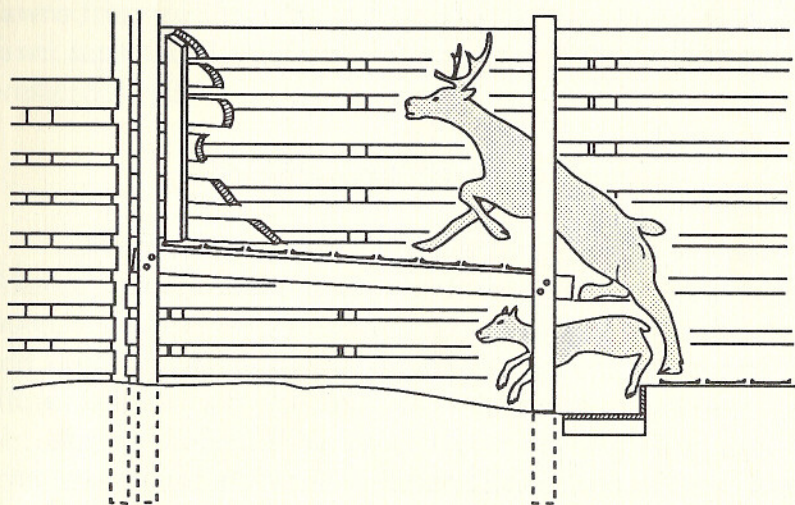


# Construction and Use of a Reindeer Fawn Separator for Injury Prevention

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## **Preface**

In 1985, members of the Applied Reindeer Research Project at the University of Alaska Fairbanks obtained and reviewed a Scandinavian instructional video<sup>1</sup> on reindeer herding in Norway. This video described a structure that was developed and used by the Scandinavian reindeer industry to prevent injuries during corralling by segregating fawns from adults. The following is a description of how the fawn separator is built, how it works, and its current use in western Alaska.

## **The Reindeer Fawn Separator**

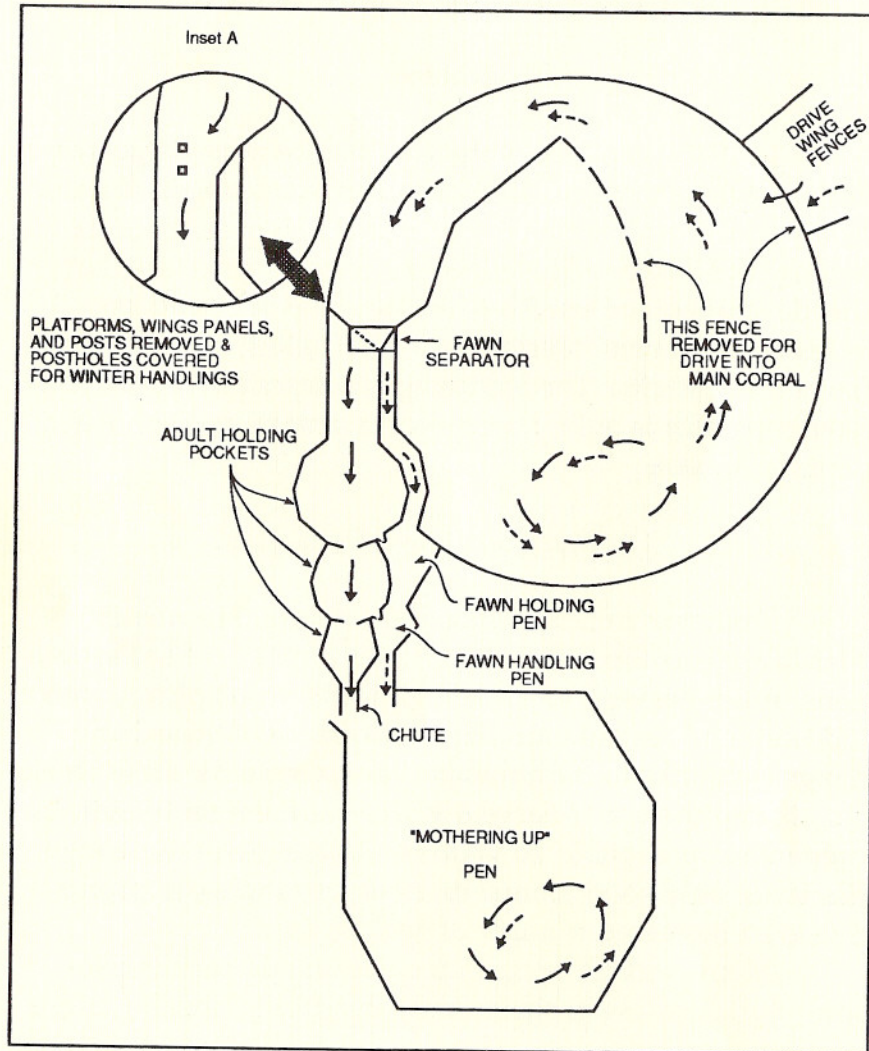
Domestic reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*) in western Alaska are corralled one or two times a year for herd separations, antler harvest, vaccination, parasite control, and record keeping. An unfavorable consequence of these handlings is injuries to the animals. Fawns are only a few weeks old during the antler harvest in June; consequently they are even more susceptible to injuries. Reduction of these injuries is not only good animal care but also increases profits due to an increased number of healthy animals.

Many injuries occur in the holding pockets (enclosures that decrease in size to keep the deer in smaller, more

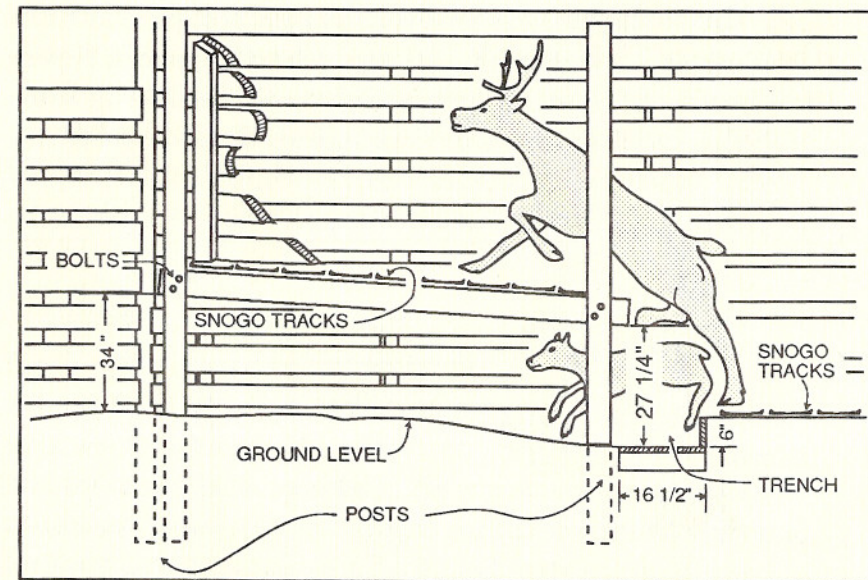
<sup>1</sup> This video was obtained and translated by Andrew John Karter, University of California, Davis.



manageable groups) (Fig. 1). One method of reducing fawn injuries (e.g., broken legs and antlers) during corrallings is to separate these young reindeer before the animals enter the holding pockets. A structure called a fawn separator can accomplish this segregation.



**Figure 1 — Simplified schematic showing placement of the fawn separator within the corral system. Adults are represented by solid arrows and fawns by broken arrows.**



**Figure 2— The fawn separator has an elevated platform that the adults will jump onto and the fawns will go under.**

The fawn separator is an elevated platform placed between the main corral (where the deer are held when originally driven into the corral system) and the holding pockets. As small groups of deer in the main corral are split off from the herd and pushed toward the holding pockets, adult deer jump onto the elevated platform of the fawn separator, while fawns walk under it (Fig. 2). Fawns are routed into a small set of holding pockets, while adults are routed into a large set of holding pockets. A few of the fawns are big enough to jump onto the platform and into the adult holding pockets. These can be transferred to the fawn pockets by carrying them through small doors in the fence separating the pockets for adults and fawns. The adult deer can then be moved one at a time through chutes where they can be restrained for antler cutting, inoculations, etc. After being handled in the chutes, females and fawns are routed into a "mothering up" pen to reunite (Fig. 1).



The blueprint provided (Fig. 3) specifies the platform to be made of 2"x6" boards and 3/4" plywood. Old snow machine tracks can be put on the plywood for traction. The platform is elevated and bolted to 4 inch by 4 inch posts. The front edge and back edge of the platform are 27 1/4" and 34", respectively, off the ground. Fences along the

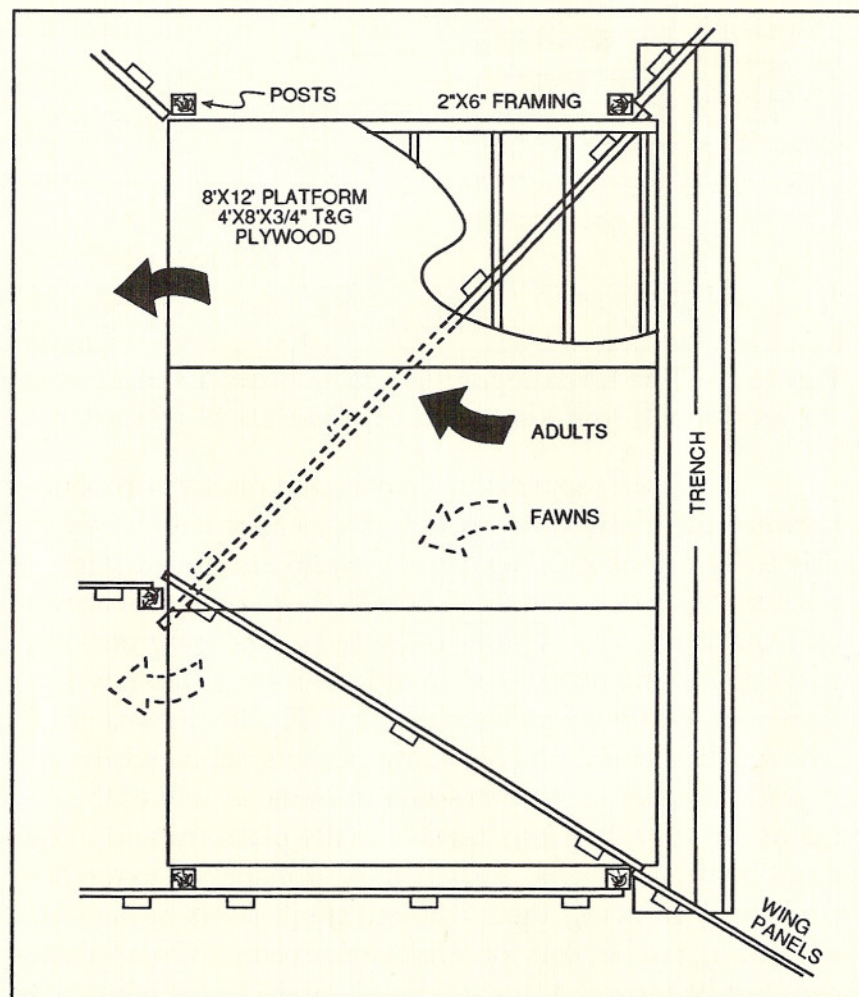


Figure 3 — Top view of fawn separator. (Solid arrows are adults going over the platform, broken arrows are fawns going under the platform.)

sides of the platform should be made five to six feet high to keep the deer from jumping out of the corral system. A short fence underneath the platform is used to route the fawns into their holding pockets. The 4"x4" posts supporting the platform can be incorporated into these fences. The trench in front of the separator helps force the adults to jump onto the platform and forces the fawns to step down and go under the platform.

The separator and its corresponding fences can be made into a temporary or "take down" structure by bolting the platform to the 4"x 4" posts and fastening the fencing with sheetrock screws (Inset A, Fig. 1). After the platform and fencing is disassembled, the 4"x 4" posts can then be pulled and the separator stored for future use. If the holes for the posts are framed with 2"x 6" boards (Fig. 4) and plugged they will not fill with dirt and are ready for use the

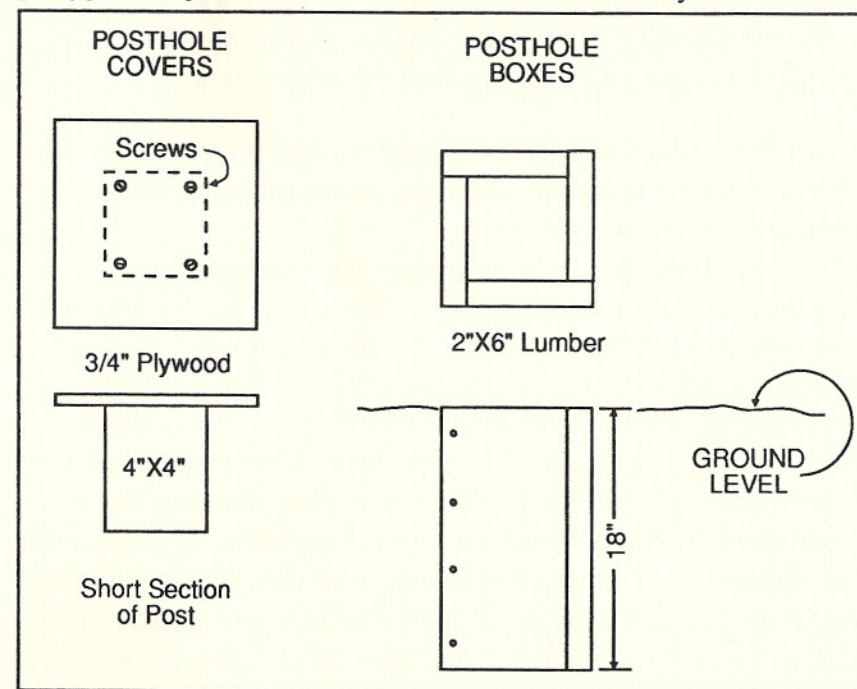
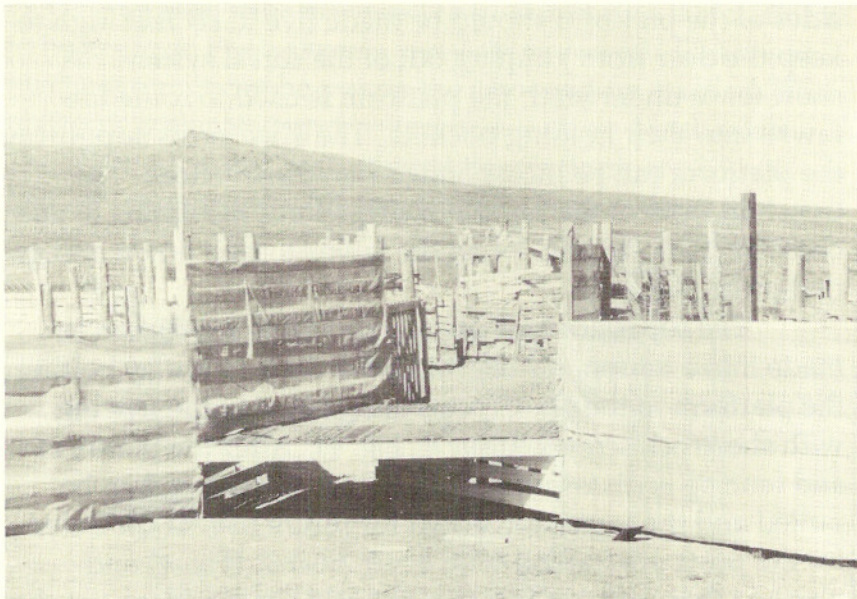


Figure 4 — Framed post hole and a removable cover.





Fences adjacent to the fawn separator are 1"x 6" boards that are covered with burlap to keep the deer from seeing beyond the fence and thus trying to run through it.

year. The separator is only needed during the summer when the fawns are small, and taking it down makes snow removal easier in the winter.

A blueprint of the separator has been provided, but the design is very adaptable (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). By keeping the basic principles and a few key measurements in mind, the separator can be put in any corral system. The height of the front of the platform is important. If it is too high, the adults will go under it; if it is too low, fawns will jump on top. The far side of the platform is higher than the front to keep the adults from turning around and coming back over the separator. The width and length of the platform can be adjusted to the situation. The trench is important in encouraging the adults to jump. The "take down" design is handy but not critical. If the separator is left assembled through the

next winter handling, it will take longer to move deer into the holding pockets and could hinder snow removal.

The fawn separator has been in limited use on the Seward Peninsula for two years. Observations indicate approximately 80 percent of the fawns are separated from the adults. The larger fawns go over the platform with the adults but they are less likely to be hurt because of their size. Injuries are fewer and less serious. The handling is more efficient as there are two chutes working at once, one for adults and one for fawns. Cost savings of handling fawns in this manner are attributed to faster handling time and fewer injuries.

Separating the fawns from the adults during the summer handling is a battle won for the herder in the war against excessive stress and injuries to his animals during corralling. Every fawn that is saved from injury or death means better herd health, greater personal satisfaction, and greater profit. The fawn separator should prove to be a great aid to both the reindeer herder and the reindeer herd.



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