

Oral Board of Game Testimony of:

March 17, 2024

Robert Fithian

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Klawock, Alaska 99925

Mr. Chairman and Board of Game Members,
My name is Robert Fithian,
My current place of residence is Hollis, Alaska

As Always, it is an honor to come before what I consider the most democratic process of wildlife conservation in the world.

I am a conservationist, professional guide, rancher, and miner

and have held leadership representation within these Alaskan ways of life.

I've spent 11 years representing the Alaska Professional Hunters Association

Served many years by appointments from several Governors to a subsistence resource commission,

and served two terms by appointment from the joint Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture

within a White-House Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council where my personal seat was to represent America's hunting industry in relation to wildlife conservation.

I have presented many presentations by invitation throughout North America at International Wildlife Symposiums or similar events about Alaska's wildlife conservation programs,

but more specifically, a number of presentations titled “Predator and Prey Relationships in Alaska.

My focus has always been to be the voice for the heartbeats of the wild things in the wild places, those that have no voice of their own in this most often

human combative arena

and to help provide for all people who depend upon or enjoy the results of stewardship for what many of us feel is Alaska’s most treasured natural resource.

I have been guiding hunters within 19C for over 40 years.

On most years I provide the McGrath AB with a unique summary of wildlife and range conditions.

I hold this experience dear, would trade it for no other and fully intend to die continuing on sharing this way of life or fighting to protect it.

It’s contributions to Alaska are significant.

I’m here to support proposal number 62, a IM/Predator Management proposal for 19C, as well as the similar proposals: 55, 60, 61 and 65.

I oppose proposals 82, 83, 85, 86, 87????, 88, 91 and 92.

Regarding IM in 19C.

All primary prey species are in Low Density Equilibriums and have been for many years, and there have been a couple of hard winters.

Just as a comparison, from 1983 – 2022 we harvested a total of five wolves.

During 2023, we harvested 6 wolves.

I would like to take you back to what I call BBI, Before the Ballot Initiatives of the late 1980's and early 1990's which stripped ADF&G from being able to effectively manage wildlife by the Constitutionally enshrined guidelines of

maximum benefit, utilized, developed and maintained on the sustained yield principle.

The first AC meeting I attended was in 1983 in McGrath.

The Wein Alaska terminal was packed with participants and there was barely any standing room. There were no heightened issues or concerns, just a robust meeting representing the results of our Constitutionally mandated wildlife management guidelines and the resulting healthy wildlife populations.

There were multiple air taxi services, meat processors, bed and breakfasts, hotels, guides, transporters, stores and in general, the results of what our Founding Fathers wanted us to achieve and have. The results of prudent stewardship.

We had hard winters back then as well, but prudent management in keeping with optimum habitat carrying capacities always provided for adequate sustained yield, and the divisions over fighting for what is left of declining resources did not exist.

By the mid 90's we were headed to what I term as Post Ballot Initiatives and the beginning of LDE that has plagued 19C since.

We went from conducting 12 hunts per year to 1 or 2 directly related to the ever-increasing numbers of wolves impacting the wildlife populations.

That brings us to where we are today, no robust AC meetings, no air taxis in McGrath, very challenged business owners and a reduction of over one half of the human population.

Our 19C caribou and moose calf annual survival rarely exceeds 10 percent.

Of the say 10 percent that do survive, 90 percent of those survivors will never see one of their offspring survive to be of recruitment age. Add or take away a couple points either way and that is where we are and have been for many years.

This is a far cry from anything relative to stewardship or our management mandates.

The only relief we have seen is after implementation of the 19D East IM Program, Caribou and some moose from 19C trend away from the mountains and during late fall and early winter and out into the main valley of the Kuskokwim and into 19D East, some wolves follow them out and are harvested accordingly.

If it were not for that annual harvest, 19C would be held in very low LDE subject to some reprieve by wolf population fluctuations according to disease and or starvation.

Important species of willows, sedges, grasses and lichens are healthy within this region. Although some change is occurring, healthy, unutilized ungulate habitat is commonplace.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Board Members