WORSENERED WITH SIGHTINGS OF WOLVES ALONG THE PARK'S ROAD DROPPING GREATLY. KEY PACKS WERE OFTEN DISRUPTED INCLUDING THE APPARENT ELIMINATION OF AN INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN PACK WITH A 77-YEAR HISTORY OF RESEARCH AND ONE OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY SEEN PACKS IN THE PARK.

DESPITE THIS, THE GAME BOARD REJECTED SEVERAL PETITIONS REQUESTING EMERGENCY CLOSURES TO PROTECT THE FEW REMAINING WOLVES. AFTER ADOPTING A 6-YEAR MORATORIUM IN 2010 ON NEW BUFFER PROPOSALS, IN FEBRUARY, 2017 THE GAME BOARD FINALLY AGAIN CONSIDERED THE ISSUE OF CREATING BUFFERS BUT FAILED TO ACT. HAD THE BOARD ACTED, THE BUFFER LIKELY WOULD HAVE BEEN TOO SMALL AS IT WAS IN THE PAST, AND FUTURE BOARDS COULD RESCIND IT.

THERE ARE MULTIPLE BIOLOGICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC REASONS WHY A BUFFER IS NEEDED. THE SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS FOR HB 105 OUTLINE NUMEROUS JUSTIFICATIONS. YOU WILL CERTAINLY HEAR OTHERS TESTIFY IN DETAIL ABOUT THEM. AND PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR A BUFFER HAS BEEN VERY STRONG EVERY TIME THE ISSUE WAS BEFORE THE GAME BOARD DURING THE PAST DECADES, YET THE BOARD REFUSED TO ACT.

IT IS TIME TO FINALLY RESOLVE THIS ISSUE WITH A PERMANENT SOLUTION BY MOVING FROM THE GAME BOARD ARENA TO THE LEGISLATURE. HB 105 WILL ACCOMPLISH THAT. I STRONGLY SUPPORT THIS BILL AND URGE THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS TO FULLY ENDORSE IT AND TO RECOMMEND ITS PASSAGE.

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE WRITTEN COMMENTS ON THIS IMPORTANT BILL.