

## NATIONAL PARKS

### Wolf killings revive calls for protective zone around Denali

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Alaska officials have imposed an emergency ban on wolf hunting and trapping next to Denali National Park. Here, a masked man armed with an AR-15 assault weapon stands next to 10 dead wolves that were shot 70 miles east of the park. This photo and others were emailed anonymously to Rick Steiner, a retired professor at the University of Alaska and a board member of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. The group published the photos on its web site yesterday. Special to E&E News

Rick Steiner, a retired professor at the University of Alaska, said he was disgusted when he looked at the two photographs emailed to him anonymously Saturday, showing 10 dead wolves.

The first photo showed a masked man next to a snowmobile, armed with an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle, standing behind the animals at a site near Denali, a 6-million-acre national park and preserve in Alaska. The second showed the same man in a building, standing next to the hanging carcasses.

"It was reprehensible — and I think most Alaskans will feel this way, as well," Steiner, from Anchorage, said yesterday. "But this stuff goes on all the time in Alaska. There's over 1,000 wolves killed here every year. It's too many."

Fearing that an excess have been killed this year, Alaska officials this week imposed an emergency ban on wolf hunting next to the park. A similar prohibition on wolf trapping will go into effect next Monday.

The move by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to cut short this year's seasons has renewed calls for a permanent no-kill buffer zone that would protect wild animals next to the park.

It's something that Steiner, a board member of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, has sought for years. He noted a study that found 16 percent of Denali's visitors caught a glimpse of a wolf last year, compared to 45 percent in 2010.



This photo, which was also emailed anonymously to Rick Steiner, shows the same man standing next to hanging wolf carcasses. Special to E&E News

"There needs to be a zone where park predator species — including grizzly bears, wolves, wolverines and lynx — are not killed so that the 600,000 visitors that come to the park in the summer get to see them, instead of the four or five guys on the boundary that get to kill them," Steiner said. "I mean, the math is ridiculously overwhelming in favor of the protected buffer. ... You can go ask any third-grader if that makes sense to them, and they'd say, 'Of course, that makes sense.' If you don't kill them, you get to see them. It is really just about that simple."

The photographs have caused a stir in Alaska and elsewhere, prompting state officials to call them part of a "media campaign." Steiner said the person who emailed the photos shut down the email account immediately after sending them. PEER published the photos on the group's website yesterday, calling it an "assault rifle slaughter."

Alaska Wildlife Troopers said they've determined that the wolves shown in the photographs were harvested 70 miles east of the park and that no laws were broken.

"The wolves in the pictures were sealed as required by Alaska law," said Bernard Chastain, Alaska Wildlife Troopers deputy director, referring to the placement of a tag or "seal" on the animal. "No illegal activity has been determined to have taken place at this time."

Steiner said the current situation is caused by people who "hate wolves and hate the whole idea of national parks."

"We understand that this was perfectly legal — and that's our point," he said. "This sort of thing can happen whether it's 6 feet from the boundary of Denali or 60 miles from the boundary. And that is what needs to be stopped."

As justification for closing this year's hunting and trapping seasons early, Sam Cotten, commissioner of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, said the wolf harvest has exceeded the past five-year average.

"This wolf harvest closure is done in an effort to manage harvest closer to the previous five-year average," he said.

Without the emergency order, the hunting season for wolves would have ended on April 15, while the trapping season was set to close on April 30.

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