

NPS Staff Report  
Board of Game and ADF&G Commission

March 14, 2014

Mr. Chair and members of the Board,

My name is Debora Cooper. I'm the Associate RD for the Alaska Region of the Nat'l Park Service. I oversee the NPS's natural, cultural and subsistence resource programs. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today.

The NPS has a 98-year history and a presence in Alaska since long before statehood. Sitka National Historical Park was set aside in 1910. The National Park Service was established in 1916; and Denali, Alaska's first national park, was established in 1917.

Our mission and that of the Department of Fish & Game is largely complimentary and cooperative. The NPS strongly supports hunting and trapping, as well as subsistence as provided for in ANILCA. The Park Service supports hunting as one of the many ways the public experiences and enjoys national preserves. Since the passage of ANILCA, there have been thousands of proposals to the BOG. The NPS has supported and/or implemented nearly all of the proposals that the BOG adopted. A fraction of 1%-- has resulted in the NPS adopting a handful of harvest restrictions affecting several preserves today.

The laws of the National Park Service, beginning in 1916 with the Organic Act, and policies implementing the Organic Act establish the foundation that directs management. ANILCA is an important part of the framework. While ANILCA provides for some differences in Alaska (compared to lower 48 NPS management), it also directs that preserves be managed as national parks in accordance with the Organic Act except that sport hunting and trapping are allowed.

NPS management policies direct managers to ‘maintain the natural fluctuations and processes of plant and animal populations. Activities intended to reduce the number of native species for the purpose of increasing the numbers of harvested species are prohibited.’ As I have mentioned in the past, NPS Management Policy is not discretionary, not subject to regular change, and can only be waived by the national director.

Reading federal management purposes of Alaska’s national park areas, there are numerous Congressional expectations as well. A few excerpts include:

- to provide the opportunity for rural residents engaged in a subsistence way of life to continue to do so.
- to provide for the maintenance of sound populations of, and habitat for, wildlife species of inestimable value to the citizens of Alaska and the Nation...
- To assure the continuation of the natural process of biological succession.
- And in multiple other areas, there are mandates for the protection of populations of wildlife.

Neither NPS law, policy, nor Congressional expectations preclude our overlapping interests with tribal governments, ANSCA corporations and Alaska's business community. Following are a few examples of cooperative work with a number of departments of the SOA.

We host about 2.5 million visitors a year. We work well with the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development to encourage visitation, and we partner with more than 400 large and small businesses which provide commercial visitor services on Alaska's parklands. The Alaska Travel Industry Association understands how mountains, wildlife and fish, help drive the visitor economy.

Our working relationship with the Alaska Department of Public Safety is strong and long-standing. Mutual assistance is provided on a recurring basis in resource protection, search and rescue, emergency response and other cases. Maintaining this trusting relationship is essential for the well-being of Alaskans and our shared resources.

On an annual basis, NPS and ADFG jointly survey for moose in areas in and adjacent to Bering Land Bridge, Noatak, Gates of the Arctic and Kobuk Valley. In Yukon-Charley Rivers and Denali, the moose surveys are conducted by the NPS and data is shared with ADF&G. The survey methodology was developed by the state, and all data is entered into a statewide database administered by ADFG,

and analysis is available on a state maintained website. All survey participants have access to the data.

We enjoy similarly cooperative efforts with Fish & Game in surveying and sharing data related to Dall's sheep, muskox, small mammals and birds. The muskox project on the Seward Peninsula is likely the largest joint federal/state cooperative project in Alaska. And at TWS meetings coming up this year, there's a special session on Dall Sheep mgt that's being co-chaired by NPS and ADFG staff. In that regard, we'd like to share some recent developments on sheep monitoring methodologies, through a short video to be shown in a few minutes.

It is imperative that we have sound science backing up our respective management decisions and contributing on-going research findings to the science and resource management community across Alaska. Individually examples of collaboration may seem insignificant, but together they show a state-federal working relationship that is solid, cooperative and extensive.

I'd like to speak to current wildlife research a little more specifically here. In the Eastern Interior, the Park Service has tracked movements, health, numbers and status of wolves within Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve for more than 20 years, the second-longest wolf study in Alaska outside of Denali. We believe having collared wolves and research based on both aerial tracking and biological samples allows state and federal biologists to provide better science-based advice to management. This work has been an economical way to acquire firm

population and pack size information and data about genetic variation within the wolf population.

Earlier this week, the NPS made a formal request for discussions with the Department concerning wildlife research across state/federal administrative boundaries, including future predator control efforts adjacent to preserves and the avoidance of shooting radio-collared wolves (there are currently six remaining near or within Yukon-Charley Rivers Preserves). We'd also like to discuss reciprocal wildlife research permitting, such that the National Park Service may resume landing aircraft within reasonable distances outside preserve boundaries to capture and collar wolves, maintain or repair malfunctioning GPS collars or to work up a darted animal that has crossed onto State land. This was disallowed during the last couple years of winter capture work.

In short, we would like to resume somewhat regular conversations among our park superintendents and biologists and their counterparts within the Department of Fish and Game, to share information about wildlife biology, habitat observations and logistical considerations.

It is important for us all to never forget how much we have in common in affecting our collective responsibility to soundly manage the wildlife and their use by humans in Alaska. Our collective staffs provide tangible and important examples of this collaboration and dedication every day.

Before concluding, I'd like to announce the naming of our next Regional Director, Bert Frost...currently the Associate Director nation-wide for NRSS. You may have met Bert at a North American or a WAFWA meeting. We're very happy with the announcement and anxious for his arrival, which should be in late spring or early summer.

Thank you Mr. Chair. Again, I sincerely appreciate this opportunity. If we have a moment, I'd like to share the brief video I mentioned.