

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 10, 2017

1:11 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Andy Josephson, Co-Chair
Representative Geran Tarr, Co-Chair
Representative Dean Westlake, Vice Chair
Representative Harriet Drummond
Representative Justin Parish
Representative Chris Birch
Representative DeLena Johnson
Representative George Rauscher
Representative David Talerico

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Mike Chenault (alternate)
Representative Chris Tuck (alternate)

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 105

"An Act establishing the Gordon Haber Denali Wolf Special Management Area."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 39

"An Act relating to game management and to regulations of the Board of Game."

- BILL HEARING CANCELED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 105

SHORT TITLE: DENALI WOLF SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) JOSEPHSON

| | | |
|----------|-----|---------------------------------|
| 02/03/17 | (H) | READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS |
| 02/03/17 | (H) | RES, FIN |
| 02/10/17 | (H) | RES AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124 |

WITNESS REGISTER

MEGAN ROWE, Staff
Representative Andy Josephson
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of Representative Josephson, sponsor, answered questions during the hearing of HB 105.

BRUCE DALE, Director
Division of Wildlife Conservation
Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing of HB 105.

RICK STEINER, Professor
Conservation Biologist
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 105.

VIC VAN BALLEMBERGHE
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 105.

ACTION NARRATIVE

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CO-CHAIR GERAN TARR called the House Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:11 p.m. Representatives Tarr, Rauscher, Drummond, Talerico, Josephson, and Parish were present at the call to order. Representatives Johnson, Westlake, and Birch arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 105-DENALI WOLF SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA

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CO-CHAIR TARR announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 105, "An Act establishing the Gordon Haber Denali Wolf Special Management Area.

[1:13:35 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON, speaking as the sponsor of HB 105, informed the committee legislation on this issue was first proposed in 2013, and again in 2015, but never received a hearing. The bill

seeks to return to a state policy that looks out for the interests of wolf packs that leave the Denali National Park and Preserve (the park) and venture north and east of the park. He stated in the north part of the park is the Stampede Trail where there are wolf townships, not in the park, but on state land. Although wolves are intelligent, they do not recognize borders, and the wolf population in the park has dropped significantly. Wolf packs remain in the park, but two packs are decimated or gone because of trapping. Tourism industry records indicate it used to be that one-half of the visitors to the park saw a wolf, but now wolf sightings are reported by six visitors out of one hundred, a decrease of approximately 45 percent to 6 percent. Co-Chair Josephson opined the bill is important for two reasons: Denali National Park and Preserve is the third highest revenue-generating park, and has 650,000 visitors each year. Spending at the park is about \$810 million, with a small city of hotels and commerce north of the park entrance supporting visitors. In addition, wildlife viewing is a big facet of the tourism economy; in fact, ECONorthwest reported 90 percent of visitors to the state come to view, rather than hunt, wildlife. Tourism hunting is also beneficial as hunting sustains wildlife; however, more visitors come to take pictures of wildlife. There are 19,000 jobs statewide in tourism that produce nearly \$1 billion in wages. The park remains a prime destination for visitors to Alaska, and the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADG&F) reports there is "just a handful" of trappers lawfully trapping in a way that hurts the wolf pack and viewing opportunities thereof. The bill reflects the sponsor's four-year effort to change the law affecting the lands north and east of the park, in order to return to state policy that protects the species. Furthermore, in addition to the economic reasons to change the law, there are also ecologic reasons to support an intact ecological system in the park, even if the system ventures outside the borders of the park. He referred to other pending legislation related to trapping near trails.

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CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON said, according to ADF&G, HB 105 would affect a handful of trappers who have an "adverse impact." He directed attention to the national perception of this issue and read from an article on page 69 of the 2/16 edition of National Geographic magazine entitled, "Denali." The article described collared alpha female wolves from the known Grant Creek and East Fork packs that had been trapped and shot by an individual claiming three times to have ruined wolf viewing experiences for millions of visitors to the park [document not provided]. Co-Chair

Josephson continued to explain in 2000 wolf biologist, the late Gordon Haber, and others convinced the Board of Game (BOG), Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), to establish a no-kill buffer zone along the Stampede Trail and in Nenana Canyon, east of the park. In 2009, the National Park Service (NPS), requested an expansion of the protected area; however, BOG eliminated the buffer. Currently, this issue is up to BOG, but the legislature has the authority to take action consistent with Alaska Statutes Title 16. He opined BOG is not a sufficiently diverse board to comply with its enabling act. The last time a buffer was proposed, BOG postponed further consideration of the issue for six years, although there was an emergency closure for a few months.

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CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON observed Fairbanks is a community that prides itself on trapping; however, the Fairbanks North Star Borough voted six to three to pass a resolution in support of protection for wolves. He read portions of Fairbanks North Star Borough Resolution No. 2016-39: "A Resolution Urging Governor Walker to Close Areas Adjacent to Denali National Park and Preserve to the Trapping and Hunting of Bears, Wolves and Wolverines," provided in the committee packet. Co-Chair Josephson concluded the state contributes to the loss of wolves in the park, and directed attention to documents provided in the committee packet related to the impact of trapping to the park, and supplying statistics on tourism. From the foregoing statistics, one can conclude wildlife viewing generates more income than hunting, although both are important. Also, ADF&G reported the number of active trappers in the affected area is between one and three. In 2012, he recalled the Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA) expressed interest in a non-consumptive seat on BOG. He acknowledged although there will be criticism of the bill, this is a statewide issue.

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CO-CHAIR TARR asked the sponsor to read the Be It Resolved portion of the above mentioned resolution.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON read as follows [[original punctuation provided]:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED the Fairbanks North Star Borough urges the Governor, through the Commissioner of Fish and Game to close the areas adjacent to Denali

National Park and Preserve to the trapping and hunting of bears, wolves and wolverines. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED copies of this resolution shall be distributed to Governor Walker and Alaska Department of Fish and Game Commissioner Sam Cotton ...

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO expressed his understanding the original buffer zone had a sunset clause, thus BOG did not reauthorize the buffer zone and did not take an action to remove the buffer zone.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON deferred the question to Dr. Steiner.

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO asked whether the sponsor was aware of the distance between the closest Fairbanks North Star Borough boundary and the area of the proposed buffer zone.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON estimated 120 miles.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked for the width of the boundary.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON said the proposed boundary encompasses several hundred thousands of acres in a conservation easement management area where activities are unaffected except that wolves can't be killed. He deferred to Dr. Steiner for confirmation.

REPRESENTATIVE WESTLAKE acknowledged there is a value of trapping and a value of tourists viewing animals; he pointed out tourists leave at the end of each season, and local activities continue year-around.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON deferred to Dr. Steiner for a complete answer as to when wolves are taken, but noted part of the problem is the wolves are not alive in June.

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REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked the sponsor to provide a map that would show the boundary proposed by the bill. On page 1, line 8, the bill read [in part]:

consists of the land and water presently owned by the state and the land and water acquired in the future by the state lying within the boundaries of the parcel described in this subsection:

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON inquired as to how [land and water] would be acquired by the state in the future and how it would be affected by the bill.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON reminded the committee there are five million acres left to select under the terms of the [Alaska Statehood Act of 1958]. Although the land around the Stampede Trail has been selected, there is always the possibility of a land trade due to the importance of this issue; however, there is a crisis - two well-known family packs are gone - and he cautioned against waiting for alternative action by, for example, the Board of Game.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON said she has never been into the park but has traveled the Stampede Trail. She directed attention to page 2, lines [17-19] of the bill which read:

(b) The land and water lying within the Gordon Haber Denali Wolf Special Management Area is reserved from all uses incompatible with its primary function to protect wolves from hunting and trapping, except that nothing in this section may be

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON advised in the abovementioned area there are many other animals and game. She questioned whether the bill would be unique, and the first of its kind, with the primary function of designating a buffer to protect wolf habitat.

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CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON agreed the foregoing language could be improved and clarified. He stressed the bill does not create an area such as the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary and Refuge, which is uniquely dedicated to protect bear habitat. Co-Chair Josephson recalled attending a BOG meeting which revealed, he opined, only with great reluctance will BOG consider non-consumptive concerns.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER referred to statistics provided in the sponsor statement, and inquired as to whether a current sustainable population number [of wolves] has been established through scientific study.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON deferred to Dr. Steiner.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked for an explanation of Fiscal Note Identifier: HB105-DNR-MLW-2-8-17, OMB Component Number 3002.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON opined a special management area may fall under the auspices of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and a critical habitat area may fall under the auspices of ADF&G; in fact, amendments to the bill may create a critical habitat area instead of a special management area. He noted DNR has twice issued an indeterminate fiscal note.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON stated without a fiscal note, the bill cannot seriously be considered, and requested additional related information from ADF&G.

CO-CHAIR TARR pointed out fiscal notes are sometimes indeterminate and gave an example.

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REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON directed attention to the last line on page 2 of the above referenced fiscal note analysis which read [in part]:

If the intent of the bill is to transfer responsibilities and authorities to the Department of Natural Resources ... [the Department of Natural Resources} does not have sufficient information ...

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON remarked:

It just seems like that they're unclear about the intent and if they're unclear about the intent, I didn't know what your ... intent entirely was either.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON responded the bill was drafted by the Legislative Affairs Agency, Legislative Legal and Research Services. He said he would work with the department on the bill's fiscal note.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER, referring to his earlier question, also asked if there is a trend in the [wolf] population. Further, he questioned whether the bill provides wildlife for tourism, or solves a wolf problem.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON answered both. He seeks to preserve for future generations an Alaska with intact ecosystems, and not little pockets of wilderness, as in the national parks in the

Lower 48. The intent of the bill is to have a sustainable, healthy wolf population, which correlates with income to the state from tourism.

REPRESENTATIVE WESTLAKE questioned why DNR and not ADF&G will facilitate the bill.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON deferred to his staff.

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MEGAN ROWE, on behalf of Representative Josephson, sponsor, explained ADF&G is not responsible in the bill as it is drafted because the bill relates to a chapter in statute designated to the responsibilities of DNR. She directed attention to page 2, beginning on line 22 of the bill which read:

(c) The land and water lying within the Gordon Haber Denali Wolf Special Management Area is assigned to the department for control, development, and maintenance.

MS. ROWE advised that "the department" was thought to be ADF&G, but is actually DNR, and thus is a "drafting issue."

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH recalled in 1992 a wolf buffer zone about one-third larger than proposed was established, but overturned for non-biological reasons. He questioned why the proposed buffer zone is smaller than the area previously suggested by BOG.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON deferred to Dr. Steiner to explain why the land - illustrated on a map provided in the committee packet - to the southeast of the original park and south of Cantwell, along the George Parks Highway, is no longer in need of a buffer.

REPRESENTATIVE BIRCH asked whether the sponsor has had dialogue with the Denali Borough in this regard.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON said no and offered to inquire.

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO said Healy is the closest community to the park, as are the Stampede Road and Panguingue Creek Subdivision.

REPRESENTATIVE BIRCH encouraged the sponsor to think about the importance of local control. He recalled his personal experience in the area responding to the use of the Antiquities Act of 1906 by former President Jimmy Carter in 1978, and expressed his concern about wildlife-related bills that ignore, or sidestep, the affected local governments.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON opined BOG has plenary power in this regard and only the legislature can intervene; in fact, it has been reported that local, regional advisory councils are ignored by BOG.

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REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON expressed her concern for the wolf pack that has been studied and is a "treasure ... for our state." She is also concerned about the continued expansions of the park boundary, which used to be much smaller. Representative Johnson asked how much further expansion is enough for animals that don't understand boundaries.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON clarified the bill does not extend any boundary, but grants an easement for the benefit of the wolves in this area. Furthermore, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act is unique in that part of its settlement terms allow for existing uses to continue, such as subsistence and sport hunting, and other local practices. Within the original 1917 park boundary are many restrictions, but within the preserve there are bear hunting, subsistence hunting, and other allowed activities.

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO turned attention to page 1, beginning on line 8, of the bill which read [in part]:

... Wolf Special Management Area consists of the land and water presently owned by the state and the land and water acquired in the future by the state lying within the boundaries ...

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO interpreted the foregoing language to mean that any included private property would not be part of the management area.

CO-CHAIR JOSEPHSON said he did not know and confirmed there are private inholdings in the affected area. However, basic police

power precludes some activities on private land and he agreed the language "requires some, some further discussion for sure."

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO advised it is important to check the status of the ownership of the affected land. For example, he questioned whether the largest contiguous piece of land owned by the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) would be affected. He advised there is a 6,000 acre reserve within the boundaries of the map provided, and a portion of the land is held in quiet title by a lease. Also within this area are parcels of residential private property, ARRC property, University of Alaska (UA) property, and land owned by a municipality; however, the bill only applies to land owned by the state. Furthermore, according to the map, a large part of the land encompassed by the bill is on the east side of the Nenana River, and he inquired as to the location and health of the Totatlanika wolf pack on the east side of the river. He said he saw 27 wolves in this pack, and other wolf packs on the east side of the Nenana River appear to be thriving in game management unit 20A.

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BRUCE DALE, Director, Division of Wildlife Conservation, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, in response to Representative Talerico, said generally wolf densities are higher in game management unit 20A than in Denali National Park and Preserve, because the abundance of moose is higher.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH returned attention to page 1, beginning on line 8 of the bill [text previously provided], and to page 2, beginning at line 17, which read [in part]:

(b) The land and water lying within the Gordon Haber Denali Wolf Special Management Area ...

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked if ADF&G were the enforcement agency, would it interpret the foregoing language to include private property falling within the boundaries defined by the bill.

MR. DALE said the Department of Public Safety (DPS) would be the primary enforcement body, and "it depends on how it's implemented whether it would be closed to taking of wolves on private land or not."

MS. ROWE remarked:

The first sentence that you're referring to, "The Gordon Haber Denali Wolf Special Management Area" consists of the land that is owned by the state, now and in the future. This says, "the land that is within that area," so the area is the area that's presently owned by the state. What is reserved is that area. The, the land descriptions might include private areas ... private lands and waters, but the area that is the Gordon Haber Denali Wolf Special Management Area is land that is presently owned by the state or will in the future be owned by the state, so it's not to include private lands.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH surmised private land within the outlying territory would not be subject to the rules in the bill.

MS. ROWE said yes.

[2:08:10 PM](#)

RICK STEINER, Professor, Conservation Biologist, informed the committee he was a professor at UA from 1980-2010, and directed attention to his written testimony and ten supporting documents provided in the committee packet. He suggested the committee consider the following two criteria while judging HB 105: 1.) The bill helps the economics of the state because it enhances the wildlife tourism industry; 2.) The bill supports the Alaska Constitution by the principle of equity, fairness, and common ownership of all resources, including wildlife, by all Alaskans. He paraphrased from the Alaska Constitution as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Article 8 - Natural Resources

Section 2. General Authority

The legislature shall provide for the utilization, development, and conservation of all natural resources belonging to the State, including land and waters, for the maximum benefit of its people.

Section 3. Common Use

Wherever occurring in their natural state, fish, wildlife, and waters are reserved to the people for common use

DR. STEINER surmised all Alaskans have equal legal access to and use of the wildlife in Denali National Park and Preserve, including the seventy thousand Alaskans who visit the park each year - and who wish to see the animals alive - in contrast to the two or three individuals who wish to hunt and trap along the boundary of the park. Dr. Steiner opined approval of the bill is a clear constitutional and economic choice. Turning to a short history of the park, he said at the time of the creation of the park in 1917, the exact boundaries were unclear and debated, especially along the northeast boundary where wildlife migrations occur. In 1922, the Alaska Railroad recommended adding additional land to the park, and in 1965 the state selected said lands, noting the park boundary is an "arbitrary line." Efforts to define the boundaries in 1969 by the Johnson Administration, and in 1978 by the Carter Administration, failed. In 1980, during negotiations surrounding the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, land exchanges to bring certain areas into the park were suggested but not implemented. In 1985, the Sheffield Administration attempted a land exchange with the Kantishna Mining District, and 1992, BOG established the first wolf buffer, which was approximately 800 square miles, including the wolf townships and the entire eastern boundary of the park. In response to an earlier question, he explained HB 105 seeks a smaller area than the 1992 buffer because the bill focuses specifically on viewing wolf family groups along the Park Road. Subsequently, "in political retaliation response to [former] Governor Hickel's suspension of some wolf control programs elsewhere," BOG rescinded the 1992 wolf buffer zone order two months after it was issued. In 1995, the Murkowski Administration proposed a railroad line through the wolf townships, and in 2000, BOG reestablished a wolf buffer which was expanded in 2002. In 2001, former Governor Knowles unsuccessfully proposed to convey the townships to UA, which would then sell the land to the park. In 2008, an expanded buffer was proposed, and in 2010 there were four proposals to BOG for wolf buffer zones. However, BOG eliminated the existing buffer and adopted a six-year moratorium on the consideration of further related proposals. Dr. Steiner noted the issue continues to be contentious; in fact, the BOG process will not provide a durable solution for the "Denali watchable wildlife issue" and is opposed to protecting the economic values of watchable wildlife.

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DR. STEINER pointed out if BOG enacted a closed area, the closure could easily be rescinded; after 100 years, no efforts have been successful at protecting wildlife along the northeastern boundary, thus the need for HB 105 to partially do so for wolves. The Denali National Park and Preserve wildlife viewing decline is a matter of record, yet hunting and trapping continue along the northeastern park boundary; although the legal take along the boundary is limited to four or five wolves per year, alpha breeding females are significantly important to the pack. Since the buffer was rescinded in 2010, only 5 percent of visitors to the park have seen wolves in the past four years. He directed attention to reports issued by the National Park Service (NPS) provided in the committee packet. Dr. Steiner opined the loss of the buffer is the primary cause of the reduction, and the science is "crystal clear" that NPS studies have shown the take of the wolves along the boundary has reduced the park population, reduced denning near the Park Road, and reduced visitor viewing success. Although only four to five wolves are taken along the boundary, the "breeder loss effect" of a significant breeding individual can cause the disintegration of a family group as evidenced by the Grant Creek family group that suffered the loss of its last pregnant female in 2012, and shrank from fifteen to three wolves in one year. In 2015 and 2016, the breeder loss effect occurred again in the East Fork, or Toklat, family group which failed to pup and den after its pregnant female was killed, leading to the demise of one of the longest studied mammal groups in scientific history, felt in the scientific and conservation communities as an unnecessary and unfortunate loss. He restated the economics of wildlife viewing are greater than the economic value of hunting and trapping the same animals.

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DR. STEINER reviewed statistics related to total visitor spending in Anchorage and Fairbanks credited to the park, and other national park statistics. He cautioned that not including all lands with the boundaries of the bill will complicate enforcement and recommended HB 105 include not just state land but all land as well. To those who argue six million acres is sufficient for the park, he pointed out only the original Mount McKinley National Park boundary of approximately two million acres is closed to hunting and trapping, and the other four million acres are open to subsistence and sport hunting and trapping; further, the few hunters and trappers displaced by the bill would retain access to millions of acres of state and federal lands north, east, and south of the affected area.

Finally, he stated there is public support within Alaska, nationally, and globally for the permanent protection of Denali National Park and Preserve wildlife along the boundary of the park as evidenced by petitions, written testimony, and a local resolution.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER noted his interest in other large animals, and asked for an estimate of sustainable populations for sheep and caribou in the park and surrounding areas.

CO-CHAIR TARR inquired as to the population estimate [for wolves] at which collapse would occur.

DR. STEINER, in response to Representative Rauscher, said he was unaware of a sustainable population objective for any of the wildlife populations in the park. He deferred to NPS biology staff who primarily manage wildlife in the park. However, the bill is about the viewing ability of park wildlife along the Park Road system for the visitors to the park, and is not about the park's populations of wolves, bears, or other animals. Further, the bill seeks to enhance and sustain the viewing of wolves along the Park Road and to impose a substantial and sufficient protected area. The number of wolves is not the only measure to judge the health of a wolf population, and the integrity of family groups is vital to game management. On a broad scale, game management unit 20 is bigger than many states; however, the bill can protect the pack integrity for the two or three essential family groups for viewing in the park.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER cautioned the cause and effect of the bill should not be adverse. Reading from a publication by Kimberly Titus, Division of Wildlife Conservation, ADF&G, he relayed former Governor Knowles established three guiding principles that must be met for wolf control to proceed: programs must be based on sound science; cost effective; broadly accepted by the public [document not provided]. Representative Rauscher urged the committee to search for sound science in order to recognize the cause and effect of the bill on the buffer zone, as well as in the park.

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO noted that the number of visitors to the park set a record last year and another record is anticipated;

he inquired as to whether research has attached a number to the lack of wolf viewing in Denali National Park and Preserve.

DR. STEINER answered visitors to Yellowstone National Park (Yellowstone) have a 45-85 percent chance to see wolves, and wolf viewing has been valued at approximately thirty-five million dollars per year. He estimated the value of wolf viewing in Denali National Park and Preserve to be millions of dollars to tens of millions of dollars, in contrast to the commercial value of five wolves taken, which would be a few thousand dollars. He acknowledged placing a value on certain experiences is difficult. Further, additional losses are caused by dissatisfied visitors.

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO asked whether low ungulate populations of moose and caribou in ADF&G game management unit 20C, on the west side of the Nenana River, have an impact on the wolf population.

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DR. STEINER agreed ungulate populations have an effect as they are the primary prey; in winter, wolves rely on moose and caribou carrion from winter-kill. The Denali caribou population is in a depression, and it is no longer permitted to take caribou; however, snowfall does not have a direct correlation, but is a factor in the availability of winter-kill. Although natural factors and wildlife are a complex system, he advised there is simplicity in reducing the loss of a few significant wolves.

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REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO informed the committee game management unit 20C has had a closed caribou season for over 30 years on the east side of the Nenana River, and advised that there is no take within the park, or on the north side, but there still are no caribou.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON questioned whether there are other ways to enhance the affected wolf pack.

DR. STEINER acknowledged management cannot control natural causations for fluctuations in wildlife populations, but can alter human interactions, and prohibit the limited take of four to five animals each year. In addition, NPS restricts access to wolf den sites along the road, and if the wolf family groups in

the northeastern section of the park recover, or new groups form, and begin to den along the Park Road, the visitor viewing success will return to 40-50 percent or higher. He was encouraged to hear of high wolf density east of the Nenana River.

REPRESENTATIVE DRUMMOND asked how NPS manages to protect wolves in Yellowstone since its park boundaries span Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Also, if a buffer zone is granted, she questioned what would prevent the wolves from being lured to the new boundary further east.

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DR. STEINER was unsure of the relationship between Yellowstone, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming; however, last year the governor of Montana established a 300,000 acre bison conservation area along Yellowstone's boundary, which is a model for how a state can cooperate with a national park. Wolves were reintroduced in Yellowstone, and a comparison of Denali National Park and Preserve and Yellowstone wolves is provided in the committee packet. He acknowledged there is no perfect boundary for the park; however, the 340,000 acre Denali Wildlife Conservation Area proposed in 2016 would encompass almost 90-95 percent of the wolf forays from the eastern edge of the park. Dr. Steiner advised the area designated by the bill is a legitimate compromise that has been proposed multiple times, and is easily defined by mountain peaks from a public use and enforcement standpoint.

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VIC VAN BALLEMBERGHE said he is a wildlife biologist who served on BOG three times between 1985 and 2002. In 2002, during the time he was serving on the board, a buffer was created adjacent to the northeast corner of Denali National Park and Preserve to protect park wolves from hunting and trapping when they ventured out of the park in winter. Previously, wolf packs were reduced by legal and illegal hunting and trapping. The creation of the buffer was strongly supported by the public. Other buffer areas had been created, starting in 1992, including one along the Stampede Trail, but from 2002 to 2010 more wolves were taken, indicating that the buffers were too small. In 2010, the National Park Service and other organizations proposed to enlarge the northern buffer, and in spite of strong public support, BOG rejected the proposals and rescinded the existing buffers. In response to an earlier question, Mr. Van

Ballenberghe said the Nenana Canyon buffer created in 2002 did not have a sunset clause, but was rescinded by a BOG vote. During the past six years, sightings of wolves along the Park Road has dropped; key wolf packs have been disrupted, including the apparent elimination of a pack studied for 77 years, and frequently seen in the park. Petitions to BOG requesting emergency closures were rejected; however, after the six-year moratorium, BOG will again consider this issue. He opined BOG will not change its position and act to create an adequate buffer. He stated there are many biological, sociological, and economic reasons why buffers are needed and directed attention to HB 105 supporting documents found in the committee packet. At this time, a permanent solution such as HB 105 is needed; he expressed his strong support for the bill and urged for its passage. Mr. Van Ballenberghe related his personal experience as an Alaskan: Alaska has a diversity of animals not found elsewhere in the U.S., such as grizzly bears, polar bears, musk ox, and caribou, but wild wolves remain elusive. Over 42 years and many miles of travel in Alaska, he said he has only seen one wolf along the road system due to hunting, trapping, and wolf control programs. Over 36 years of travel in the park, previous to the recent disruption, he saw dozens of wolves near the road, which is the only opportunity for one who is interested in seeing and hearing wolves along the road system. Mr. Ballenberghe said HB 105 can provide what BOG will not: Preserve the unique opportunity to experience wolves in one small place that people can access.

[HB 105 was held over.]

[3:02:01 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Resources Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:02 p.m.