

Patrolling the Wilds

Article and Photos by: **Megan A. Peters**

In Alaska, hunters go deep into the back country getting dropped off by air taxi services, four-wheeling or snowmachining out to far off spots, and even floating rivers, all in the name of filling their freezers. Hunting is a passion that takes a lot of work and where the hunters go, the Alaska Wildlife Troopers must follow.

On this particular September day, Alaska Wildlife Trooper Tim Abbott, based out of Fairbanks, had a rare advantage over the hunters he was hoping to pay a visit. Instead of having to four-wheel in or float the river for days to find the hunters, Trooper Abbott was going to get a bird's eye view of the hunting grounds from Helo-2.

The day's patrol plan was to fly out near the White Mountains where hopeful moose hunters were floating Beaver Creek for an 'any bull' hunt. As the name implies, as long as the moose is a bull, it can be harvested through legal means. After handing his go-bag to DPS pilot Leon McNelly for storage, Trooper Abbott climbed into the back seat for the quick hop into the back country.

The first stop was near the confluence of Beaver Creek and Victoria Creek where a couple cabins were firmly nestled into the trees. A hunting party could be seen on a little lawn. A part of the group was getting ready to launch a skiff. The only safe landing zone was on the opposite bank. Once the rotors stopped spinning, Trooper Abbott waved to motion the skiff over and swatted at a cloud of bugs.

"You guys on a guided hunt?" asked Trooper Abbott.

"No, private," responded one of the hunters as he pulled onto the shoreline. The men gladly loaded up Trooper Abbott in their boat to bring him over to the homestead. The hunting party was made up of the property owners and close friends that have hunted together in the area for multiple years. They were lucky enough to harvest a bull the day prior. A check of the moose meat and licenses determined that all laws had been followed during the hunt.

After Trooper Abbott was returned to the helo, Pilot McNelly lifted off and headed up the meandering creek until a moose rack was spotted



The clouds of mosquitos hung thick around Trooper Abbott as he checked hunting permits along Beaver Creek. During the patrol effort, three hunters were cited for various hunting violations.



Along the bank of Beaver Creek, Trooper Abbott met with hunters from across Alaska that converged into the area in hopes of bagging a bull moose. The hunt was open to any bull. Even if antlers are retained to show that a moose is a bull, it is still required for the sex organs to remain naturally attached to the salvaged meat until it is out of the field and processed for human consumption.



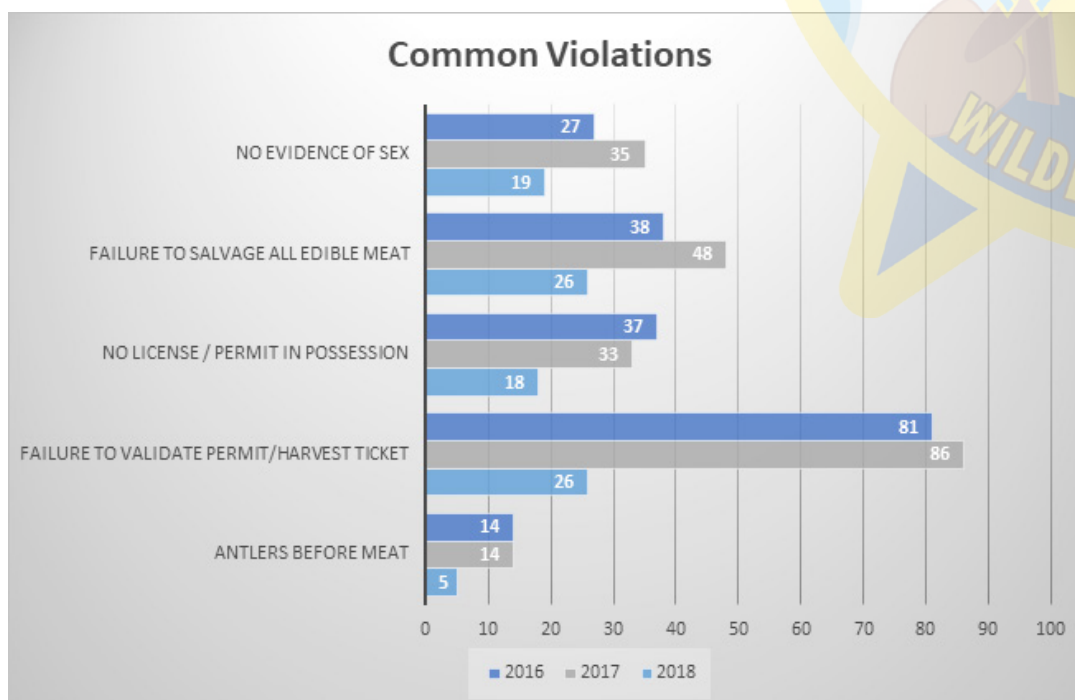
on the raft maneuvering down the creek. Once again, a landing zone was easily found and Trooper Abbott was able to wave the hunter over so he could check the haul. The hunter told Trooper Abbott that only part of the moose, the two hind quarters, was in his raft. The rest of the meat was in his partner's raft a little way ahead. "We ate some of the ribs last night then finished boning them out," the hunter explained as he rummaged through a meat bag to locate the proof of sex on the bull.

Unfortunately for hunter, in Game Management Unit 20B where he harvested the moose, it is required to keep the meat on the ribs until it is processed for human consumption. The man also had neglected to record the kill on his harvest ticket, which should be done immediately after a kill.

"Guess I should have read the regs better," the man said. Regardless of the two citations issued, the hunter sent Trooper Abbott off with a wave and a thank you as Trooper Abbott walked his way back to the Helo.

After a few more contacts, the bug clouds were getting thicker and the sun was noticeably starting to descend toward the horizon. Trooper Abbott and Pilot McNelly decided to look for one more set of hunters before heading back to Fairbanks. From the air a makeshift camp was spotted. As Pilot McNelly swooped the helo around to find a landing zone, a kill site could be seen in a marshy area. There was a whole side of ribs from the moose still on site and no antlers were spotted. (Antlers before meat is considered a big deal in terms of a hunting crime as well as failure to salvage).

After documenting the kill site, Trooper Abbott made contact with the hunters at their camp. A husband and wife were enjoying the campfire as their son was off scouting out another moose for harvesting. They told Trooper Abbott about the kill and showed him the meat they had harvested along with the antlers. For the meat back at the site, they stated that it was dirty from being in the water and they didn't intend to salvage it as it wasn't fit for eating.



Statewide, the most common hunting violation that Alaska Wildlife Troopers come across year after year is failure to validate a permit or harvest ticket. The numbers reflect full calendar years for 2016 and 2017. The numbers for 2018 tabulated through September 24, 2018.

“We are going to have to disagree on that. I pulled back the hide and checked it,” said Trooper Abbott. “Since you are still here, I will work with you on the failure to salvage as long as you go back and get the rest of it.”

When the contact was all said and done, the shooter was relieved of the antlers and received two sets of court papers: one for removing the antlers from the kill site before salvaging the meat and one for not leaving proof of sex attached naturally to the harvested meat (having the antlers does not qualify as proof of sex). As Helo-2 made its way back to Fairbanks, the hunting party was salvaging the rest of the moose meat from the marsh.



Trooper Abbott, based out of the Alaska Wildlife Troopers Fairbanks Post of the Northern Division, was able to utilize Helo-2 for a patrol in the White Mountains along Beaver Creek. During the patrol, Trooper Abbott was able to contact eight hunting parties, one person that lives year-round along the creek, and conduct safety checks of a few cabins in the area. In all, six citations were written, three of which required the hunter to appear before a magistrate in Fairbanks at a later date. The use of Helo-2 allowed Trooper Abbott to cover more ground in one day than he could typically cover using a boat, ATV or snowmachine. Helo-2 is mostly used for search and rescue missions and a mechanism for rapid responses to active incidents for the Special Emergency Reaction Team based in Fairbanks.

Investigation at a kill site for a bull moose revealed that not all the meat was harvested before the antlers were removed. It is the responsibility of the hunter to know and follow all regulations during a hunt. Hunting regulations can be found online at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildliferegulations.hunting>. To report hunting violations, contact Wildlife Safeguard at 1-800-478-3377. Tipsters can remain anonymous. To learn about Wildlife Safeguard, visit <https://dps.alaska.gov/awt/safeguard>. Hunters should also check Emergency Orders while they are out in the field. Emergency Orders can be found on the ADF&G Website at <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/EONR/>.

