

Oral Board of Game Testimony of:  
Taiga Resources Conservation

March 17, 2024

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Klawock, Alaska 99925

Mr. Chairman and Board Members,

My name is Robert Fithian, I live in Hollis Alaska and am representing.

Taiga Resources Conservation

a management and consulting firm specializing in conservation based natural resource industry support.

I'm here to support proposal number 62, as well as the similar proposals:

Regarding 19C, ADF&G management plans for big game species except bison are similar and reflect management guidelines for continued subsistence, guided, unguided and resident hunting opportunity.

The Alaska Native people from this area are:

“Di- chin an ek’ Hwt’ ana”

the “Upper Kuskokwim People.” Their native language is distinctly related to this region and is one of the eleven identified Athabaskan languages.

For centuries, people from Lake Minchumina to Lake Clark would gather during late summer and fall to hunt and gather along the base of the range at a tributary named Khu-chay-nik Creek.

There is a high mountain there named Trimokish which can be seen from both Lake Minchumina and Lake Clark.

There is a Doyon Cultural Site marker at this location near the historic Silvertip Camp.

I have seen up to seventeen families from the Upper Kuskokwim gathered there at Silvertip enjoying their customary and traditional way of life as many generations of them have before.

The most complete written works about this region and its people is titled:

“A History of the People of the Upper Kuskokwim who Lived in Nikolai and Telida” by Raymond Collins of McGrath.

There are over 70 references of dependency of 19C captured within this works.

During 1898, USGS geologist Spurr led an expedition that ascended and then descended the Alaska Range to the Upper Kuskokwim.

The first evidence of human activities that Spurr and his party found on the West side of the Range were well used hunting camps and human travel trails along the headwaters of the South Fork.

During the past and current century, people from the Upper Kuskokwim engaged in the professional guiding industry by working for other guides within this region or using the knowledge gained in this work to start and operate their own businesses.

It has been beneficial for the financial remuneration; but also the vast majority of the meat harvested is retained by their guiding business and shared within their local communities.

It is important to note that this sharing of harvest within the local communities and residents, is an important long time customary and traditional practice.

The professional guide industry from this area beginning in the 1950s shared much of it's harvest within the local communities and villages.

From my end, through the 1980s and well into the 1990s it would take me two full days of distributing our annual fall harvest to the needy people of the Upper Kuskokwim.

Again, this is a long-established customary and traditional use.

The most recent subsistence survey for this region was conducted in cooperation with Donlin Gold and depicts limited subsistence use within 19C.

For the record, this is directly related to the success of the 19D East Predator Control Program and the resulting abundance of game within 19D as opposed to the low-density populations that have plagued the traditional use of 19C.

Also note that the winter subsistence hunt for Dall's sheep in 19C has been closed.

I will say this for the Board and for the Department, it would be prudent to explore the ability to add Dall's sheep to the IM programs in regions where they fit.

One factor that I want to do my best to help you understand is predator stress.

This factor weighs extra heavy on prey populations held in LDE by predation.

As these prey species have to live in more protective habitats rather than their preferred optimum habitats, subsequently, they move into winter with less body fat and higher stress levels.

These factors have a substantial impact on annual mortality which compounds significantly during hard winters.

Regarding bears and IM/Predator Management in 19C.

I do not support baiting of brown grizzly bears in this region and do not support multiple bear harvest limits.

If we are successful in implementing an IM Predator Management program in 19C I urge the Department to closely monitor harvest and be prepared to adjust harvest opportunity.

Prior to the ballot initiatives, we were one brown/grizzly bear every four years harvest limit nearly statewide.

I support careful initial liberalization but encourage close monitoring and adjustment.

It's very sad that the ballot initiatives primarily funded by outside special interests have resulted in such a large conservation tragedy.

I do want to say that most Alaskan's love our wolves and understand that they are part of our environment.

However, they have to be controlled to allow for healthy overall wildlife populations and the best interest of the whole, which should be primarily, wildlife first.

We will never be able to maintain healthy wildlife populations by managing to view wolves. What hurts many of us is that there is not the same consideration for the heartbeats of the prey species as there is for the predator.

In closing Mr. Chairman and Board Members, I do believe that closing the Dall's sheep hunting season to non-residents in 19C was a deviation from proven science, and will not compliment annual recruitment.

I urge you to reconsider your action on that matter. I oppose all drawing permit and method of harvest sheep proposals.

Thank you Respectfully,

Robert Fithian