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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release: **July 18, 2019**

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ADF&G Finds Gustavus Game Samples Safe for Consumption

(Juneau) – The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) tested 13 samples of muscle (meat) and four samples of liver from 12 moose and one black bear harvested in the Gustavus area during the 2017 and 2018 hunting seasons for PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) chemicals. Detectable levels of PFAS were found in four of the 13 animals tested, but concentrations in samples of meat, the tissue most often consumed, did not differ from background levels found in remote areas of the Northwest Territories, Canada, and all samples were well below levels considered safe for human consumption.

PFAS is a family of chemicals used in a variety of products including firefighting foams previously used at airports across North America including Gustavus and other Alaskan airports. PFAS chemicals do not break down in the environment but build up over time in the plants and the blood and organs of animals in a process called bioaccumulation. Studies in animals exposed to higher concentrations of PFAS found links between the chemicals and liver damage, depressed immune response, birth defects, slow growth, and newborn deaths. PFAS chemicals are now widespread in the environment and can be detected at very low concentrations even in remote areas.

In July 2018 the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities was alerted to concentrations of PFAS in the groundwater near the Gustavus Airport that exceeded Department of Environmental Conservation standards. Moose are commonly harvested around the Gustavus Airport and those animals could be exposed to PFAS by drinking water and eating aquatic plants. As a precautionary measure, ADF&G tested game meat for 15 individual PFAS chemicals.

ADF&G recently received results of those analyses. Detectable levels of PFAS were found in meat and/or liver from four of the 13 animals tested (three moose, one black bear). Neither the US Environmental Protection Agency nor ADEC have developed safe consumption guidelines for PFAS chemicals. However, published guidelines from Minnesota suggest fish with PFAS concentrations of less than 10 nanograms PFAS per gram of fish may be consumed without restrictions, fish with concentrations of 10-50 ng/g should be limited to one meal per week, 50-200 ng/g should be limited to one meal per month, and greater than 200 ng/g should not be consumed.

Concentrations of PFAS chemicals in the four samples from Gustavus were all well below the Minnesota guideline for unlimited consumption of less than 10 ng/g. The highest concentration was in the liver of a cow moose at 7 ng/g. Concentrations in the other three animals were less than 1 ng/g. Liver tends to concentrate chemicals more than muscle, and three of the four samples with detectable levels of PFAS were liver. However, liver remains safe to eat.

Drinking water at wells around the Gustavus airport was initially sampled August – November 2018. PFAS concentrations in 19 wells exceeded ADEC action levels. More information on PFAS in Gustavus well water can be found at: http://dot.alaska.gov/airportwater/gustavus.

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