

PROPOSAL 19

5 AAC 99.015. Joint Board nonsubsistence areas.

Redefine the boundaries for the Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Area as follows:

Redefining the Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Area (FNSA) boundaries is not difficult and does not require the Joint Boards of Fisheries and Game to start over. I recommend that the qualifying characteristics boundary begins at the (board set) Fairbanks Management Area (FMA). (5 AAC: 92.530(10)). This boundary was developed for managing moose hunting where there are urban land use characteristics. It has a management strategy utilizing public and private lands (private lands with permission of the owner) and has only archery and primitive weapons components. Fishing is catch and release, limited harvest or stocked waters limited. The Tanana River is the southern boundary which fits with characteristics change between rural and nonsubsistence areas. Some rural traplines begin near the outer edges of the FMA but most are more remote but within the existing FNSA.

Other road accessible areas along the Richardson Highway (Salcha) or Chena Hot Springs Road or other roads leading out of the FMA could be reviewed and added to the FMA if the necessary nonsubsistence characteristics are found. The Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee would be a valuable resource to help with your review and setting new boundaries.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? This proposal asks the Joint Boards to review and change the boundaries of the Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Area (FNSA). The FNSA was defined over 30 years ago soon after the authority to create them. Then the characteristics of the "area" were not as important as finding an existing boundary. The Joint Boards started with the Fairbanks North Star Borough boundaries then added extra. The subsistence use characteristics were not differentiated between more urban developed areas and the rural non-developed characteristics of the borough and adjacent lands included. The developed areas within the borough still qualify under the definition (5 AAC: 99.016(a)). That is a nonsubsistence area is an area or community where dependence upon subsistence is not a principal characteristic of the economy, culture, and way of life of the area or community. The more rural areas within the Fairbanks North Star Borough and the additions do have the characteristics that should remove them from the nonsubsistence area. The boards have consistently approved subsistence hunting and fishing in the nonsubsistence area although they are not supposed to do so.

For most other nonsubsistence areas the boundaries have been set on the change of land use characteristics. I estimate the FNSA is unnecessarily larger than it should be by 65%. In its existing configuration, rural communities like Delta Junction are close to the FNSA where the nonsubsistence "line" is 15 miles away but over 100 miles from urban Fairbanks. The land use characteristics in this southeast direction example are nonsubsistence for 20 to 25 miles from the urban center. The other 75 miles is rural, undeveloped, nearly roadless, and mostly upland fish and wildlife habitat. That area does not meet the codified characteristics for a nonsubsistence area.

South from Fairbanks NSA the urban and community characteristics completely stop at the north bank of the Tanana River. The existing nonsubsistence area extends more than 30 miles south of the river. None of that area has the characteristics of a nonsubsistence area. These examples support a review and a look at new boundaries. The original boundary was set when the boards were figuring out how to map out nonsubsistence areas. Most of the later nonsubsistence areas very closely followed city limit or local community boundaries.

Changing the FNSA boundaries would have several benefits to fish and wildlife users and to those entities who make the regulations to guide them. An example is the codified intent to avoid nonsubsistence areas where hunts have a subsistence component. The Fortymile caribou hunt zones include a large portion of the rural FNSA. Defined only by GPS points that overlap is difficult to impossible to find in the field. The zones follow game management subunits or watershed boundaries. Rivers and streams within the FNSA allow some subsistence harvest while most of the fishing activity is directed under sport fishing regulations on stocked waters.

The proposal asks the Joint Boards to consider new boundaries for the Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Area. The following adds a discussion of the 12 characteristics in AS 16.05.258(c). A nonsubsistence area is defined where “dependence upon subsistence is not a principal characteristic of the economy, culture, and way of life”.

1. The social and economic structure. There is a clear difference in the land use patterns between the smaller Fairbanks Management Area and the far flung existing nonsubsistence area. The FMA consists of the urban area of Fairbanks and North Pole plus the suburban subdivisions. Outside this boundary there is very little residential development except along a few roads and the main highways (pointed out in the proposal). The FMA was created to be the type of boundary now defined as nonsubsistence. That is, residents can hunt, trap, and fish without interfering with their neighbors. There is virtually no business development outside the FMA except for natural resources extraction like gold mining, commercial firewood cutting, some timber cutting and some trail-oriented recreation opportunities. A complete change in residential and business land and resource uses.

2. The stability of the economy. The urban and suburban areas of the Fairbanks Management Area plus isolated strips along the Richardson and Steese Highways and Chena Hot Springs road are characterized by stable economies. The remainder of the existing nonsubsistence area’s economy is rural mining and some lumber and firewood cutting. (Mining being less stable and most everything else based on renewable resources).

3. The extent and the kinds of employment for wages, including full-time, part-time, temporary, and seasonal employment. I would estimate that 98% of all employment is within the Fairbanks Management Area plus the road corridors listed. Wood cutting and mining, both small scale are present outside the FMA but are seasonal only. Employment is nearly nonexistent in the area I am recommending to remove from the existing nonsubsistence area.

4. The amount and distribution of cash income among those domiciled in the area or community. As is #3, the urban and suburban areas are mainly a cash economy. The FMA population is near 100,000.

5. The cost and availability of goods and services to those domiciled in the area or community. The goods and services needed to support the Fairbanks community are all found within the areas I am requesting you define as the Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Area.

6. The variety of fish and game species used by those domiciled in the area or community. The Fairbanks community uses almost all of the big and small game resources that have habitat in the Interior. They use all of the fish resources in the Tanana and Chena Rivers and stocked waters close to the community. Because of the transportation systems available, community members annually harvest fish and big game from all over Alaska. The few residents that would live outside the new boundaries also have access to the transportation systems.

7. The seasonal cycle of economic activity. The Fairbanks community has a stable year around population. The economy supports a large nonresident tourist influx in the summer season. The new nonsubsistence area would not be economically changed by any seasonal activity.

8. The percentage of those domiciled in the area or community participating in hunting and fishing activities or using wild fish and game. Nearly every household participates to some degree. The number of hunting, trapping and fishing licenses sold by percentage of the community population far exceeds the percentages found in rural Alaska. Neighbors and families share resources and trappers both use and sell their furs. Taking into consideration the non-household residents (military on base, university staff and students, etc.) I would estimate 75% of the total number of those domiciled participate in some way.

9. The harvest levels of fish and game by those domiciled in the area or community. Making an estimated number is very difficult (one of the reasons the Subsistence Section of the Department of Fish and Game doesn't do it). A large number of big game animals are harvested each year because of the community's ability to reach various parts of Alaska. Small game is harvested locally. Fish, especially salmon, are harvested by the thousands for family household use and sharing. Fairbanks is home to the Chitina Dip Netters Association with thousands of members participating annually. As an example of their mobility, none of those fish are caught in the Fairbanks area or the Fairbanks non subsistence area.

10. The culture, social, and economic values associated with the taking of fish and game. Fairbanks area residents have a close relationship with fish, game and fur resources and many harvest enough to provide the fish and meat protein they eat without going to the market. The community places a high value on fish and game. Most families share with their friends and neighbors and that culture is greatly appreciated. For many families fishing season in summer and hunting season later in the year basically use all of the vacation time they have. Community residents travel long distances to participate in fishing and hunting.

11. The geographic locations where those domiciled in the area or community hunt and fish. Fairbanks and North Pole residents hunt all over the state. There are families with two or more generations who hunt caribou along the Dalton Highway corridor. Hundreds of them use Tier I and drawing tags to hunt a long way from home. Some hunt in the existing nonsubsistence area but outside the Fairbanks Management Area. There are dozens of families who have hunting and fishing cabins or camps along the rivers that are partly in and partly out of the existing nonsubsistence area. An example is Game Management Unit 20A where a significant number of any bull moose tags are available annually. Community hunters apply for those in high number. Unit 20A has no characteristics of a nonsubsistence area. No local economy, a very small number of residents, and eligibility in most hunts for even nonresidents. (Unit 20A should be removed from the FNSA).

12. The extent of sharing and exchange of fish and game by those domiciled in the area or community. Most families who harvest significant fish and or game resources share with their generational family members, not so much with neighbors and the community at large. As in many urban areas there are hunters who give away almost all of the game meat the harvest. The level of sharing and exchange is not as high a percentile as would be found in most rural areas.

Recap: There is a distinct boundary dividing the urban/suburban portions of the Fairbanks and North Pole community and the surrounding area. The nonsubsistence area should not extend for 100 miles through habitat that has no non-subsistence characteristics. That is the case with the existing non subsistence area.

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(EJ-F23-658)
