

POLAR BEAR IMPORTATION

A panel of legal and scientific experts from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service sat like chastised children as members of the House Committee on Resources fired salvo after salvo of Congressional outrage at the agency's three-year indifference to federal law and the intent of Congress demanding that the agency allow importation of legally-hunted polar bear trophies. "Who got to you?" Charged Georgia Rep. Charles Norwood at the House Resources Committee on April 30.

As the Interior Department of biologists and lawyers were being dismissed, Committee Chairman and Boone and Crockett Club member, Don Young (R-Alaska) demanded every document from the Service detailing the three-year ordeal in formulating polar bear regulations. He accused the agency of seemingly answering to some unknown "authority" higher than the President, Congress or the people of the United States.

At issue is the three-year delay by the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service to issue regulations allowing American hunters to import trophies from legal Canadian polar bear hunts. Under the law, each hide kept in cold storage in Canada represents \$1,000 import permit fee, the proceeds of which will be reinvested in polar bear conservation research. The Interior Department's unwillingness to act promptly signaled a disdain by the United States for Canadian wildlife management policies and threatened the liveli-

hood of Canada's indigenous people, the Inuits.

Despite the USF&WS acknowledgment that Canada's polar bear conservation policies were "the best in the world" and that keeping dead bear hides in Canadian deep freezes while U.S. biologists flyspecked Canadian polar bear data defied "common sense," the Service nevertheless refused to budge on complying with the committee's demand that all hostage hides be released.

David Akeagok, an Inuit and a director of the Inuit Hunters and Trappers Association, testified that polar bear hunting represents fully a third of the Inuit economy. He also respectfully but bluntly asked that those from the world of green trees and hot sun "stay out of our business and don't tell us how to manage our wildlife." He defined trophy hunting as part of subsistence hunting. "They (non-Inuit hunters) take the worthless parts (essentially the bear's hide) and we take the valuable parts (the meat)." A single polar bear trophy hunter infuses \$20,000 into Inuit communities, he said.

Safari Club International's Director of Conservation and Boone and Crockett Club member, Dr. William Morrill testified that true conservation is not found in computer-generated data. "Conservation is what happens on the ground, where the species interact with the humans who share the habitat. In Canada, the polar bear



management system is an example of a sustained use conservation program that is working." Dr. Morrill states that the Interior Department intransigence on this issue is an "injustice to Canada and her people who live in the hunting land, to the great white bear, and to the people of the world."

After three years of delay, the Fish and Wildlife Service finally issued its ruling that allows importation of pre-1994 hides and those taken in future hunts from only five of Canada's 12 polar bear management areas. Service representatives left the Committee chambers without explaining how a bear hide kept in cold storage is relevant to efforts to conserve live polar bear.

—SAFARI CLUB INTERNATIONAL

20 YEARS OF PUTTING SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN

The historic city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was the site for the 20th annual convention for the Foundation of North American Wild Sheep (FNAWS) -- raising nearly \$3 million dollars for wildlife conservation programs benefitting the wild sheep of North America.

High bid during the auction was \$300,000 for a highly desirable big-horn sheep permit donated by the Arizona Game and Fish Department. 100% of the monies raised from the sale of this permit are returned to the State of Arizona for their wild sheep conservation efforts. A Montana big-

horn tag brought \$238,000 while the convention audience was in awe when the Alaska state permit sold for \$200,000! A newcomer to the permit arena, the Alaska sale was permitted by a law adopted by Alaska legislators last year, with the auction revenue dedicated for sheep research in Alaska. In all over \$1.5 million dollars was generated from the auction of 22 permits sponsored by various states, Canadian provinces and one foreign country.

As pressures mount from loss of habitat, predation, disease and lack of funding for management, the Foundation has emerged as a membership organization to fill a vital

role in sheep conservation, and has become a leader in its field. The Foundation, combined with its chapters and affiliates, has underwritten nearly \$20 million in project funding.

The recovery of wild sheep to their indigenous range, in abundance and health, is without a doubt the wildlife success story of this century. From its beginning in 1977, to the present, the Foundation has focused on the challenge of sound sheep management and has provided the funding resources to make a significant impact into the 21st century.

—FOUNDATION OF NORTH AMERICAN WILD SHEEP

REWARD MONEY PRESENTATION ANNOUNCED

Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Michael Finley is pleased to announce that the park presented a \$7,500 reward to Norman Joe Shafer of Salt Lake City, Utah, for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the man who killed and removed the antlers from the carcass of a well-known and celebrated elk in Yellowstone National Park.

Chad S. Beus, 24 years old, of Salt Lake City was convicted in U.S. District Court in Cheyenne, Wyoming, on April 3, 1995, of misdemeanor poaching and felony witness tampering. He was fined \$20,000; ordered to pay Yellowstone \$10,000 restitution; forfeited the rifle used to kill the elk; sentenced to eight months in prison and three

years supervised probation; and prohibited from owning firearms.

Beus killed the large 8 by 6 point bull elk known as "Charger" in Elk Park, near Norris Junction late in the evening of September 18, 1993. He hacked off the animal's skull cap and antlers and left the carcass on the bank of the Gibbon River. The animal was discovered by photographers early the next morning.

A nationwide search and inter-agency investigation focused on Beus when Norman Joe Shafer, a taxidermist in the Salt Lake City area, contacted Yellowstone National Park investigators after Beus took the elk rack to Shafer's shop to have it mounted. Shafer recognized the antlers from an article in *Bugle* magazine. Beus later attempted to bribe his companion to take responsibility for killing the animal.

Most of the reward money was from court-ordered restitution paid by Beus; the remaining money was donated to the park by several organizations and private persons. Organizations included: Boone and Crockett Club (\$1,000), Safari Club International (\$1,000), and Livingston Rebuild Center (\$500). Over 16 individuals also donated money.

Superintendent Finley expressed his appreciation for each person who contributed either money or information which led to the successful resolution and prosecution of this crime. He noted, "Although the fines levied by the district court will not compensate for the loss of this magnificent animal, the penalty and large reward will be deterrent to other persons who may be tempted to poach inside Yellowstone National Park."

—NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PROPOSED ELK REINTRODUCTION

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR), and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) are jointly considering reintroducing free-ranging elk to the Tennessee portion of Land Between the Lakes and southeastern Kentucky if public support for the project is favorable. Over the next several months, the Agencies will be collecting public comment on the proposal. A decision on whether to proceed could come sometime this summer.

The TWRA and TVA are proposing to release 30 elk (8 bulls; 22 cows) each year for two years. If these releases go well, then a release of 100 animals (25 bulls; 75 cows) the third year and possible a release of another 100 the fourth year could take place.

Each of the 30 elk released during the first two years will be fitted with radio transmitters to allow biologists to track their movements. Radio locations of released animals will enable biologists to determine the annual home ranges and habitat preferences of elk on the Land Between the Lakes. If any elk leave the area, the radio transmitter allow the animals to be located and returned to the area.

In an attempt to prevent elk from leaving, a method known as

"soft release" would be used. With this technique, elk brought to the area would be held in a holding pen for three weeks to allow time for them to acclimate, reduce stress, and reduce long distance movements immediately after release.

The TWRA and TVA are working with the Southeastern Cooperative Disease Study veterinarians, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to meet testing requirements to ensure that elk are tested and vaccinated to prevent introducing any diseases.

In a joint statement issued by the TWRA, KDFWR and TVA, the reason for the attempt to reintroduce elk is, "Elk were native to Kentucky and Tennessee and, through a partnership, TWRA, KDFWR and TVA are proposing limited reintroductions of elk in selected areas of suitable habitat. The purpose is to develop a sustainable elk herd of adequate size for viewing, education and hunting. The primary sites currently being considered are the Tennessee portion of Land Between the Lakes and southeast Kentucky."

Current plans would be to have a simultaneous initial release of 200 animals this winter. If the project goes forward, the first release would occur north of Hazard, Kentucky on the



Cyprus Amax Wildlife Management Area, which spans three counties in southeastern Kentucky. This area lies within 2.6 million acres of land that can support elk. Three other release sites in the area would also receive a total of 600 animals in the future to complete reintroduction.

Elk were once found in every county in Tennessee. The last elk sighted in Tennessee was killed in Obion County in 1865.

TWRA's and TVA's proposal to release 30 animals would be in addition to the already established herd that is located in the Kentucky portion of the Land Between the Lakes. This herd would remain enclosed. The agency is actively working with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to assist in funding this proposal.

—TENNESSEE WILDLIFE RESOURCES AGENCY AND KENTUCKY DEPT. OF FISH & WILDLIFE RESOURCES