

## **Abundance-based fish, game management can benefit all**

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There was a time in America's history when natural resources were so abundant that the thought of ever depleting them seemed absurd. However, with the Industrial Revolution and increased human population, it became obvious that people not only were capable of harming the environment, they were doing so at an alarming rate. As we depleted our resources, competition to exploit the few remaining resources predictably escalated.



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From these excesses was born an awakening that came to be known as the conservation movement.

Under the guidance of great visionaries such as Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, we began a process of conserving and restoring our once-great natural resources. Fundamental to the conservation model was the concept of managing on a sustained yield basis.

Sustained yield is the application of time-tested agricultural principles to the natural environment. In his 1933 book, "Game Management," Aldo Leopold, one of the founders of modern wildlife management, defined game management as "the art of making land produce sustained annual crops of wild game for recreational use."

Some 25 years later, as the framers of Alaska's constitution contemplated the proper management of Alaska's vast natural resources, they took the sustained yield principle to a new level. Not only would they protect these precious assets for

future generations, they would do so for the maximum benefit of Alaska's people (Article VIII, Sections 1-4).

Upon this foundation, the concept of abundance-based management was built. Such management requires man to work with the land to produce the maximum sustainable yield.

Alaska statutes define intensive management as "measures to enhance, extend, and develop the population to maintain high levels or provide for higher levels of human harvest, including control of predation and prescribed or planned use of fire and other habitat improvement techniques."

Abundance management is also deeply rooted in the culture and traditions of Alaska. Throughout the state, Alaskans rely heavily on the bounty produced by their natural resources. Central to these traditions is the premise that mankind has not only the ability but also the obligation to manipulate natural systems for the benefit of people, as well as the benefit of the resource itself.

Naturally, when resources become scarce, increased competition for the remaining resources exacerbates the challenge. Throw in rising energy costs and high unemployment and the stage is set for impassioned human conflict, as well as further resource depletion. This is precisely why management of our renewable resources (especially fish and game) to produce abundance is so important.

It has been said, "A rising tide raises all ships." When properly applied, abundance-based fish and game management benefits all user groups.

So how do we properly apply the concept?

The first step is to identify the species and populations we need to increase. Next we identify the environmental resistance inhibiting the growth/maintenance of the population (e.g., weather, poor habitat, over-hunting, predation, etc.). Finally we initiate a plan to mitigate the identified resistance to the extent possible.

A well-conceived plan defines the measure(s) of success, provides for user access and may involve the manipulation of several factors and employ several techniques simultaneously. Selecting these techniques must always consider humaneness, selectivity, efficiency and cost effectiveness. While some techniques are more controversial than others, all are management tools and should be used properly.

Reducing wolves should never become a war on wolves any more than harvesting moose should become a war on moose. It is important to remember that moose are to wolves what vegetation is to moose -- food.

As we manage for abundance, we must realize that if we have more moose than the habitat can support, we must reduce the number of moose or increase the habitat or both. The same is true of moose and wolves. All are important components within the abundance management concept.

Abundance management embodies the realization that humans are not merely intruders in the environment, nor are they merely guardians. The role of humans should be one of thoughtful intervention to produce abundant and sustainable populations of fish and game for all to enjoy.

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