

PROPOSAL 145

5 AAC 92.510. Areas closed to hunting.

5 AAC 92.550. Areas closed to trapping.

Close areas to hunting and trapping within 1/4 mile of parts of the Sterling Highway in Units 7 and 15 as follows:

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Amend to include all lands within ¼ mile of the five wildlife structures (including the structures themselves) being constructed as part of the Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Project: two underpasses and one overpass in Unit 7 and two underpasses in Unit 15A.

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What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The Sterling Highway mile post (MP) 45-60 Project (aka Cooper Landing Bypass) includes more than \$10.5 million in mitigation for wildlife crossings including four underpasses and the first overpass in Alaska. Two underpasses are in Unit 15A between Jim’s Landing and Sportsman’s Landing along the existing highway; two underpasses and one vegetated overpass are in Unit 7 between Sportsman’s Landing and Cooper Landing along the new bypass.

These structures are expected to help reduce moose-vehicle collisions (that average more than \$35,000 per incident in damage, injury and sometimes human death according to the Alaska Moose Federation) and allow for other wildlife species to move unimpeded across a road segment that currently averages > 1.2 million vehicles per year.

Cameras installed to monitor similar wildlife underpasses on the adjacent Sterling Highway MP 58-79 through the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge have already documented use by moose, lynx, snowshoe hare, brown and black bears, porcupine, caribou, river otter, ermine, mink, ducks and sandhill cranes. More wildlife use is expected once game trails become well established, a likely outcome because trapping and hunting around those structures are incidentally prohibited by other safety restrictions imposed by the Refuge near roads, campgrounds, trailheads, and buildings.

However, the new structures being installed on the Sterling Highway MP 45-60 project do not have protections for wildlife while they use them. Without a change in regulation, hunting and trapping would be permitted on and at the entrance/exit of multi-million dollar structures meant to create safe passage across the highway; these underpasses and this bypass, meant to benefit wildlife, could turn into a population sink.

We seek to ensure that the \$10+ million investment of public funds to help wildlife navigate an increasingly congested part of the Kenai Peninsula is honored by State hunting and trapping regulations.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Wildlife Alliance

(HQ-F22-032)
