

# A Case for Repealing the Intensive Management Surcharge Sunset

Harvesting wild game is a practice steeped in tradition and is extremely important to many Alaskan families. In fact, in some places, it is a necessity. By the Department of Fish and Game's best estimate, 39.1% of rural Alaska's wild food harvest is composed of land mammals, marine mammals, and birds/eggs. It is estimated that about 34.0 million pounds (usable weight) of wild foods are harvested annually by rural residents and 11.4 million pounds by urban residents (this includes all wild foods). On a per person basis, the harvest is roughly 276 pounds per person per year for residents in rural areas and 19 pounds per person for residents in urban areas (Subsistence in Alaska, 2018). In addition to providing healthy and wholesome food, it also helps bond families, friends, and communities. The older generations teaching the younger, the shared activities of butchering and processing, the sharing of the bounty with friends, relatives, and neighbors.



The Alaska Legislature recognized this importance and in 1994 passed the Intensive Management (IM) Law consistent with Article 8, section 4 of the Alaska Constitution. This law requires the Alaska Board of Game to identify moose, caribou, and deer populations that are important food sources for Alaskans and ensures that these populations remain large enough to allow for adequate and sustained yield.

An intensive management surcharge was added to hunting licenses in 2016 and has been collected since January 1, 2017. Because these programs have proven successful in increasing some ungulate (principally caribou and moose) populations, hunters requested the surcharge to ensure that funds were dedicated and available to assess and conduct intensive management activities. The license revenue allows the department to carry out the projects free of interference or hinderance from the federal government. This also frees up other funds that can be used to leverage federal Pittman-Robertson (PR) funds (3:1 match) for research and other critical activities, thereby helping to mitigate reversion of federal dollars and fills the gaps where PR funds cannot be used.

## What is the IM program process?

The intensive management program is conducted under Board of Game authority and under policies adopted to ensure it is effective and based on scientific information (AS 16.05.255(f)). If a population drops below what the Board determines is needed to meet the needs of Alaskans, they will direct ADF&G to begin intensive management of that population.

The process starts with an investigation into the causes of the low population numbers. This can be attributed to several things including forage quality and availability, weather, and predation among other factors. Steps are then taken to increase the numbers which can include hunting and bag limit restrictions, habitat improvement, and predation control.

After any form of prey management occurs, the department surveys and monitors those populations. The department reports research findings on active programs to the Board annually, so they are able to deactivate the program after population numbers have risen above the threshold. These regulations are formally adopted in the Alaska Administrative Code in Title 5, Chapter 92, which contains detailed information about each individual IM area. All reports, maps and general information can be found on the department's website at:

<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=intensivemanagement.main>



## Where has Intensive Management worked?

An example of success is the Forty-mile caribou herd (FCH). Spread out through Alaska's interior, the FCH had always been a presence and a source of food for Alaskans. The herd has cyclically withered and swelled, ranging from a rock bottom of 6000 animals in the early 1970's to 38,0090 in 2007. When the population was at its peaks, like the 1920's at an estimated 260,000, the herds range encompassed 85,000 square miles from Whitehorse, Yukon, to the White mountains north of Fairbanks. Until recently it occupied about 25% of that area and only a small number of Forty-mile caribou moved into the Yukon Territory each year. Even as the herd weathered its large declines and modest recoveries, its importance to Alaskans living along the interior highway system in the communities of Tok, Delta, Fairbanks, and even Anchorage, among others, remained strong. To reach the herd's harvest objective however, IM was recommended.



Detailed caribou calf mortality studies from May 1994 through April of 2003 revealed that wolves accounted for an average of 47% of the total calf mortality. Further, from May 1991 through April of 2005, wolves accounted for 80% of the total adult caribou mortality.

In 2003, an IM control program was authorized by the Board of Game. Its implementation began January 2005 to reduce the region's wolf population - the estimated minimum pre-control wolf population was 350 animals - to a range that would enable the caribou herd to grow towards management objectives while ensuring that wolf populations continued to be managed on a sustained yield basis. The FCH has increased two to four percent annually, growing to 44,000 in 2006, 52,000 by 2010, and has reached an estimated 73,000 prior the 2020/2021 hunting season.

That summarized the population accounting but not the impact to the economy or the benefits to Alaskans. Taking the harvests of the 5 seasons prior to IM the recorded harvests, at the low end of 150 in regulatory year 2000-2001 and a high of 875 in regulatory year 2002-2003, yields a 5-year average of 670 animals harvested each regulatory year.

In regulatory year 2020-2021, during a worldwide pandemic and 15 years after the IM program was implemented, Alaskan families harvested over 6500 caribou from the exact same grounds. That is 6350 more caribou than the lowest recorded harvest of the prior 5 years and 5829 more caribou harvested than the 5-year average before IM. Using the smaller of these numbers, the 5-year average and an average per animal yield of 75 pounds, illustrates one of the benefits to Alaskans. 5829 extra caribou roughly pencil out to produce around 437,220 pounds of meat that ends up in Alaskans freezers.

The average red meat price in Anchorage, one of the lowest in the state, is conservatively \$6 per pound. That translates to Alaskan families put \$2,623,320.00 worth of some of the world's healthiest meat in their freezers to feed their families than in the years before IM. This does not account for the amount of dollars that those hunters spent at local retailers in preparation for the hunts or the dollars spent at local processors and taxidermists after the hunt, nor does it account for the goodwill and community building that comes from the sharing of the stories, the meat, and meat products with the hunter's friends and neighbors.

The future of the herd and for Alaskans that capitalize on this incredible resource appears bright. Future IM efforts will continue with an eye on preventing the herd from exceeding capacity of its habitat, maintaining harvest within established objectives, and ensuring that the users of the resource fund the IM program through the IM surcharge when purchasing a hunting license.

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