

PROPOSAL 152

5 AAC 92.550. Areas closed to trapping.

Establish trapping setbacks along trails and trailheads in Unit 7 as follows:

1) SOLUTION:

We are requesting the Board of Game amend 5 AAC 92.550 to establish 1) a 100-yard trapping setback along both sides of the trails and all sides of the trailheads listed and described in the table provided. 2) We are requesting a 50-yard trapping setback for traps with an inside spread of 5 inches or less, that are set at least 4 feet above the ground or snow level, and size 3 leghold marten traps set in boxes. We are requesting these changes to protect the safety of people and their pets utilizing the most popular multi-use trails in the Cooper Landing area.

2) REGULATORY LANGUAGE:

ADD Regulatory Language for Unit 7: “Trap setback of 100-yards on both sides of the trails and trailheads listed. Traps with an inside spread of 5 inches or less which are at least 4 feet above the ground or snow level, and size 3 leghold marten traps in boxes are allowed if more than 50-yards from the trail.”

- Crescent Creek Trail
- Lower Russian Lake Trail
- Bean Creek Trail
- Russian Gap Trail/Historic Quartz Creek Trail
- Resurrection Trail, South End
- West Juneau Bench Trail
- Devil’s Pass Ski Loops
- Stetson Trail parking area and first 400 yards

The precedent for establishing trapping buffers for public safety along multi-use trails in the State of Alaska has already been set, most notably in the Municipality of Anchorage, parts of Chugach State Park, the City/Borough of Juneau, and along six trails and surrounding all school yards in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. While these municipalities and boroughs have approved trapping regulations on lands they manage, they have not issued regulations for state- managed trails in deference to the regulatory powers of the Board of Game. We are asking the Board of Game to rectify this situation in our area.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

1) ISSUE:

We are requesting the Board of Game amend 5 AAC 92.550 to establish 1) a 100-yard trapping setback along both sides of the trails and all sides of the trailheads listed and described in the table provided. 2) We are requesting a 50-yard trapping setback for traps with an inside spread of 5 inches or less, that are set at least 4 feet above the ground or snow level, and size 3 leghold marten traps set in boxes. We are requesting these changes to protect the safety of people and their pets utilizing the most popular multi-use trails in the Cooper Landing area.

Unit	Trail Name	Description	Winter Uses
7	Crescent Creek Trail USGS Map Seward B7, C7 and C8 USFS, Chugach National Forest Map for Crescent Creek Trail	Begins at Crescent Creek Trailhead parking area at mile 3.5 of Quartz Creek Road and ascends 6.5 miles to the Crescent Lake Cabin at the west end of the lake.	Backcountry skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, backpacking, fat tire biking, and access to public use cabins
7	Lower Russian Lake Trail USGS Map Seward B8, Kenai B1 USFS, Chugach National Forest Map for Russian Lakes Trail	Lower Russian Lake Trail from the trailhead parking located in the Russian River Campground about 1.0 miles from the campground entrance to both the Barber Cabin on the shore of Lower Russian Lake and to the Russian River Falls Overlook.	Backcountry and cross-country skiing, skijoring, snowshoeing, hiking, fat tire biking, backpacking and access to public use cabins
7	Bean Creek Trail	Bean Creek Trail starting at its trailhead at mile 0.5 of the west end of Slaughter Ridge Road to its intersection of the main Resurrection Pass Trail above Juneau Falls.	Backcountry and cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, fat tire biking, snow machining, dog mushing, backpacking, and access to public use cabins
7	Russian Gap Trail/Historic Quartz Creek Trail	This trail is referred to as the Quartz Creek Trail on the 2004 plat approved by the Kenai Peninsula Borough for the Russian Gap Subdivision. This trail ascends behind the west side of KPB parcel 11912507 and continues through parcel 11912513, connecting with the Russian Gap Trail and heading north easterly along a bench below Russian Gap.	Backcountry and cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, snowmachine use

7	Resurrection Trail, South End USGS Maps Seward B8, C8 and D8	From the southern Resurrection Trail trailhead on the Sterling Highway continuing to the Swan Lake public use cabin	Backcountry and cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, fat tire biking, backpacking and access to public use cabins
7	West Juneau Bench Trail USGS Maps Seward B8, C8 and D8	From the Sterling Highway pullout at mile 53.25 just west of the southern Resurrection Trail trailhead continuing to its intersection with the Resurrection Trail.	Back country and cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, snow machining, fat tire biking, backpacking for camping and cabin use
7	Devil's Pass Ski Loops USGS Map Seward C7 and C8 USFS, Chugach National Forest Map for Devil's Pass Trail	These trails begin at the far end of the parking area for Devil's Pass Trail head at mile 39.5 of the Seward Highway. They loop along the cleared area to the northeast of the parking lot between Quartz Creek and the Seward Highway.	Backcountry ski access, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, fat-tire biking, skijoring
7	Stetson Creek Parking area and Trail	Stetson Trail parking area at milepost 50.7 of Sterling Highway. Setback of 100 yards around clearing beyond gate under the power line and first 400 yards up the trail.	Cooper Landing EMT training, search and rescue dog training, hiking and snowshoeing

2) WHY:

Year-round outdoor recreation is an important and growing segment of the Cooper Landing area's economy. The community of Cooper Landing is located on the Sterling highway at the headwaters of the Kenai River. Easily accessible by road, Cooper Landing is located only 100 hundred miles south of Anchorage, the largest city in the state. Cooper landing's primary economy is based on summer recreation and tourism to the area, however, as winter recreation in the area increases, Cooper Landing businesses could take advantage of this opportunity and extend their seasonal

offerings. To encourage the increasing number of family-friendly, active, outdoor recreational pursuits (e.g., winter biking, cross-country skiing, backcountry skiing, snowshoeing, trail running, ice fishing, bird hunting, and backcountry cabin rentals) in the area, it would be beneficial for business owners to be able to accurately market Cooper Landing as a fun, safe, and uniquely beautiful area, for visitors to enjoy with their family and pets.

As the number of winter trail users has increased immensely over the past 20 years, so have the number of dangerous encounters between user groups and traps set in recreational areas. While many trappers set their traps a responsible distance from multi-use trails, trap placements close to (or in) trails and trailheads present a very real danger to all users, especially young children and pets. As of late February 2022, seven dogs have been caught in traps throughout Southcentral Alaska, and two dogs were killed, as reported via the Alaska Press. Since land managers and law enforcement do not track trap safety incidents all reports are collected and tabulated unofficially and are considered incomplete. While we respect the rights of trappers to use these multi-use trails, we are seeking trapping regulation that will ensure the safety of all trail users.

Our proposed 100- and 50-yard trapping setbacks are not large enough to significantly limit a trappers' opportunity along multi-use trails. Proposing setbacks for only the most popular

and heavily used multi-use trails leaves all other areas unrestricted. Trappers who follow the Trapper's Code of Ethics' third tenant, to "promote trapping methods that will reduce the possibility of catching non-target animals," most likely already set traps back from heavily used trails. The setbacks we are requesting will not unduly impact trappers and will greatly improve trail user safety. These proposed setbacks would also align with the Forest Service's Our Values Statement, which includes the intention of managing for "*Safety. In every way: physical, psychological, and social.*"

The 100- and 50-yard setbacks we have proposed would not present an undue burden on trappers. The average backpacking speed is 1 to 2 miles per hour. Assuming trappers are walking between one and two miles per hour, the setback distances requested would require only an additional two to three minutes of walking to place and check traps. Since many trappers use snow machines, the 100-yard setback could be crossed in less than one minute. **A local Cooper Landing trapper, as well as trappers from other nearby GMUs, have endorsed a 100- yard setback as reasonable and logical.**

Our proposed 100-yard and 50-yard setback distances will not impact the Board of Game's ability to manage wildlife along the listed trails. Should trapping a particular species within the setback become biologically necessary, the board could use a temporary permit system to address any problem that might arise. A similar proposal requesting a 100-yard setback from trails has been submitted and endorsed by the Homer AC. Having regulations that are similar, will make management, education, and enforcement easier in Units 7 and 15.

Establishing trap setbacks in the Cooper Landing area has strong community support. Cooper Landing property owners and residents were surveyed about trapping issues in their area in March, 2021. Returned surveys were tallied to show that 90% of the respondents felt setbacks for traps in the Cooper Landing area were necessary, and 10% felt setbacks were unnecessary. 86-89% responded in favor of setbacks along the trails and trailheads listed above, while 10-12% did not feel they were necessary.

Our proposal includes only the most popular multi-use trails used by a variety of users during the trapping season. Popular trail uses in our area include: cross-country skiing, access to backcountry skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, fat tire biking, dog mushing, snow machining, travel by search and rescue dogs and personnel, hunting and trapping. The Stetson Trail parking area and first 400 yards has been utilized for search and rescue dog training which is critical to the active avalanche areas close by.

As of the 2019 census, there are 731,545 residents of the state of Alaska, and based on sealing records, license sales and the annual "Trapper Questionnaire," the Alaska Department of Fish and Game estimates **2,500 to 3,500** trappers in the state. By adopting this trapping regulation in Unit 7, the Board of Game would better represent the majority of its constituents and the current areas recreational uses

PROPOSED BY: The Cooper Landing Safe Trails Committee

(HQ-F22-012)
