

**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME  
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION**

**ORPHANED GAME ANIMAL POLICY**

Animals are orphaned every year for a variety of reasons. Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) employees may encounter orphans in the field or be asked by a member of the public what to do about an orphan situation. The following Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) policy outlines the protocols and procedures to be followed in situations involving orphaned game animals. "Game animals" means all species of birds, mammals, and reptiles (excluding domestic mammals unless they are feral). Wolf pups taken into captivity during a department predator control operation are handled under a separate policy. Different rules apply to species regulated by the federal government (migratory birds and marine mammals) and those procedures are summarized separately below. This policy is intended to provide guidance to employees who are either contacted by a member of the public about an orphaned animal or who encounter one on their own. This policy is also meant to ensure that no orphaned mammals are taken into captivity unless a permanent placement has been identified and approved by the DWC Permit Section.

Mammals

All requests to place orphaned game mammals at zoos or other facilities will be processed by the Division's Permit Section and authorized by the Division Director or Deputy Director. The local Area Biologist or Assistant Area Biologist, working with the Permit Section, will make the determination whether to take an orphan game mammal into captivity. Costs incurred for transporting orphans to temporary and/or permanent facilities are the responsibility of the institution that will permanently possess them. Billing arrangements must be made by the receiving party or the temporary holding facility; ADF&G will not pay for transportation of orphan mammals.

Department employees who encounter or hear about an orphan mammal should gather as much information as possible about the species, size, location, and habits of the animal, as well as the reasons why it is believed to be an orphan. Do not assume an animal is an orphan simply because it is alone - often the mother is foraging nearby and will return once people have left the area. If an animal is observed alone over an extended period of time, please contact one of the following (contacts are listed in the order they should be called):

1. The local DWC Area Biologist (call the Wildlife Information Center at 267-2257 if you don't know who that is)
2. DWC Permit Section (465-4148)
3. DWC Headquarters (465-4190)
4. The local Alaska Wildlife Trooper (call 269-5511 if you don't know who that is)

Do not feed or pick up an orphaned mammal yourself or counsel anyone else to do so; this is illegal and may result in a fine. Do not contact the Alaska Zoo, the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center, or any other wildlife facility yourself or counsel anyone else to do so; placement at these facilities must be authorized in advance by the DWC Permit Section.

Beginning in March of each year, the DWC Permit Section will initiate the following steps to determine the availability of permanent placements and temporary holding facilities for orphan

game mammals:

1. compile a list of species and number of animals requested and approved for placement at Alaskan zoos and research facilities;
2. determine the availability of temporary holding facilities within the state for orphan moose calves and bear cubs; and
3. identify and approve placements outside of Alaska for moose calves and bear cubs in accordance with the zoo policy.

By May 15 of each year, the DWC Permit Section will notify all Area Biologists by email of the number of approved placements for moose calves, brown bear cubs, and black bear cubs, as well as the status of temporary holding facilities for these species. The email will include a list of additional species that have been requested and approved for placement at Alaska zoos. This information will be updated via email as placements are filled or if additional placements are identified and approved.

The availability of a permanent placement for a particular species does not obligate the department to take an orphan into captivity. Other factors to be considered in the decision include the age and condition of the animal, the likelihood it can survive on its own in the wild, whether the animal poses a public safety threat, and logistical and staff constraints. Because older animals do not adjust well to life in captivity, only young of the year are eligible for placement as exhibition animals. Due to limited availability of qualified zoo placements, moose and bears should be taken into captivity only as a last resort. Other species should be taken into captivity only if logistically feasible and if doing so will not interfere with other duties and responsibilities.

When a placement is not available, responding employees have three options: (1) if practical, leave the animal where it is; (2) remove the animal and release it at an undisclosed location; or (3) remove the animal and euthanize it in a humane manner. Questions about decisions made regarding individual orphaned game mammal situations should be directed to the DWC Permit Section.

#### Birds and Marine Mammals

The department has "co-management" authority for migratory birds, with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) being the lead. Division employees responding to injured or orphaned migratory birds, including threatened and endangered species, will notify the USFWS or a local wildlife rehabilitator. If necessary, employees are authorized through the department's Federal Migratory Bird Permit to transport birds to a rehabilitation facility. DWC Permit Section staff will make rehabilitator lists available to all regional and area offices.

The department has no management authority for marine mammals. Marine mammals are managed by either the USFWS (sea otters, polar bears, and walrus) or National Marine Fisheries Service (whales, seals, sea lions, dolphins and porpoises). It is illegal for ADF&G staff or members of the public to handle marine mammals (living or dead) without authorization from the appropriate agency. All sightings of injured, orphaned, stranded, or dead marine mammals should be reported immediately to the Alaska SeaLife Center's 24-hour Marine Mammal Stranding hotline at 1-888-774-7325.

  
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Doug Larsen, Director

4/22/09  
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Date