

RC35

My name is Michelle Anderson. I am a Gulkana Tribal Member raised on our traditional lands, eating our traditional foods and around our culture. I have testified before in my professional capacity. Today, I am speaking as a tribal individual. I've given many testimonies representing my people to protect our traditional hunting and fishing rights. As with any culture, our traditional foods are the core of our Athabascan culture and way of life. The Ahtna traditional territory, prior to land claims, is estimated to be 24 million acres of land. Our Elders based our land selections on our hunting and fishing uses. After land claims, and a commitment from Congress that the State of Alaska would provide for our traditional hunting and fishing needs, we received title to 1.7 million acres of land. The pipeline that was referenced yesterday crosses 55 miles of Ahtna land. That pipeline could not have happened if Ahtna people hadn't agreed to allow that pipeline to cross our lands. Ahtna did not receive one penny from any barrel of oil that has flowed through the line. Our leaders were promised when land claims was being negotiated that the State of Alaska would provide for our hunting and fishing needs. We were not made instantly wealthy with the passage of land claims. Our people have never asked for much but the one thing they have insisted our leaders continue to fight for is our traditional foods. In order to be law abiding citizens, we abide by state rules and regulations. We have patiently waited for a promise to be kept to our people. For over 44 years, our people have attended meetings like this one, doing our best to follow state protocol and be respectful. How we, the original citizens of this state, have found ourselves to be in a position of begging to hunt and fish our traditional foods is a sad state of affairs. People suggest that we are no different than anyone else. I must correct that statement. Our tribes have a government to government relationship with the Federal Government. To take that one step further; our tribes are

the words used by other Alaskans who were horrified and disgusted. The community subsistence hunt concept is right; the relaxing of the eligibility criteria, not having adequate enforcement, not having adequate local staff, and not providing amenities for these other hunters – just unleashing them into an area that was not prepared was flat out wrong. The Hunt should remain in its original intent. The Board should deliberate on how to provide for these thousands of other hunters. The Community Subsistence Hunt should remain its own hunt and for those who meet the criteria. Instead of punishing everyone, the Board should consider asking themselves what would work best for the hunters who don't meet the criteria. Perhaps there needs to be two separate community hunts with separate quotas.

3. Our lands are owned by a state chartered corporation. Congress did not create reservations under our land settlement act. According to the State, we must abide by state law on our ANCSA lands. When the hunting season closes, it closes for us too. One of the Ahtna values I grew up understanding and seeing with my own eyes is our people's respect for land boundaries. Our people are very mindful of not going into another village's hunting territory. We just don't do it. With this hunt, there is rampant disrespect for private property. Our area is completely overwhelmed with hunters. Our Hunters worry that someone will be hurt or shot. The hunting season occurs during berry picking season. Both hunting and berry picking are family activities. Families fear for their safety doing either activity anymore.
4. One other thing I want to point out comes back to cultural belief and how we were raised. We weren't raised to be trophy hunters or competitive while hunting. The Ahtna

sovereign nations. Whether people like it or not, and regardless of how the State views it, Alaska Native peoples are different. Our tribal status makes us different. To pretend that we are like everyone else diminishes our tribal sovereignty and does a disservice to those who came before us and to those that will come after us. It is for those who come after us that we are standing our ground just as our ancestors did.

The state of Alaska benefited greatly from Alaska Natives settling our land claims. We lost much in this settlement. Having been to several of these meetings, listening to our people and to others, I have some thoughts I'd like to share.

1. Ahtna People have been standing up for our traditional hunting and fishing rights since the State of Alaska has attempted to minimize or take away those rights. We attend every board of game meeting and board of fish meeting. We provide testimony like this. And when we need to, we settle our disputes in court. Our traditional foods are worth fighting for.
2. In 2009, the Community Subsistence Harvest was established and by all accounts from Ahtna people and others, it went well. Then the rules changed. While Ahtna people spent two years proving their eligibility to have this hunt and the quota needed, the rules were changed to allow any group of 25 people to call themselves a community; and they had to do nothing to prove it. The Board of Game opened that hunt to thousands of Alaskans who competed with us for those 100 moose. I don't need to remind this Board and those attending the meeting what others saw during subsequent hunts and have freely commented – they use words like massacre and annihilation. Those aren't Ahtna people talking, even though we saw it and felt the same, those are

people believe that when an animal gives itself that is the animal to take. It doesn't matter how small or large it is. The Ahtna people consider it engii to not properly take care of wild game or fish or to let the meat go bad. To overhunt or over fish is not an Ahtna traditional value and not a practice I have ever seen our people do. We believe in sustainable management; not taking more than we need. When stocks are low, we know not to hunt or fish or to cut back on what is taken. We know that if we take care of the animals and fish, they will take care of us.

I've heard it suggested and have felt by the testimony and questions asked afterwards yesterday that the Board might think the easy fix is to do away with the community hunt. I don't believe that is the answer. I believe this Board was on the right track by establishing the community hunt. I urge the Board to enforce the 8 criteria Ahtna people had to prove to establish the Hunt and make sure every community hunt group that applies can do the same. We know there are families and groups that have hunted in this area for generations. Because of their pattern of hunting and their ability to prove how many generations back they have done so, meeting the criteria should not be difficult.

Thank you for meeting in Glennallen. I appreciate your service to Alaska and wish you well in your deliberation.