

Hunters in the 1890s called for a national wildlife refuge on the Kenai

by Jim Hall

As many readers know, the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge was originally called the Kenai National Moose Range. The Moose Range was established by Executive Order on December 16, 1941 by President Franklin Roosevelt. The land was set aside from unreserved federal lands for the American public in order to protect the giant Kenai moose, and subsequently, to protect and conserve all species of fish & wildlife found here on the majestic Kenai Peninsula. The formation of this conservation effort, however, had a much earlier beginning.

Recently I returned from a 60-day assignment with the Department of the Interior in Washington DC, where I worked with the office of the Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Basically that's the office that provides oversight for everything done by both the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the National Park Service. One of the interesting things I discovered while working in the Main Interior building was the Main Interior Library, which encompasses the 150+ year history of land management by the Department of Interior.

I wish that I had possessed unlimited time to dig through the archives of information located in that huge library, but alas, I was constricted to lunch time, and a couple of afternoons after work. Despite being limited on time, I did find some interesting material, and some of the articles that I found on the history of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge were very enlightening.

For example, *Outdoor Life* magazine was founded in Colorado in 1898, and catered primarily to Western sportsmen. Almost all issues are available in DC in the Interior Library, and I got the opportunity to look through the "early years" of the conservation movement in North America through the words of sportsmen from the time period. Few people may realize that the conservation movement in North America was largely developed, organized and implemented by sportsmen from the turn of the 20th Century.

President Theodore Roosevelt was listed in several articles from the early years of *Outdoor Life*. Roo-

sevelt went on to create the National Wildlife Refuge System with his establishment of Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge (Florida) in 1903. Looking back through those early magazines, including *Outdoor Life*, *Forest and Stream*, *Field and Stream*, and *The Pacific Sportsman*, it was very plain where the hearts and pocket books of those early sportsmen were directed.

Although Dall Deweese is the first person on record to call for the establishment of an Alaska Game Preserve (see *Refuge Notebook*, Sept. 21, 2001). The first record I personally located calling for the preservation of land in Alaska came in an article in the March, 1902 edition of *Outdoor Life* by one W.T. Hornaday. Mr. Hornaday's article was titled "National Game Preserve For Alaska," and he proposed a vast game preserve encompassing all of the lands in southern Alaska from Yakutat Bay to the Nushagak River, including the Alaska Peninsula and Kodiak Island (which he spelled Kadiak Island). His verbalized his fear as, "Nature has been millions of years in developing the wonderful animal forms now inhabiting our arctic provinces, but which foolish and short-sighted man is now thoughtlessly exterminating." He went on to say "We of to-day have no right, either moral or legal, to destroy all the zoological resources of nature, and hand over to our grand-children a world destitute of wildlife." I made a copy of this article, and many others of historical note, and they are available to anyone interested.

In that same *Outdoor Life* edition, there was another article by the famous Colorado hunter Dall DeWeese calling for "The Protection of Alaska Game." In his article DeWeese calls for the establishment of game laws, and writes at length of the wildlife he found on the Kenai Peninsula from 1897 until 1901. He also goes on to imply that some irresponsible sportsmen, but primarily market hunters (supplying the mining camps) were decimating the wildlife of the Kenai Peninsula. We know today that this happened as DeWeese described: through the use of poison, wolves were extirpated (locally extinct), and fox were decimated to the point of scarcity. By 1915 cari-

bou were listed as “scarce,” and totally gone from the Kenai Peninsula by 1920 (they were re-stocked in the 1960s and 1980s).

Forty years of debate later, the Kenai National Moose Range was finally established—eighteen years before Alaska reached Statehood. When I hunt the Kenai Mountains and the benchlands of Lake Tustumena, hike the trails along the Skilak Loop Wildlife Recreation Area, and canoe the Swanson River and Swan Lake canoe systems, I marvel as I see the indige-

nous wildlife and spectacular scenery. I am thankful that those who came before us had the wisdom and strength to fight for the greater good; without their efforts we would live in a different (and I believe poorer) World. Especially here on the Kenai.

Jim Hall is the Deputy Refuge Manager for the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.