

Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory
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RAC/WI XXXXX.KD

Ted Spraker
Chair
Alaska Board of Game
P.O. Box 115526
Juneau, Alaska 99811-5526

Re: Comments for Board of Game

Dear Chairman Spraker:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council) to provide comments on proposals coming before the Alaska Board of Game (BOG) at its Interior and Eastern Arctic Region meeting scheduled for March 6-14, 2020, in Fairbanks.

The Council represents subsistence harvesters of fish and wildlife resources on Federal public lands and waters in Western Interior Alaska. It was established by the authority in Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and is chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act. Section 805 of ANILCA. The Council's charter establishes the Council's authority to initiate, review, and evaluate proposals for regulations, policies, management plans, and other matters related to subsistence uses of fish and wildlife within the region. The Council also reviews resource management actions occurring outside their regions that may impact subsistence resources critical to communities served by the Council. The Council provides a forum for the expression of opinions and recommendations regarding any matter related to the subsistence uses of fish and wildlife within the region.

The Council held a public meeting on March 2-3, 2020 in Fairbanks. Among the items discussed were BOG proposals that would affect subsistence users and resources in the Western Interior Alaska Region. The Council discussed and voted to submit the following comments to the BOG for consideration as it deliberates these proposals:

Proposal 45: 5 AAC 92.080 (15). Prohibit the use of moose, caribou and reindeer urine as scent lures in the *Interior and Eastern Arctic Region*.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal.

Council comments:

Several Council Members expressed concerns about the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Alaska, and believe allowing this practice would increase the vulnerability of healthy ungulate populations to CWD. The Council also believes that hunters are unable to destroy the pathogens of CWD through cooking, which could pose a health risk to humans. The Council intends to submit a similar proposal to the Federal Subsistence Board during its next regulatory cycle.

Proposal 46: 5 AAC 92.115. Establish intensive management programs for bear across the *Interior and Eastern Arctic Region*.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **OPPOSE** this proposal.

Council comments: This proposal is very generic, broadly written and does not provide specifics on black or brown bear populations within game management units. Local observations support that while some areas are appropriate for intensive management of bears, others do not. The Council is also unaware of any public safety issues with bears for communities within the region. Bears represent an important food and wildlife resource for subsistence users. The Council believes intensive management to protect moose populations from bears should only be applied where it has merit.

Proposal 53: 5 AAC 85.055. Establish an archery only registration permit hunt for Dall sheep in the *Interior and Eastern Arctic Region*.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **OPPOSE** this proposal.

Council comments:

The Council agrees with the Tanana Chiefs Conference that there is no justification to increase hunting pressure on sheep populations in the Brooks Range. This population experienced huge declines beginning in 2012/2013, continuing with deep snow mortalities in 2018/2019, leaving no additional harvest opportunity for an added archery season at this time.

Proposal 54: 5 AAC 92.015(a)(4). Reauthorize resident grizzly/brown bear tag fee exemptions throughout *Interior and Northeast Alaska*.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal.

Council comments:

The Council supports this proposal as it removes the financial burden for hunters to purchase a \$25 bear tag throughout the Interior region, facilitating the customary subsistence practice of taking brown bears opportunistically.

Proposal 56 XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. Establish minimum distance requirements for trapping

around dwellings in the Interior and Eastern Arctic Region.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **OPPOSE** this proposal.

Council comments:

It is a common and efficient practice for trappers to set traps near their homes, as many access their traplines from trails leading out of their own yards. The Council understands the author's intent with pets; however, this proposal is too broad. The Council recommends the proponent re-submit a proposal to address specific roads and areas of concern.

Proposal 57: 5 AAC 92.080(4)(A). Allow residents to take game from a boat under power in Unit 21.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal **WITH AMENDMENT**

Council comments:

The Council recognizes abuse can occur and some rural residents consider this a hazardous and unethical hunting practice. Rural Alaskans, however, frequently hunt along rivers in the Interior, and releasing a throttle or shutting off the motor can become a liability issue for the hunt. The Council recommends amending this proposal to allow for residents to take game from a boat under power in Unit 21 with an amendment requiring *a boat to come off step, slow forward progress, with the motor at idle*. This will provide opportunity for river hunters with a safer, more stable, and more efficient hunting platform.

Proposal 58: 5 AAC 92.540(x). Establish a Controlled Use Area (CUA) for the Kaiyuh Flats area in Unit 21D.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal.

Council comments:

Moose hunts in this area have been largely limited due to access and quotas. The Council is concerned, however, with the influx of airplane hunters who may hear of increasing moose populations in the Kaiyuh Flats area. The age cohort appears to be healthy with good populations of cow moose; however, many cows were observed with no calves which is concerning. The Council believes a CUA would allow for continued conservative management of this important subsistence resource.

Proposal 59: 5 AAC 85.045. Change the winter any-moose season for residents in Unit 21D.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal *for the area depicted in the attached map.*

Council comments:

The Council heard from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) area biologist regarding the unique dynamics in this area where the cow/moose ratio is only dropping because the cow moose population has been increasing at a much faster rate than bulls. The Council supports a December hunt when moose are in better condition, the snow is shallower, and users can eat the

meat during the long winter months. Locals will mark safety zones during this time when the ice is thinner so hunters can avoid hazards. With harvest at only 1/3 of the quota, the Council does not believe a December hunt would negatively impact the population. The Council is requesting the BOG to adopt the area proposed in the attached map for a December hunt period. The described area will protect bull moose in December in the northern section of the hunt area of Unit 21D, where bull populations are low. The Council notes that a similar proposal will be before the Federal Subsistence Board at its April 2020 meeting in Gulkana.

Proposal 60: 5 AAC 85.045(a)(19). Reauthorize a winter any-moose season during March in a portion of Unit 21D.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal.

Council comments:

The Council believes this is a housekeeping issue to allow a winter hunt to occur in areas of 21D.

Proposal 61: 5 AAC 85.045. Extend the resident moose season within the Kanuti Controlled Use Area of Unit 24B.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal.

Council comments:

There is a low hunter success rate during the current season; the bull/cow ratio is good; and bulls encountered later in the season are typically non-breeders. Federal harvest in the current extended season to October 1 is currently only 2-3 bulls in the Kanuti CUA. The prohibition on aircraft in the CUA will prevent locating breeding aggregates of the population. Breeding aggregates have typically sequestered away from hunting activities of the main season. The proposal will have little affect on continued recruitment. Traditional Ecological Knowledge says that displaced younger bulls will be traveling and easier to call and encounter for harvest. Subsistence users prefer younger bulls later in the season for the meat quality.

Proposal 62: 5 AAC 92.069(b)(3). Allocate 90 percent of the Unit 21B, Upper Nowitna Corridor moose drawing permits to residents and award remaining available nonresident permits to resident.

Council recommendation: The Council voted to **OPPOSE** this proposal.

Council comments:

The Council believes the current allocation system is working and appreciates that many non-resident hunters give their meat to residents in the Western Interior Region.

Proposal 63: 5 AAC 92.530(7). Repeal the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **OPPOSE** this proposal.

Council comments:

The Council strongly believes that the Alaska Board of Game's Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area (DHCMA) regulation is the most effective way to ensure enforcement of game management. Hunters and others rely on ADF&G regulations versus broad state statute as a much

more reliable way to understand activities permitted in the DHCMA. Law enforcement can also enforce the BOG regulations for illegal activities. The BOG is tasked with game management within the statutorily delineated GMUs comprising the DHCMA.

Proposal 64: 5 AAC 92.530. Clarify the legal use of highway vehicles, snow machines and off-road vehicles in the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area (DHCMA) for hunting and trapping. Clarify the use of firearms, and transport of furbearers and trapping bait when trapping in the DHCMA.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal **WITH MODIFICATION**.

Council comments:

The sole purpose of the described area in Alaska Statutes was to protect Big Game populations. The Council supports the premise of the proposal to clarify use parameters of the DHCMA, and believes the BOG is the best management body to address enforcement and other issues brought forth by law officers and the public. The Council voted to amend Proposal 64 by replacing language with the following, which were also discussed and submitted by the Koyukuk River Fish and Game Advisory Committee:

1) Clarification to allow snowmachine use in the DHCMA for both access to traplines and the transport of legally defined big game bait. Licensed trapping is a very important management tool to harvest furbearers under trapping regulations. Travel to and from homes within or outside of the DHCMA by licensed trappers should not be impeded. Firearms to take free-ranging furbearers has always been allowed in the DHCMA under a trapping license, and should continue. Restricting trappers' ability to take predators would be detrimental to big game populations, and could cause the reduction of opportunity for subsistence and other users.

2) Clarification to allow residents north of the Yukon River to travel to their homes from the Dalton Highway. The residents of Wiseman, Coldfoot, Stevens Village, Anaktuvuk Pass, Allakaket, Alatna, Evensville, Bettles, and Nuiqsut should be permitted to travel from the Dalton Highway to their homes with legally taken big game. Access by residents using licensed highway vehicles should be allowed on year round or winter roads to these villages in order to transport game, game parts, hunters or hunting gear, as defined in regulation. Specifically, residents should have access to the oil field roads to Nuiqsut, the winter roads to Stevens Village, Anaktuvuk Pass, Bettles, Evensville, Allakaket and Alatna, and the year round road to property and businesses in Wiseman.

3) Clarification to allow licensed highway vehicles to transport hunters, game, game parts, and gear within 1 mile of the Dalton Highway. The current ¼ mile restriction does not allow subsistence and other hunters to access boat launching sites into the Koyukuk and Sag River drainages that have side road access outside of the quarter mile limit. Some hunters are currently accessing legal boat launch sites up to 18 river miles from logical accesses.

The Council does not support additional clarifying language within the original proposal; namely, the five bullet points on pages 75 and 76 of the BOG Proposal book. There is insufficient information provided as to what that clarifying language would be, and the impacts of any such language to subsistence uses within the DHMCA. The Council requests the BOG defer action on this proposal, and return to the Fish and Game Advisory Committees and Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils with a proposal for comment that contains specific language that would clarify the legal uses of the DHMCA.

Finally, the Council wishes to convey that its support for any clarifying language via Proposal 64 is based upon Alaska Statute protection of Big Game primarily, but also other fish and game resources. The Council's concern is for Federally qualified subsistence users who reside in or near the DHMCA whose homes and subsistence harvest is critical to their lifeway, as well as non-Federally qualified users who are protected under ANILCA Title VIII sec. 815. Further, any actions or clarifying language proposed by the BOG under this proposal should not be interpreted as taking away the rights afforded to subsistence users under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and/or the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

Proposal 65: 5 AAC 85.025. Establish a new resident, general season for caribou in Unit 20F

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **OPPOSE** this proposal.

Council comments:

The Ray Mountain Herd population has declined in recent years, and cannot sustain additional harvest, especially cows.

Proposal 67: 5 AAC 85.020 & 92.132. Increase the bag limit for brown bear in Unit 21D.

Council recommendation: The Council voted to **SUPPORT** this proposal.

Council comments:

The Council supports this proposal, as there are no biological concerns with the bear population in this unit and a limited demand for harvest. ADF&G reported that current take is 50-75% of the harvestable surplus.

Proposal 68: 5 AAC 92.044. Open a fall bear baiting season in Unit 21C.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **OPPOSE** this proposal.

Council comments:

The Council has concerns about the use of illegal game parts being used in bait stations during a fall hunt period and enforcement.

Proposal 70: 5 AAC 85.020. Change the season start date for taking brown bear in Unit 24A to align with Unit 25A.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **OPPOSE** this proposal.

Council comments:

Neither bear meat nor fur is in prime condition during the proposed season start date. There is consistent harvest of Brown bears in GMU 24A. Current regulations for hunting bears in this GMU subunit allow for the taking of bears in more prime condition beginning on August 10.

Proposal 72: 5 AAC 85.020 & 5 AAC 92.132. Increase the resident bag limit for brown bear in Unit 24B.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal.

Council comments:

The population in this unit is currently high and can support additional harvest opportunity.

Proposal 73: 5 AAC 585.020 & 5 AAC 92.165 & 5 AAC 92.220. Eliminate the RB601 brown bear registration permit hunt for Units 21D and 24.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal.

Council comments:

The Council does not support the current RB601 permit for hunting Brown bears in these units, because it requires the permit beforehand. The alternative is taking Brown Bears opportunistically, under sealing requirements. Brown Bears are most often taken for subsistence opportunistically and on-demand. In some cultures, all parts are retained. In the Koyukon culture, skin and skull are discarded.

The requirement under the current subsistence permit for destruction of trophy value, if it leaves the unit, results in the loss of parts of the bear important to some subsistence users. There are few Brown bear hunters in these units, making the current subsistence permitting system unnecessary. The Council recognizes that eliminating the permit and requiring sealing would potentially disregard Customary and Traditional subsistence practices for some cultures. The Council requests that the BOG create an alternative system that allows opportunistic Brown bear harvest which will allow traditional activities such as leaving the skull and skin in the field and permit subsistence users to keep all usable parts if desired, with post harvest reporting.

Proposal 75: 5 AAC 92.111 & 92.115. Develop a feasibility assessment for intensive management of wolves and bears in Units 21D and 24.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal.

Council comments:

There are a high number of wolves and bears in these units and a need for predator reduction, particularly around Allakaket. The Council also believes that deep snows over the past two winters require proactive management for the long-term protection of moose populations necessary for subsistence.

Proposal 76: 5 AAC 92.126. Establish a non-intensive management predator control plan in Unit 21 for bears and wolves.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal.

Council comments:

The Ruby Fish and Game Advisory Council believes that studies should be conducted to look at predation on the Galena Mt. and wolf Mt. caribou herds. The Council supports further investigation to consider habitat treatments or predator control in Unit 21.

Proposal 84: 5 AAC 85.055. Extend the sheep season in the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area within Units 24A, 25A, and 26B.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **OPPOSE** this proposal.

Council comments:

Given the lack of current population data and two recent winters with deep snow, the Council firmly believes the sheep population cannot support additional harvest opportunity in these Brooks Range units and extension of the season would threaten this important subsistence resource.

Proposal 85: 5 AAC 85.055. Open an archery only registration sheep hunt in the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area in Units 24A, 25A, and 26B.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **OPPOSE** this proposal.

Council comments:

See Proposal 84.

Proposal 96: 5 AAC 92.123(a)(2). Reauthorize the Unit 19D-East predation control program.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal.

Council comments:

Like many Interior units, the moose population in Unit 19D-East has endured two harsh winters back to back. Deep snows has caused increased moose mortality including calves, which will affect recruitment for area herds. The Council believes continued predation restraint is warranted.

Proposal 97: 5 AAC 85.045. Change the Tier II permit hunt for moose in Unit 19A to a registration permit hunt.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **OPPOSE** this proposal.

Council comments:

The Council agreed with ADF&G's position that "The department is **OPPOSED** to the proposal as written because hunters are currently harvesting the maximum number of animals available, and if this proposal is adopted as written, harvest would likely increase significantly. The department currently issues 200 permits while the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issue an

additional 100 permits. Currently with 300 total permits issued and success rates just above 50% there is no additional harvest available.”

Proposal 98: 5 AAC 85.045. Change the Tier II permit hunt for moose in Unit 19A to a registration permit hunt.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **OPPOSE** this proposal.

Council comments:

See above comments for Proposal 97.

Proposal 99: 5 AAC 85.045. Change the Tier II moose permit hunt (TM680) in Unit 19A to a household permit.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal as **AMENDED** by the McGrath Fish and Game Advisory Committee. (McGrath AC)

Council comments:

The McGrath AC supported this proposal with the following conditions: 1) A registration hunt with up to 300 permits, 2) Permits available within the hunt area. 3) A person won't qualify to receive a permit, if they have a permit to hunt moose anywhere else in the Kuskokwim Drainage, 4) Only one permit per household, 5) Hunt reports turned in within 15 days of hunt closure.

The Council believes this proposal with amendments reflects a traditional way of hunting.

Proposal 102: 5 AAC 85.045. Shift the season dates for the Tier II moose permit hunt in Unit 19A.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **OPPOSE** this proposal.

Council comments:

A season date shift would require a reduction in the number of permits, threaten a population of moose with a marginal bull/cow ratio, cause meat to spoil before hunters could get it out of the field, and ultimately result in reduced hunting opportunity.

Proposal 107: 5 AAC 85-045. Establish a resident winter moose hunt in Unit 21E.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal.

Council comments:

This is a growing moose population with a need to harvest additional moose. A winter moose hunt would provide additional hunting opportunities for local communities. This hunt would open state lands closest to the villages for a winter hunt, and overlap/align with the current Federal hunt.

Proposal 108: 5 AAC 92.052. Require trophy destruction of moose antlers taken from Unit 21E under RM836 permits, and establish check stations.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **OPPOSE** this proposal.

Council comments:

The Council is in agreement with the Grayling Anvik Shageluk Holy Cross (GASH) Fish and Game Advisory Committee that while user conflicts exist, this proposal is not the best vehicle to address those conflicts. The Councils hopes to hear from the GASH AC and BOG on ideas to address the issue of harvesting moose for the purpose of selling antlers.

Proposal 109: 5 AAC 85.045. Replace the moose general season hunts for residents and nonresidents in Unit 21A with registration permit hunts.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal.

Council comments:

The Council is concerned with underreporting of moose harvest in Unit 21A and believes this proposal would provide better harvest reporting.

Proposal 112: 5 AAC 85.045. Open a registration permit hunt for moose in a portion of Unit 19C and eliminate the general season hunt.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal **WITH AMENDMENT**.

Council comments:

The Council has concerns with underreporting of moose harvest in Unit 19C and agrees with the McGrath AC to modify the proposal by establishing specific parameters (Windy to South Fork) to “delineate a recognizable limit against the mountains on the East boundary.” The Council recognizes that eastern Unit 19C is largely used by non-Federally qualified subsistence users in fall on trail systems. There is a need for more reliable harvest information in this area. Federally qualified users use the western portion of 19C in fall and most of the subunit in winter.

Proposal 115: 5 AAC 92.220. Require meat to be left on the bone for caribou, moose and bison in Units 19, 21A, and 21E.

Council recommendation: The Council voted unanimously to **SUPPORT** this proposal **WITH AMENDMENT**.

Council comments:

The Council concurs with several area Fish and Game Advisory Committees that an amendment to this proposal adding “prior to October 1” is necessary for consistency with similar regulations. The Council also agrees that bison should be added to the list. This proposal addresses wanton waste and provides better meat condition.

The Council thanks the BOG for considering these comments, which reflect the importance of

conserving healthy wildlife populations and providing for the continuation of subsistence uses in the Western Interior Alaska region. We look forward to continuing discussions with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and BOG on subsistence matters affecting the region. If you have questions about this letter, please contact me through Karen Deatherage, Subsistence Council Coordinator, with the Office of Subsistence Management, at (907) 474-2270 or karen_deatherage@fws.gov.

Sincerely,

Jack Reakoff
Chair

Cc: Federal Subsistence Board
Thomas Doolittle, Acting Assistant Regional Director, Office of Subsistence Management
Gregory Risdahl, Acting Deputy Assistant Regional Director, Office of Subsistence Management
George Pappas, State Subsistence Liaison, Office of Subsistence Management

Suzanne Worker, Acting Subsistence Policy Coordinator, Office of Subsistence Management

Chris McKee, Wildlife Division Supervisor, Office of Subsistence Management

Tom Kron, Acting Council Coordination Division Supervisor, Office of Subsistence Management,

Karen Deatherage, Subsistence Council Coordinator, Office of Subsistence Management

Ben Mulligan, Assistant Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Mark Burch, Special Projects Coordinator, Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Nissa Pilcher, Regional Coordinator, Interior Region, Board Support, Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory

Council Interagency Staff Committee

Administrative Record