Feds to ban some hunting in Alaskan refuges

BY KARIN BRULLIARD THE WASHINGTON POST

Alaska has long allowed authorities and hunters to kill bears and wolves on national wildlife refuges as part of what it called an "intensive predator management" program. Approved methods included shooting wolves and their pups in dens, using bait to hunt bears, killing mother bears with their cubs and one made famous by former Alaska governor Sarah Palin: gunning down wildlife from helicopters.

That's now about to change. In defiance of several Alaska officials, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved regulations that ban nearly all predator hunting on national wildlife refuges that is not approved by the federal government and "based on sound science and in response to a conservation concern." The new regs specifically prohibit hunting bear cubs as well as bear hunting using traps, snares or helicopters, among other methods.

Alaska's predator hunting has been a flashpoint in a growing battle between state and federal officials over who has authority over federal lands. Alaska officials, who criticized the ban as fed-

eral overreach, say their prostand up for the authorities gram increases moose and caribou populations that attract hunters and serve as a food source for rural Alaskans. But in a column for the Huffington Post on Wednesday, Fish and Wildlife Director Dan Ashe denounced it as unethical and based on lion acres, or about 114 flawed science about predator-prey relationships.

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"Over the past several years, the Alaska Board of Game has unleashed a withering attack on bears and wolves that is wholly at odds with America's long tradition of ethical, sportsmanlike, fair-chase hunting," Ashe wrote. "We have a long history of cooperative management with the states, including Alaska, and we have deep respect and admiration for our state agency professional colleagues. But there

and principles that underpin our work and say 'no.

The new rule, which takes effect in early September, will protect a lot of predators on a vast amount of land. National wildlife refuges in Alaska cover 73 milsquare miles, and include the 20 million-acre National Arctic Wildlife Refuge. The regulations exempt subsistence hunting.

Fish and Wildlife often goes along with state rules for hunting on national wildlife refuges. But it has shown increasing frustration with Alaska's liberalization of predator hunting, which wildlife advocacy organizations say is unusually cruel. In its announcement, Fish and Wildlife cited "public interest and concern' about the bear and wolf killings and said the regulations simply "clarify" federal domain over the refuges.

"Every moose or caribou killed by a wolf or bear is one less hunting license fee paid to the state," said Wayne Pacelle, the president and CEO of the Humane Society of the United States, which praised the comes a time when the U.S. new regulations. "But Fish & Wildlife Service must there's a booming ecotour- members of Congress are

A grizzly bear enjoys a salmon he caught on Skilak Lake in Alaska in 2012.

ism business in Alaska, and seeking to prevent similar turn the rule banning the people go to these parks and refuges because they want to see the animals. When you shoot them. . .you diminish the numbers of animals and the experiences of people who trek to Alaska to have the thrill of a lifetime."

Pacelle noted that some

federal government rulemaking, a trend Ashe called part of an effort to "erode federal management authority piecemeal, dealing death by a thousand cuts.'

Alaska Rep. Don Young, a Republican, said in a statement Wednesday that he has proposed legislation to overstate's predator control program.

"Make no mistake — the size, scope and impact of this rule is enormous," Young said. "This unilateral power grab fundamentally alters Alaska's authority to manage wildlife across all areas of our state.'

Brown bat mystery in Washington state

BY DARRYL FEARS THE WASHINGTON POST

White nose syndrome, the mass killer of bats from the East Coast to Oklahoma, somehow afflicted a little brown bat in the Cascade Mountains region of Wash-

That shouldn't have been possible. Bats only fly so far, and it's taken the fungus 11 years to spread 1,500 miles from Albany, New York, where it was first detected. So how did it suddenly jump another 1,300 miles from Oklahoma to the Cascades?

The question might not be answered for months. But what's certain, according to

the U.S. Geological Survey's original fungus. A DNA and never fly out, but also National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisconsin, is that the fungus on the Washington bat matches the Pseudogymnoascus destructans that has killed at least 7 million bats in the East and the Midwest. The USGS announced the results Wednes-

The notion that this could happen was so outlandish that scientists considered a variety of other explanations. They wondered if the fungus were a different strain brought from elsewhere in the world by a traveler who'd unknowingly tracked it, or if it were some kind of clone of the

analysis put those theories to rest.

"Although it remains unclear how [Pseudogymnoascus destructans] reached Washington, this finding guides us to look to North America as the source," said Jonathan Sleeman, director of the National Wildlife Health Center.

Here's why that sends chills up the spines of bat biologists and the close-knit groups of regular people who love the animals. White nose kills most of what it touches — not only little brown bats, which enter caves and mines for their annual winter migration

big brown bats, Indiana bats and a host of others. In Pennsylvania, more than 95 percent of little brown bats were gone in 2012.

More than likely, the number of dead bats has surpassed the 7 million estimate that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offered that year. The agency dialed down talk of the estimate because it was challenged and proving the number was hard. But over the last five years, bats have only continued to die, with no cure in sight.

Added to the mystery of how white nose first reached the United States, and how



Little brown bats that are free of white-nose syndrome cling to a cave wall in 2011 near Allagash Lake in Maine.

to kill it, is how it reached Washington unnoticed.

"Every single avenue we look at seems far fetched," Greg Falxa, a wildlife biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, said in April after the

dying bat was found by a hiker. "This bat had the deterioration already, which suggests the fungus didn't just get here this year. Who knows how it got here? Everything is speculation

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