

Chief Brian Ridley

OPPOSING THE RELEASE OF
WOOD BISON
IN THE LOWER TANANA

RC013

RESOLUTION 2024 - 27
Tanana Chiefs Conference Full Board of Directors



Tanana
Chiefs
Conference

**OPPOSING THE RELEASE OF WOOD BISON
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WHEREAS, Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) is an Alaska Native tribal health and social services consortium established by the Interior Alaska tribes and tribal communities, to provide a unified voice in advancing sovereign tribal governments through the promotion of physical and mental wellness, education, socioeconomic development and culture of the Interior Alaska Native; and

WHEREAS, Alaska Fish and Game (ADF&G) designated the Lower Tanana River area as one of the approved locations for the release of bison in the 2013 Environmental Assessment and associated 10(j) rule for wood bison in Alaska; and

WHEREAS, In 2023, the ADF&G resumed the concept of restoring bison in the lower Tanana drainage, initiating a site-specific public planning process; and

WHEREAS, The Environmental Assessment that was developed in cooperation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service that ADF&G is using to guide restoring the bison is obsolete from over 10 years ago in 2013, had a narrow focus and is not integrated with environmental consequences or impacts; and

WHEREAS, The Environmental Assessment states that the State of Alaska will not consider reintroducing wood bison to Alaska in the absence of Federal regulatory assurance to land owners and land managers that such action will not adversely affect resource development activities, and ADF&G will develop site specific wood bison management plans in cooperation with other State and Federal agencies, land owners, local residents, wildlife conservation, and other stakeholders; and

WHEREAS, Doyon, Limited in January 2024 expressed concern regarding the ADF&G's wood bison project, stating that ADF&G exaggerated potential benefits to locally affected communities and failed to address allocation, impact to resource development, and trespass issues; and

WHEREAS, The Innoko herd was reintroduced over 10 years ago, yet the promises made by ADF&G regarding the benefits to Tribes have not been realized and it has yet to be determined if wood bison herds can be successfully established; and

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- WHEREAS,** The Tribes in the Tanana Chiefs Conference region are currently facing food security concerns due to the Yukon River salmon disaster and not being able to fish for the last four years. Tribes face difficulties with the high cost of living, and substituting salmon with other local animals due to the lack of moose or increased competition from outside hunters; and
- WHEREAS,** Trespass of outside hunters on our traditional lands, which the State fails to address. Adding additional animals to be hunted will make trespass harder to control, placing the burden on Tribes and corporations; and
- WHEREAS,** The release of wood bison into the Lower Tanana area would increase pressure from outside hunters, leading to trespass issues and reducing the ability for Tribes to harvest traditional foods on their lands; and
- WHEREAS,** Wood bison are not part of the oral history or stories of the Nenana Tribe, whose local elders tell stories of their grandparents' way of life that do not include wood bison; and
- WHEREAS,** The State of Alaska passed House Bill 123 that codifies in law the state recognition of federally recognized Tribes, and ADF&G did not conduct proper government-to-government consultation with Tribes regarding the release of wood bison into the Lower Tanana area in align with the ADF&G Tribal Consultation policy signed in 2002; and
- WHEREAS,** in 2002, ADF&G implemented a policy on "Government-to-Government Relations With the Federally Recognized Tribes of Alaska," that states the Department and Boards are committed to consulting with tribes in Alaska prior to taking action or undertaking activities that affect a Tribe or Tribes and shall favor meaningful participation of the affected Tribe; and
- WHEREAS,** It is a management failure to introduce additional animals into an ecosystem when ADF&G is failing to adequately manage the current animal populations on our traditional lands.



NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Tanana Chiefs Conference Full Board of Directors opposes the release of wood bison into the Lower Tanana area and calls upon ADF&G to cease any further actions on this effort until ADF&G has:

1. Conduct proper government-to-government consultation with Tribes in alignment with the Tribal Consultation Policy signed in 2002 regarding the determination of the release, allocation, and traditional and ceremonial use of the wood bison, and provides a report with how the Tribal consultation will be incorporated; and
2. Conduct an updated Environmental Assessment that evaluates the potential environmental and cultural effects in the three areas where wood bison are targeted for reintroduction and includes legacy data over the past decade on the Innoko wood bison herd and integrate that data into the development of alternatives, and invite Tribes to be cooperative agencies; and
3. Completes thorough assessments of potential and long term impacts of wood bison on the ecosystem, and that data is shared with Tribes; and
4. It has been proved through the Innoko herd that wood bison herds can be successfully reestablished and there are successful hunts that benefit the food security of local Tribes; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Tanana Chiefs Conference Full Board of Directors agrees that ADF&G should allocate more resources toward addressing the decline in the moose population over the past four years, and stands in unity with Doyon, Limited's position that a more efficient use of state resources would be to focus on existing fish and wildlife within the state rather than continuing ADF&G's project to import an animal that has historically failed.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this resolution was duly passed by the Tanana Chiefs Conference Full Board of Directors on March 13, 2024 at Fairbanks, Alaska and a quorum was duly established.

Secretary/Treasurer

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Submitted by: Nenana Native Association & Manley Traditional Council