



# NATIVE MOVEMENT

From: Native Movement

To: The State of Alaska Board of Game

Subject: Comments on Proposals for the Region III Meeting, on March 15-22, 2024

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## Introduction

While the meaning of sovereignty is complex, it essentially embodies a community's ability to care for its own. During the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) negotiations, discussions focused mainly on the land as many Alaska Native leaders presumed that would include the resources on that land. At the time, Alaska Natives were faced with losing ancestral lands due to outside interests in natural resource development and commodification.

Years before the passage of ANCSA in the early 20th Century, Tribal leaders from the Tanana River region met with federal officials. They recognized that reservation Tribes in the Lower 48 states had faced forced relocations to poor-quality lands and ecosystems that kept them from prospering. Therefore, during ANCSA negotiations there was less focus on what private land ownership would mean for tribal sovereignty, self-governance, and food security.

Congress passing ANCSA resulted in lands that are privately owned by 12 regional and over 200 village for-profit corporations, leaving the 229 federally recognized tribes in Alaska essentially landless. Today, Alaska Native people are both tribal citizens and shareholders in their corporations. ANCSA served to separate sovereign Tribal governments from land ownership and the rights to exercise sovereign authority over their lands such as fish and wildlife management. While ANCSA extinguished aboriginal hunting and fishing rights, Alaska Native peoples received no compensation for this loss as the financial settlement was limited to compensation for the loss of lands. Tribal hunting and fishing rights in Alaska were not extinguished but continue to go unrecognized.

The Interior and Eastern Arctic have some of the harshest environmental conditions in the world, yet Indigenous people have lived and thrived here for thousands of years. The region is characterized by a continental subarctic climate, extreme cold in the winter, and extreme heat in the summer. The Athabascan way of life incorporates adaptations to the environment and cultural values that are a part of our daily lives. It's important to acknowledge the history of Indigenous people on these lands. They have been living here for at least 4,000 years, spanning over 320 generations.

When Alaska Natives talk about strengthening sovereignty, it is not about having idyllic authority, but the ability to take real action and prevent very real, heartbreaking dynamics from happening in our communities. In other Tribes outside of Alaska, Tribal governments usually have full management over resources, land use provisions, their justice system, and hunting and fishing rights.

### *Traditional Diet and Exercise*

Our diet, before the arrival of Western influence, comprised what we obtained from the land, water, and air around us. We were highly skilled and adept at surviving in the extreme climate of Alaska. Our people never took more than what was necessary and always left enough for other non-human users of the resource, additionally, lucky providers would often have the responsibility to share the bounty amongst community members who were less fortunate. Our culture was rich in advanced tools, skills, and knowledge, which were developed over thousands



of years through observations and learning through trial and error, and then passed down to the next generations.

Our way of life is suffering a great loss of culture, directly related to the decline of fish and wildlife. Some groups oppose Indigenous sovereignty and tribal recognition. It's important to note that these issues are not based on race but rather on the tribal government and the right of Indigenous people to practice their cultural and spiritual way of life, simply having the ability to take care of themselves and their families.

“By acknowledging and empowering tribes as partners in co-stewardship of our country's lands, and waters, every American will benefit from strengthened management of our land and resources.” -Deb Haaland, United States Secretary of the Interior

Alaska Natives have experienced significant changes in a relatively short period. It has been 156 years since we joined the union, 64 years since we joined statehood, and most notably in 2022, the State of Alaska finally recognized Alaska Native Tribes legislatively. This highlights the governmental and institutional marginalization of the Alaska Native people. Native people and tribes are disenfranchised through the governmental process, particularly with the State of Alaska, which has failed to acknowledge the sovereignty of Alaska Native people who have been here since time immemorial. The lack of food sovereignty forces us to choose less nutritious food items that are more expensive and keeps us reliant on outside food sources and shipping methods.

#### *Denied Access To Traditional Food*

There have been significant declines and unforeseen changes in our lifetime that have had a disproportionate impact on Indigenous communities. Subsistence has become a distant memory for some due to multiple factors such as restricted access to resources, health problems, financial challenges, and the decimation of fish and wildlife populations. In addition, Indigenous communities are facing added threats and pressures from climate change, such as wildfires, habitat loss, permafrost thawing, and unpredictable weather events. In the past, we could rely on natural patterns, timing, migration routes, and the changing of seasons, but these are no longer predictable.

These drastic changes have caused various inequities for the Alaska Native people. The Indigenous people of Interior Alaska and across the State have faced many restrictions. This has led to a lack of recognition of tribal governance sovereignty and food sovereignty. Unfortunately, we are often criminalized, fined, and placed on the failure to report lists. In the past, law enforcement officials took away expensive gear, which was needed to sustain the nutritional, cultural, and spiritual needs of our families.

It is essential to recognize that access to traditional food sources is considered a basic human right by the United Nations. Furthermore, it is an essential aspect of religious freedom for us to access our traditional food sources.



### *Traditional food as medicine*

Potlatch food tables used to be filled with traditional foods harvested directly from the land but today potlatch foods mainly consist of Western store-bought food. However, wild foods are the best nutritional choice that can prevent diet-related illnesses and are considered a form of medicine for many Indigenous people. Prevention is always better than cure, and it is more cost-effective to prevent the onset of medical health issues than to correct them later. Our traditional food is a vital missing element in our diet, culture, and life in general.

Vitamin D is essential to survive Alaska's harsh and extreme climate. Due to the lack of sunlight in the winter months the region's traditional foods, including fish, are a crucial source of this vitamin. Vitamin D is particularly important for bone, muscle, brain, and immune health. Recent studies have shown that younger generations of Alaska Natives have lower serum concentrations of vitamin D compared to their older counterparts. This suggests a shift away from traditional ways of life. This shift highlights the importance of traditional foods in maintaining adequate levels of vitamin D among Indigenous populations in Alaska.

The lack of access to our wild food sources not only deprives us of their nutritional value, but also of the physical activity involved in harvesting, processing, and sharing them among the community. As a result, sedentary lifestyles have increased, leading to higher rates of health-related issues among Alaska Natives. Failing to meet our basic needs has a significant impact on our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, causing overwhelming stress and reducing our quality and quantity of life.

Indigenous people have lived on this land for thousands of years, and we have shown great resilience in adapting to quick changes. However, we can only do so if we're allowed to continue living and practicing our traditional way of life. It should not be a surprise that there is a direct correlation between health consequences associated with the increase in food insecurity and poverty.

We shouldn't have to carry the burden of conservation while others reap the benefits from the fish and wildlife on our traditional lands and territories. Management has the ability to modify the actions of excessive harvest along with the increase of competition due to the population increase in urban areas.

We need to directly address the underlying issues that are impacting the fish and wildlife in our region. The ecosystem and our well-being are threatened by the collapse of multiple species. We do not have sufficient access to our basic traditional foods, and we are experiencing inflation in the cost of the food we have to purchase from grocery stores, as well as higher fuel prices. This is making it difficult for us to feed and take care of our families.

### *Loss of Identity and Culture*

The loss of identity and culture is negatively impacting our people. The loss of cultural practices has resulted in fewer opportunities to interact and engage with family during harvesting and processing. Younger generations are not getting enough time to develop subsistence and survival skills or learn their ancestral knowledge.



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Cultural traditions related to food harvest are an essential part of our life skills and contribute to living a happy, healthy, and fulfilling life. These traditions enable us to connect with our past and present history by utilizing skills that promote cultural values and beliefs. This, in turn, provides us with a sense of identity, community, and belonging. We develop an appreciation for and strengthen our connection to our animal relatives while being out on the land.

We have all been operating from a place of scarcity and competition in a system driven by profit. We can only move as fast as our trust, often the barriers are ourselves. The hope is that we can start breaking down some of the barriers and building relationships and trust across entities and interest groups. We urge the state of Alaska to address the management concerns expressed by tribal members, rural Advisory Committee members, and Alaska Native Corporations. And we ask for the state to consider what true co-stewardship can mean for the prosperity of not just the Alaska Native people but for all of Alaskans as we all love and live and subsist on these lands today.

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# NATIVE MOVEMENT

## INTERIOR AND EASTERN ARCTIC REGION

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### REGIONWIDE AND MULTIPLE UNITS (Proposals 43-48, 50-51)

**Proposal 43:**

5 AAC 85.055. Hunting seasons and bag limits for Dall sheep

Recommendation- Oppose, new limits on residents should not be imposed until there is a closure to nonresident sheep hunting. This is an obvious and logical decision of factors we can control for the conservation of Dall sheep in Alaska for all future generations. Furthermore, the issue of overcrowding may have a lot to do with hunters not wanting to travel as far away from the road to pursue rams. Hunters that travel further out are often more successful and don't encounter overcrowding issues but have to travel longer distances with their harvest.

**Proposal 44:**

5 AAC 85.055. Hunting seasons and bag limits for Dall sheep

Recommendation- Oppose, new limits on residents should not be imposed until there is a closure to nonresident sheep hunting. We can't expect the same metrics to make accurate predictions. We refer to the WIRAC management plan guidelines on the importance of older mature rams, especially in a suppressed population with missing age cohorts that may also take longer to rebound with minimal harvest pressure.

**Proposal 45:**

5 AAC 85.055. Hunting seasons and bag limits for Dall sheep

Recommendation- Oppose, guides/outfitters are seeking to reduce resident competition with their non-resident clients while ensuring their clients still have hunting opportunities despite immense conservation concerns. Resident hunters do not typically utilize guiding businesses, but non-residents do and have a much higher success rate in comparison.

**Proposal 46:**

5 AAC 85.055. Hunting seasons and bag limits for Dall sheep

5 AAC 92.057. Special provisions for Dall sheep and mountain goat drawing permit hunts

Recommendation- Oppose, nonresidents, are not entitled to have a guaranteed opportunity when there are significant conservation concerns and food insecurity. Alaskans have to experience the hardship of living in Alaska year-round, multi-species declines, and ensuring there is food on the table to feed their families, especially through severe weather events.

This proposal does not identify conservation concerns. This proposal seeks to limit resident hunters to ensure a certain percentage of opportunity for non-resident hunters, especially in areas closed to nonresident hunting due to conservation concerns. Resident hunters do not typically utilize guides/outfitters. Guiding/outfitter businesses rely on non-resident hunting opportunities and the guided hunter success rate is very high.

**Proposal 47:**



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## 5 AAC 92.011 Taking of game by proxy

Recommendation- Oppose, restrictions on proxy hunting were put into place to address previous patterns of abuse. Hunters hoping to increase their chances of successfully harvesting trophy animals have previously gone to Alaska Pioneer Homes, for example, to be able to increase their individual bag limits. Very limited bison hunting opportunities exist, and allowing proxy hunting in these hunts may reduce opportunities for those who want to participate in the hunt. Indigenous people do proxy hunting for elders in their community and originally this is why proxy hunting was allowed in regulation to provide for this customary and traditional subsistence pattern of harvest, use, and sharing. However, if a hunter in a rural community receives a permit to hunt, it is already a traditional practice to distribute harvest among the community (especially elders, widows, and single-parent families) without the need for proxy hunting. There are concerns of people taking advantage of something intended to be positive, to instead use it to their advantage to better their chance of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

## **Proposal 48:**

5 AAC 92.015(a)(4). Brown bear tag fee exemptions.

Recommendation- Support, but we also urge management to use an ecosystem-based approach and avoid throwing an ecosystem more off balance. Short-term solutions can turn into long-term issues. We also urge hunters to avoid taking the large dominant boars that control an area because when they are removed, it opens the opportunity for the smaller and younger bears to come into an area, thus, a higher prevalence of bear predation. Younger bears can often be less experienced and may be more problematic, especially when looking for available food, and can increase human-wildlife conflicts.

## **Proposal 50:**

5 AAC 84.270. Furbearer trapping

Recommendation- Support, the passing of this proposal would allow trappers to be able to better adapt to the increasing change of seasonal patterns.

## **Proposal 51:**

5 AAC 84.270. Furbearer trapping

Recommendation- Support, to align with beaver season.

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MCGRATH AREA- UNITS 19, 21A AND 21E (Proposals 56-59, 64, 66-67, 72, 74-75, 102)

## **Proposal 56:**

5 AAC 92.108. Identified big game prey populations and objectives

Recommendation- TNA, an issue originated from splitting up unit 19 so this proposal digs more into the details. IM objectives will likely be prorated for each subunit. We recommend that managers take a cautious approach to ensure that conservation concerns are addressed adequately and responsibly, so as not to create further problems and imbalance.

**Proposal 57:**

5 AAC 92.123. Intensive Management Plans VII

Recommendation- TNA, is more of a housekeeping proposal to change A's to E's but this proposal also extends the length to put back into the regulatory cycle.

**Proposal 58:**

5 AAC 92.123. Intensive Management Plans VII

Recommendation- TNA, creates the legal language for IM, from a previous proposal from the McGrath AC to propose predator control.

**Proposal 59:**

5 AAC 85.045. Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose

Recommendation- Support, hunters would like a longer season for the Tier II hunt in the early part of the season to help increase moose harvest. If the harvest gets too high then managers can shorten or limit the number of permits.

**Proposal 64:**

5 AAC 85.045. Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose

5 AAC 92.069. Special provisions for moose and caribou drawing permit hunts

Recommendation- Oppose, unit 19C Moose populations have increased such that Unit 19C now should qualify for a positive Intensive Management finding to provide for high levels of human consumption. Resident subsistence uses of moose in Unit 19C should not be restricted by imposing drawing permits since such permits do not provide reasonable opportunities for customary and traditional uses. The state subsistence law outlined in AS 16.05.258 provides a preference for customary and traditional uses for Alaska residents. Furthermore, AS 16.05.255(d) requires that the taking of moose by residents for personal or family consumption has a preference over taking by non-residents.

**Proposal 66:**

5 AAC 85.045. Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose

Recommendation- TNA, this proposal is difficult to understand as it does not clearly state what would be changed. We would need to see current moose numbers to make an informed recommendation, but in general, we support increased subsistence moose hunting opportunities as long as the population can sustain increased hunting pressure. When this proposal was submitted, moose numbers were at an all-time high and the moose count may be low at this particular time so we are eager to see the staff reports.

**Proposal 67:**

5 AAC 85.045(a)(17). Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose

Recommendation- Support, this proposal would reauthorize antlerless (e.g., moose cow) harvests as required annually by AS 16.05.780, which otherwise prohibits the harvest of antlerless moose.



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This is a re-authorization for managers to have on the books and give residents more harvest opportunities in very specific circumstances. We hope informed decisions will be carefully made in consultation with the local community and tribal organizations to ensure there is consensus regarding the take of cow moose and that no conservation concerns result from such take.

**Proposal 72:**

5 AAC 92.540. Controlled use areas

Recommendation- Oppose, much effort by the ADF&G was expended to ensure reasonable opportunities for customary and traditional uses of moose in the Holitna-Hoholitna Controlled Use Area by limiting the size of boats and motors for moose hunting. These restrictions served to reduce user conflict and promote local subsistence harvest success. There was a history of user conflicts in this area, the heaviest users with the most success were hunters from outside Unit 19A who would travel long distances to hunt in this controlled use area. While outside the authority of the BOG, this controlled use area also serves to limit the negative impacts of large boats and motors on salmon spawning habitat. Larger boats displace a lot of water in smaller rivers, which disturbs salmon bedding and limits subsistence success.

**Proposal 74:**

5 AAC 92.050. Required permit hunt conditions and procedures

5 AAC 92.069. Special provisions for moose and caribou drawing permit hunts

Recommendation- TNA, unclear if The BOG has the authority.

**Proposal 75:**

5 AAC 85.045(a)(19). Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose

Recommendation- Support, this proposal would reauthorize antlerless (e.g., moose cow) harvests as required annually by AS 16.05.780, which otherwise prohibits the harvest of antlerless moose. This is a re-authorization for managers to have on the books and give residents more harvest opportunities in very specific circumstances. We hope informed decisions will be carefully made in consultation with the local community and tribal organizations to ensure there is consensus regarding the take of cow moose and that no future conservation concerns result from such take.

**Proposal 102:**

5 AAC 85.020. Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bear

5 AAC 92.044. Permit for hunting bears with the use of bait or scent lures

Recommendation- Oppose, this proposal seeks to liberalize bear hunting for resident hunters, which is an important food resource. But opening bear baiting during moose season will negatively impact hunters'. What if they come upon a baiting station? Furthermore, liberalizing bear season does not necessarily mean it will affect the moose population.

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