

# Our Stories, Our Lives

## Hunting and Trapping in Alaska's Interior

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

From the Arctic tundra of the North Slope to the thick spruce and cedar forests of Southeast, Alaskan history has been written in terms of Alaska's natural resources. These resources, from wood to gold, have historically commanded high prices on the international market, drawing many to Alaska in hopes of striking it rich. Today, oil, hard minerals, and fish stocks are the center of national attention, but the earliest marketable resource was fur. While demand and price were established in fashionable cities thousands of miles away, supply was driven by local factors. The resources and people of this land have long been impacted by the economics of distant demand and local supply.

#### The Development of a Trapping Economy

Years before Alaska was known to foreign countries and before European goods were introduced, fur trapping played a part in the seasonal cycle of Alaskan Indians and Eskimos. Using stone-tipped weapons, deadfalls made from wood, and snares made from babiche, the native people acquired furbearers to make articles of warm clothing and fancy trim. Historic trading ties linked the Bering Strait Eskimos with the Athabascans of the Interior and the Siberians to the west.

The first direct contacts between Native peoples and the Russian fur traders were made in the Aleutians during the second half of the 18th century. Here, the Russians forced the Aleuts to hunt sea otter and fur seal, often separating the men from their families so they could pursue distant populations of those animals.



Top: David and Daniel Rowland at their wall tent near McCarthy, ca. 2007.

COURTESY OF THE ALASKA TRAPPERS ASSOCIATION.

Above: Hunting provides an opportunity to pass along traditions to the next generation. Photo ca. 1957.

COURTESY OF THE GELVIN COLLECTION.

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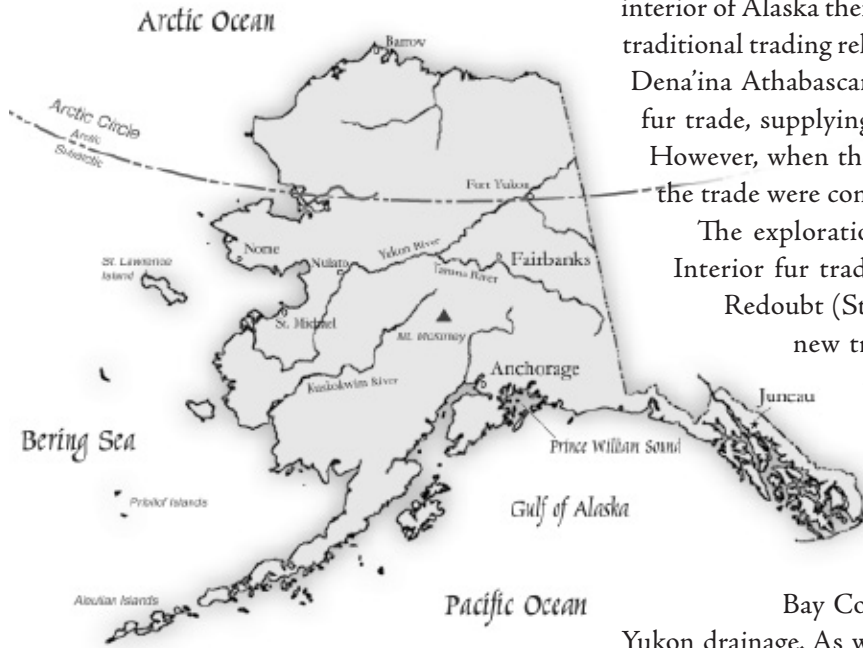
Designed by Dixon Jones.

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Museum of the North

The Russian traders worked their way to the east and finally to the mainland of Alaska. Long periods of sustained cold weather in the interior produce prime furs, and diverse habitats support different types of furbearers, including beaver, marten, wolverine, lynx, wolf, and river otter. When the Russians learned about the rich variety and quality of furs available in the interior of Alaska their attention turned inland. This intrusion disrupted the traditional trading relations between coastal and inland peoples. The coastal Dena'ina Athabascans enjoyed the position as middlemen in the Russian fur trade, supplying the Interior Athabascans with foreign trade goods. However, when the Russians moved inland, their positions of power in the trade were compromised.

The exploration of the Yukon River and the development of the Interior fur trade by the Russians was initiated from Mikhailovskii Redoubt (St. Michael), built in 1833. The exploration established new trading posts and diverted the Bering Strait fur trade directly into the company's hands. Now, direct ties with the Athabascans enabled the Russians to avoid the Eskimo middlemen.

The establishment of a trading post at Nulato in 1838 set the stage for competition between the Russian-American Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, which was moving east from Canada into the Yukon drainage. As was the case with the Russian-American Company, the England-based Hudson's Bay Company forts were located great distances from the headquarters and goods were often years in transit. The Russian-American Company at Nulato and the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Yukon both thousands of miles from their home company offices, were after the same furs. While the companies vied for fur, the Indians compared trade goods for the best deal. *(continued on page 10)*



MAP ILLUSTRATION BY KIRSTEN PICKARD.

Below: Merchandise was often transferred to trading posts by sternwheelers or steamships along the Yukon and other large rivers. Photo ca. 1925.

DR. ERNEST A. COOK PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION;  
UAF-2003-109-10; UAF ARCHIVES.



## THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN HUNTING AND TRAPPING

by Carol Gelvin-Reymiller

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*Growing up in the small rural town of Central, Alaska, how were you and your sister introduced to hunting and/or trapping?*

We were surrounded by it. It was a given that certain times of the year were marked by hunting or trapping (I think Mother thought about fishing year round!). Discussions about where to go hunting didn't seem to happen, at least overtly, but Dad or Mother, sometimes both, would just be "gone hunting." Some of my first memories are of the results of hunting, rather than the actual hunt itself. I recall Colleen and I being given small paring knives from the kitchen and we went to work next to Dad skinning a moose. We couldn't have been much older than 5 or 6 years old. The moose seemed huge to me (it was!). Discussions of temperatures and how long the meat had been hanging (or should hang) for aging are very early memories. I remember the kitchen table covered with moose or caribou meat; processing was always a lot of fun...packaging, etc...an activity where we could help out, sort of assembly line fashion. Everything was very clean and organized. Knives were constantly being sharpened. I also recall walking behind Mother and Dad hiking out to places looking for moose or caribou, brush on all sides. We had to be quiet and "keep our eyes peeled" even though visibility was limited at our height! Small animals were more Mother's thing... grouse, fish, ducks...it was the watching and listening which she particularly stressed. I recall Dad having us shoot a larger caliber rifle when we were about 12, and I remember

Mother setting up milk cans for us to practice our accuracy using a .22 rifle a year or two before that time. We hunted ptarmigan and grouse first. We began fly fishing about as soon as we could walk along the creek bank reasonably safely, about 5 years old.

Trapping was introduced to us also by its results, rather than the activity itself. Because the trapped animals were generally frozen, they were left in a heated outbuilding to thaw before skinning; Dad did a good share of that work. Occasionally he would bring a marten or weasel skin in the house which had gotten too dry to turn easily; he needed our smaller hands to finish turning it fur side out, or maybe he was just showing us what to do. I remember the stretching boards and tacks and the smell of the raw fur more than anything. I know Mother was much more involved later (when we were older and could take care of ourselves). Beginning when Colleen and I were about 13, we had our own small marten line across Crooked Creek toward the Crazy Mountains. This is when we learned the fine points of skinning and stretching fur (you're most careful with your very own catch!). To be truthful, I hadn't realized I had been "introduced" to hunting or trapping because it was integral to daily life,



Carol with her husband Scott and son Darwin, displaying their marten take for half of the winter, 1992.

COURTESY OF THE GELVIN COLLECTION.

but I suppose as parents, Mother and Dad would have considered the subject of what we should see or learn and at what age. Both of them grew up in families who hunted, trapped and fished, so presumably they had models to follow.

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*How would you characterize your father's and other male reactions to your interest in hunting?*

My father was very supportive, as he was of most all of my endeavors. I don't know, however, that being supportive or non-supportive of my hunting was something he would have contemplated as much as the reality of needing to get a moose or a couple caribou in from the field successfully. Dad was only too glad to have capable assistance from any family member, but logistics also always came into play. I think getting food was the priority. Later, when I was in my early

20s and Mother and Dad had no children at home, they probably felt less pressure to put food on the table, so to speak. During this time, we spent every autumn at moose camps together, and I think he was proud of any hunting or trapping I did with or without him. It certainly was a source of a lot of our conversations over the years, especially trapping, because it goes on all winter. He was great to talk to about sets or lures or trails. My brother could be more critical (especially when we were younger), but this I believe may have to do with the fact that he is older than I and wanted to show me or help me more than what I would have liked. He and I have also had some memorable hunting experiences together, and I think we respect one another's hunting and trapping abilities.

What I have noticed over the years about some male reactions to my interest or abilities in hunting and trapping is varied: some men basically dismiss or ignore the comments or input you give (they don't respond to you directly, as if it has no validity); other men find it a source of fascination as if this interest or knowledge is unusual, which is irksome because to me this implies women are normally incapable of having such interest or knowledge, or are somehow odd because of it; still other men seem to appreciate it and use this as a basis for conversation and friendship. The irksome reactions don't bother me now, but in the past they did, before I understood them to be reactions from males with limited experience or possessing stereotypes concerning women.

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*From what aspect of hunting/trapping do you derive your greatest sense of accomplishment and/or pleasure?*

I have to say, being out in the world, out of doors, whatever you want to call it, gives me the most pleasure. I think it's the sensory experience of feeling the breeze or rain or sun or snow and

seeing the plants, animals, and earth which is just so interesting and enjoyable. There is so much going on, and hunting or trapping makes you focus; it takes you out of yourself and into a different awareness of life and your surroundings. One of the pleasures I really miss is the dogs, ones I raised from birth, all lined out in pairs in front of the sled, pulling along through the quiet, short daylight in the middle of winter, checking the trapline. As far as sense of accomplishment, I think sitting down with friends or family and having a meal which consists of food your own family has gathered and grown is probably the best.

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*What challenges do you face, as a woman hunting and trapping, that men do not?*

I don't feel there are too many differences, really. If there are differences, I think they are related more to individual skills and strengths, rather than gender. In general for females, and in my case, smaller body mass can be a challenge; you have less weight to balance your snowmachine or tromp on a snow hook, but this is not insurmountable and can be overcome with good timing and planning. And there are advantages to being lighter.

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*Are the challenges different for you as compared to those your mother dealt with when you were growing up?*

I think Mother probably had to deal with a greater percentage of men who had expectations for women to be in particular roles. Women were meant to stay at home, take care of the children, and cook the meals, that sort of thing, and were less accepted as hunters or trappers (or fishers), at least in certain settings and circumstances. She didn't consider Dad as having those attitudes, and they certainly did a lot of hunting, trapping, and fishing together. However, if there was strife in



Cora Rivenburg with a grouse, ca. 1910-1912.

LAWYER AND CORA RIVENBURG PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, 1910-1912. UAF-1994-70-18. UAF ARCHIVES.

our house, it usually revolved around Dad going off with other people hunting while she had to stay home. At least that is what I perceived as a kid. As an adult, I think it may have been resentment concerning the role she was expected to play by default, even though there may have been little she could have done about it. Someone had to stay home with the children in certain instances, which is the same now as it was then. I don't think there are quite as large a percentage of men today with those stereotypical expectations of women...at least among the people I know.

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*How do you balance the responsibilities of being a mother, artist, student and a professional archaeologist, with finding time to hunt and trap? How is this different from when you lived in Central?*

I consider last year unusual (because of time spent on doctoral studies) in that I did not go moose hunting...the first



Belle Stevens returning from her trap line, ca. 1910-1912.

LAWYER AND CORA RIVENBURG PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, 1910-1912. UAF-1994-70-164. UAF ARCHIVES.

time I've missed it in 20 years or so. I was out of state the last time I missed hunting...20 years ago...also pursuing studies. In this sense, being a student, getting an education, has been a sacrifice in a way because it sometimes takes me away from other things I value. "Balance" is a good word for it; time management is critical. I've had to change the length of time I spend at hunting and trapping. Instead of spending two weeks hunting moose, I told myself I'd spend a few days here and there hunting closer to home this year. I hunt grouse over the weekends in the fall, or instead of putting traps out first thing in November, I put out a short line for a month over the Christmas break. I've learned to include my son first as a small boy and now as a teenager in these activities. Luckily, archaeological fieldwork is mainly a summer endeavor, which leaves some times in the spring and fall. I gather "data" and inspiration for both archaeology and art whenever I'm out, so hunting and trapping can

only add more to my other interests. It does seem like a lot sometimes to take care of everything needing attention, but I have never felt that categorizing myself is very fruitful...I have various interests that mesh together, hopefully in positive ways (or at least somewhat balanced!), to make the person I am. As with most people, I've had stages in my life where certain things are more dominant than others, and what dominates changes through time.

The major differences I find living in "town" as opposed to living in Central are pace and proximity. The pace of things in Fairbanks is more fragmented, less continuous. Numerous things are dealt with, things which may not necessary flow smoothly from one into the other because of the requirements of working with more people's schedules. The pace of things is irregular, I suppose, in comparison to a small place. I'm not saying this is good or bad. Hunting and trapping seem to be more regularly and easily dovetailed into other activities in

Central. Trails and hunting areas are in very close proximity (directly from the house), which allow for less hassle with loading and unloading gear, and staying warm. And I feel like I understand the area really well since its home. Fairbanks for me is a very distant starting point to get to places to hunt or trap. However, the proximity to certain types of educational experiences, people with common interests, and professional opportunities are much closer here than in Central. So to have those things, I have had to let go of some of the time I spend doing things like hunting and trapping directly; however, including those topics in my doctoral studies makes me less anxious about it.

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*What are your thoughts about the changing role of hunting and trapping in the lives of Interior Alaskans over the last 50 years? About the management of our natural resources?*

I suppose I wish most people understood hunting and trapping in a positive light. I think perhaps 50 years ago more people accepted that kids took off school to go moose hunting (if they were attending a regular school); or that hunting and trapping was more integral to life in Alaska (and in other places for that matter). On the other hand, people probably understood less about ecological principles, and possibly wildlife populations were not understood or managed as well because of it. I see management of natural resources as a moving target...we constantly have more to learn about how to manage resources because societies are constantly changing how resources are used or even defined. I have a lot of respect for people who choose to go into natural resource management...it seems to be such a politically charged and emotional field, as it probably should be since resources are what sustain us all.

What I have noticed also is a trend,

## SUBSISTENCE HERITAGE

For the first humans to walk on Alaskan soil, or indeed any soil, subsistence hunting and trapping was a matter of survival. Even with healthy trade networks, newly indigenous peoples had no choice but to fashion their meals and clothing from locally available resources. They were connected to the land in a very real, critical sense.

Over time, technologies have allowed humans to trade, to transport, and to create increasingly complex tools such as snow-machines, airplanes, riverboats, and roads. Now, almost all people on Earth have shifted away from a semi-nomadic lifestyle, no longer moving with the animals and the seasons. Living in cities, towns, and villages, most people rely on distant localities for goods they require.

But in recent years, the idea of “Living Green” has

received much attention, birthing terms such as “sustainability” and “locally-grown.” These are contemporary expressions intended to promote environmentally responsible living. Across the nation, there is an ever growing interest in eating organic foods, purchasing from local growers, and in reconnecting to the land.

Long before these ideas became popular as a lifestyle choice, Alaskan hunters and trappers were enjoying “organic” and “free-range” meat, though they had no need for these particular terms. Hunting for caribou and moose in season, and fishing when the salmon run, is an expression of “Alaskan-ness.” Just as in many places the desire to reconnect with one’s subsistence heritage has returned in force, in some parts of the world, people’s passion for this heritage has never gone forgotten.

perhaps stemming from ecological awareness, in which humans as a species are placed in a very negative light. Our use of resources, our impacts, or our presence on a landscape which is perceived as “pristine” is automatically seen as bad. From an anthropological perspective in which understanding human behavior at a given time period is a goal, this portrayal now of humans as negative interlopers is very interesting. As a parent, I think this attitude is alarming. To present our own species in such a negative light deserves serious consideration for what effects it will have on children; growing up with the perception that your species is responsible for basically trashing the natural resources of the earth is a heavy burden. Being exposed to the reality of how reliant we are on other species at a personal level is a good thing... understanding how to hunt or farm

or trap in a direct way seems to me to be necessary to gain an understanding of how we actually impact our natural resources, and how they impact us.

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*Where do you see the state of hunting and trapping in Alaska to be in fifty years? Are we truly operating at a sustainable level or are there too many other factors not in the hunter’s control?*

I think sustainability is critical; as to whether we are truly operating at a sustainable level, being aware is undoubtedly necessary. I think if we value as a society the knowledge and effort it takes to understand what sustainability is for our human population in interior Alaska, we will come close to maintaining our resources well. To have a society which values natural resources and the personal use of them requires our children to learn those values. In fifty

years, I think the state of hunting and trapping will be directly related to how well the human population personally appreciates and understands the issues of natural resource management. The subject of what factors hunters can control is an interesting one; there definitely needs to be communication among hunters and with resource managers who can see the larger view, and who can convey the larger picture in a meaningful way back to other hunters and the rest of the public. We can also teach our children, we can control our own behavior, we can communicate to others in thoughtful ways which might promote understanding of the issues (I consider my artwork to be communication about issues which matter to me), and we can vote and hope for the best!



# PREDATOR CONTROL IN ALASKA

## Background

Alaska is the only U.S. state with full complements of native big game, including moose, caribou, deer, sheep and mountain goats, and large predators such as grizzly bears, black bears and wolves.<sup>1</sup> Alaska currently enjoys sustainable populations of predators and prey, thanks largely to the management efforts of The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the Alaska Board of Game, formed of seven citizens appointed to determine hunting and trapping regulations and management programs. These two organizations manage wildlife by the mandates established in the Alaskan constitution, which states that all resources must be managed for the maximum benefit of all Alaskans.

These mandates can create controversy at times: predator numbers are sometimes reduced to benefit prey species that are important to Alaskans for food. Under direction from the Alaska State Legislature, ADF&G, and the Alaska Board of Game, the state has recently embarked on several programs to increase low moose and caribou populations by temporarily manipulating wolf and bear numbers.

## History of Predator Control Efforts in Alaska

Long before ADF&G was assigned responsibility for wildlife management, the indigenous people of Alaska subsisted off the land and found means to balance the predator/prey relationships in order to survive. In the Interior of Alaska, oral histories of the Athabascan people describe a kind of predator management by the taking of wolves, bears, eagles and otters whenever possible. Wolf populations were specifically managed through the practice of denning, where cubs were taken at their dens.

In the 1800s, the arrival of outsiders as a result of the fur trade and gold rushes brought increased pressure on game populations as well as additional pressure on wolves, bears, and other furbearers for supplying the fur market. In 1915, the Territorial Legislature established a bounty on wolves that remained in effect until after statehood.

As a result of increased mining activities at the beginning of the 20th century, hunting to feed mining camps left populations of moose and caribou at historically low levels. In part, as a response to these low population numbers, the Alaska Game Commission was formed and imposed the first game harvest regulations in 1925.

In 1948, the federal government's Fish and Wildlife Branch of Predator and Rodent Control began operating in Alaska with the primary assignment of killing wolves, bears, coyotes, eagles, and other predators to bring an increase in moose, caribou, deer, and mountain sheep. Primary control methods included the use of poisons, although year-round trapping of wolves was permitted. Strychnine, encapsulated in chunks of seal blubber, was scattered around carcasses of prey. "Coyote getters," made from cyanide-loaded cartridges that fired into the

<sup>1</sup>"Prey" generally refers to moose and caribou and "predators" to wolves and bears.



Alaskan wolf *Canus lupus*.  
COURTESY SOFTKEY INTERNATIONAL, INC.



Alaskan brown bear *Ursus arctos*.  
COURTESY US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE.

*An Old Bull's Thoughts Turn to Love*  
by Michio Hoshino.  
UAP2000-007-066



mouths of wolves or other carnivores that pulled on the scented capsules, were widely deployed. The federal control agency emphasized maximizing the total number of predators killed. Federal predator control was widespread throughout the Territory. Little effort was devoted to focus control in areas of presumed need. As aircraft started to be used more commonly, the late 1940s also saw the beginnings of winter aerial hunting.

After statehood in 1959, the administration of fish and wildlife resources was transferred to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in 1960. The department was staffed by young, university-trained biologists who were aware of the changing attitudes toward wildlife management in North America. They were outspoken in their opposition to the use of poison to control predators, and its use was discontinued almost immediately. The wolf was reclassified as a big-game animal and furbearer by the Board of Fish and Game in 1963, but it was not until 1968 that the Alaskan legislature gave authority to the Board of Fish and Game to abolish bounties within game management units. By 1975, bounties were no longer paid on wolves except in southeast Alaska.

During recent decades, predator control has been attempted in less than 10% of the state, and has been targeted only towards areas where research has shown that predation by wolves and bears is keeping moose or caribou populations at levels far lower than habitat can support. Predator control is a management tool, and as such, is different than hunting. Principles of fair chase do not apply. Instead, control programs must focus on effectiveness, successful techniques, and safety.

### Modern Considerations for Predator Management

**Social Context**—Moose and caribou provide an important food source for rural and urban Alaskans. Wild game is a high quality, local, organic, free-range food source, preferred by many over meats shipped in from far away. In addition, many small and/or rural communities have few or no practical alternatives to local meat.

Citizen views range from the belief that wildlife populations should not be manipulated for human benefit, to a demand for actively managing populations to allow people to harvest a higher percentage of wildlife populations annually. No single management approach can satisfy all users. ADF&G uses different management strategies in different parts of the state to provide for different values and demands.

**Legal Context**—The Board adopts regulations to conserve and develop the state's wildlife resources, and allocates uses of those resources. Using a well-established public process, the Board promulgates hunting, trapping, and other wildlife regulations, including predator management directives.

Alaska's Constitution charges state government with managing Alaska's fish and wildlife resources on the sustained yield principle. That is, long-term harvest rates should not exceed regeneration. This



principle ensures wildlife numbers are maintained in perpetuity at sustainable levels.

In 1994, the Alaska State Legislature enacted the “Intensive Management Law,” requiring the Board to designate areas where human consumptive use is the highest priority use of wildlife, and then set prey population and harvest objectives for these areas. If these objectives are not met, the Board must consider intensive management actions, including:

- Reducing or eliminating non-resident hunting;
- Reducing or eliminating resident hunting;
- Liberalizing hunting and trapping regulations for wolves and bears; and
- Implementing habitat improvement projects (primarily prescribed fires).

If these actions do not or are unlikely to result in higher levels of prey for food for people, and predation is the key limiting factor, the Board may consider predator control. Predator control measures are proposed by the public or ADF&G, evaluated by ADF&G, and considered by the Board. If adopted, programs are designed by ADF&G and conducted by ADF&G staff, specially permitted members of the public, or a combination of both. Not all public proposals for predator control are approved for implementation. In fact, historically, more have been rejected than approved.

**Biological Context**—Unlike other parts of the U.S., prey populations in Alaska are not usually limited by habitat. Instead, most moose populations and small caribou herds are held at levels lower than habitat can support by large predators. In other states, prey are primarily limited by habitat quantity and quality, which is why Alaska needs to consider predator control as a wildlife management tool.

Control programs are designed to reduce the effects of predation by temporarily reducing predator numbers, not eliminating them. Programs must provide for the long-term sustainability of populations of predators and prey. Control efforts are suspended after prey population and harvest goals have been met. Typically, predator populations then begin to increase in response to an increased food resource. If regulated conventional hunting and trapping harvests of predators cannot limit the growth of predator populations, control programs may be reinstated.

Habitat quality, weather, disease, and accidents can also affect the abundance of prey populations and are monitored by wildlife managers. Hunting and trapping seasons and bag limits, as well as predator control programs, are constantly monitored and regularly revised to make sure populations are sustainable in the long-term.

## Conclusions

While predator control programs in Alaska remain controversial, ADF&G is constitutionally-mandated with the responsibility of managing Alaska’s wildlife and ensuring the future of all species. At this time, there is no indication from available scientific data that state-sponsored wolf or bear control programs have created conservation concerns for wolf or bear populations on either a statewide or local basis. As long as Alaskans continue to depend on moose and caribou as a food source, and continue to hunt and trap for a variety of reasons, there will be a question of how to keep a balance between the predators and prey. 🦌

“It is not expected that one single management approach will satisfy everyone. Therefore, the Board of Game directs ADF&G to use different management strategies in different parts of the state to provide for different values and demands.”

—From *Understanding Intensive Management and Predator Control in Alaska*, [http://wildlife.alaska.gov/management/control/predator\\_brochure.pdf](http://wildlife.alaska.gov/management/control/predator_brochure.pdf)



Alaskan caribou *Rangifer tarandus*.  
COURTESY US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE.

“The trading goods which are destined for [Fort Yukon] take two years in transportation from York Factory on Hudson’s Bay. One portage of over 50 miles has to be made, between Fort McPherson, on Peel River, to LaPierre’s House of the Upper Porcupine. Here the goods are carried on sleds in winter across the high, rough and broken tableland between the two rivers. On account of these difficulties in transportation, few provisions are ever sent to this isolated post.”

(Dall 1870:103).

Fur buyers and traders collecting raw furs along the Yukon River, ca. 1910-1912. LAWYER AND CORA RIVENBURG PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, 1910-1912. UAF-1994-70-125. UAF ARCHIVES.



## Historical Perspectives *(continued from page 2)*

The Hudson’s Bay Company seems to have had a strategic advantage over the Russian-American Company. With the breakup of the Yukon River, British traders followed the ice down the river to the mouth of the Tanana, and at the traditional place of Nuklukayat (Nuchalawoyya) they met and traded with the assembled Athabascan groups, returning upstream before the Russians could ascend the river from Nulato.

After the purchase of Alaska by the United States in 1867, both the Russian-American Company and the Hudson’s Bay Company were forced to vacate their holdings. As they pulled out, they were replaced in the interior by the Alaska Commercial Company and individual traders. Men such as Jack McQuesten, Al Mayo, and Arthur Harper are remembered from this period in part because they intermarried with local people and stayed in the country. These were enterprising men who lived off the land and combined trading with prospecting.

The gold rushes of the late 19th/early 20th century brought many newcomers north to seek fortune. Many became disillusioned and turned to trapping as a way to make a living. Some married and established families. The increased pressure on the land led to establishment of trapping areas and rights of use passed on within the families through successive generations. This system of land rights continues to the present day in many areas of the Interior.

### The Yearly Cycle of Trapping

For many people raised in the Interior during the first half of the twentieth century, trapping was a way of life that demanded a specialized yearly cycle: leaving the village in the fall before freeze-up with the winter’s “grub stake” (supplies advanced to the trapper in return for a part of the winter trapping return), families headed up a tributary stream until they reached the main cabin. Before snowfall, wood had to be cut and the winter supply of meat obtained. Soon after freeze-up, the traps and snares would be set and from then until Christmas the trapper was moving, checking his trapline, then

back to the cabin to skin and stretch fur. Some families traveled by dog team to the village at Christmas time to visit with friends, celebrate the holiday, and trade furs to the trader in exchange for store goods.

After the holidays, the families returned to the trapline routine until spring when the orientation shifted from the major fur animals to beaver and muskrat. Most families stayed out on their traplines until spring breakup (usually May or June) and then traveled to the village by boat. After a short visit in the village, the family went to fish camp where they remained until they had sufficient fish dried for their own needs and for dog feed. Then it was fall and time to re-supply and leave for trapping.

This yearly cycle was experienced by most of today's elders, Native and non-Native, raised in the Interior. As schools became more important, it became difficult for families to maintain a life on the land and in the village. For adults, exceptions to the pattern occurred during periods of wage-labor employment such as road building, railroad construction, mining with its related activities, military service, and general construction. In most cases, trapping was the activity people returned to after short periods of wage-labor because they knew the country, had the skills, and it was consistently available despite variations in prices paid for fur. Highly labor intensive, trapping demands long hours and hard work with relatively small and often uncertain return.

### Trapping Today

Today the village has increased in importance as a focus of activities, with permanent homes, electricity, telephone, health aides, churches, and K-12 schooling. The increased commitment of people to the services and amenities of village life has made the snowmachine integral to modern village life. Snowmachines permit rapid access to family traplines, allow trappers to check lines in less time, and eliminate the need to fish for dog food. Just as the snowmachine liberates, it ties the trapper to a fuel source and cash



The construction of the ALCAN (Alaska Highway) in 1942 created economic opportunities for wage labor. ALASKA HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, CA. 1942-1943. ASL-PCA-193; ALASKA STATE LIBRARY.



The introduction of snow machines in the 1960s increases dependence on outside supply of fuel and parts.

AMERICAN JAPANESE JOINT EXPEDITION (AJJEX), 1967, RECORDS; UAF-2006-131-33; UAF ARCHIVES.

from trapping, the values derived from being able to maintain contact with traditional areas, traditional skills, and family associations out on the land remain central to many Interior residents.

A village trapper may opt to work on a construction project during the summer to supplement his fur catch in order to purchase a new snowmachine and fuel. A village office worker may leave on weekends to set and check his trapline many miles away. A busy native leader may decide to take three weeks off in the spring so he and his family can return to their camp and hunt muskrats. An elder speaks proudly of his sons who have returned to trapping after years of schooling and wage employment. ❧

*This piece is based on a longer article written by William Schneider, Trapping Furbearers in Alaska, 1980. See full reference below.*

### Additional Readings

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necessary for buying fuel, parts, and new machines.

For those people, Native and non-native alike, who reside in urban areas, snowmachines, airplanes, ATVs, and boats are essential equipment in maintaining a lifestyle that incorporates trapping into the yearly cycle. The cost of purchasing, operating, and maintaining these machines has skyrocketed. Despite the costs and the low financial returns

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