

PROPOSAL 147

5 AAC 92.550. Areas closed to trapping.

Establish trapping buffers along two areas of Kenai Lake beaches near Cooper Landing, in Unit 7 as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

ADD Regulatory Language for Unit 7: “Trap and snare setback of 100-yards from mean high-water mark of Kenai Lake on the north side from the Kenai River Bridge to 1 mile past the end of Williams Road and on the south side from the Kenai River Bridge to ¼ mile past the powerline crossing (The powerline is at mile 2.8 Snug Harbor Road), also, Kenai Lake Beach (Locally known as Waikiki Beach) ¼ mile north to ¼ mile south of the lake access road at mile 5.8 Snug Harbor Road, unless the traps are elevated three feet above ground or snow level, enclosed, underwater, or under ice. Trapping would still be permitted on the below-listed beaches if they are elevated three feet above ground or snow level enclosed, underwater, or under ice. All other forms of lawful trapping would still be allowed near the below listed beaches, provided they are placed farther than 100-yards from the trail.

- Cooper Landing, Kenai Lake Beach- north side, Kenai River Bridge to 1 mile past end of Williams Rd.
- Cooper Landing, Kenai Lake Beach -south side, Kenai River Bridge to 1/4mile past powerline at mile 2.8 Snug Harbor Rd.
- Cooper Landing, Kenai Lake Beach-west side (Waikiki Beach)

The precedent for establishing trapping and snaring buffers for public safety along multi-use trails in the State of Alaska has already been set, most recently, in the Mat-Su Valley, where 50-yard setbacks were established for 9 trails that both recreational users and the ATA mutually agreed on. The Alaska Supreme Court upheld Valdez’s trapping ordinance, confirming the city’s authority to regulate trapping within city limits. In 2023, Cordova created a special use map that closed trapping in part of the municipality and created trap setbacks of 200 yards from publicly maintained roads for traps larger than a 120 conibear, and a 200-yard setback for a popular trail. The Municipality of Anchorage, parts of Chugach State Park, the City/Borough of Juneau, and surrounding all schoolyards in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough have existing trap setback laws. 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 requesting the Board of Game to modify this situation in our area.

Unit	Beach Area	Description	Winter Uses
7	<u>Cooper Landing Kenai Lake Beaches north side</u>	Kenai Lake Beaches: on the North side from the Kenai River Bridge to 1 mile past the end of Williams Road	Cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, fat tire biking, skijoring, snow machining
7	<u>Cooper Landing Kenai Lake Beach south- side</u>	Kenai Lake Beaches: from the Kenai River Bridge to ¼ mile past the powerline crossing (powerline is at mile 2.8 Snug Harbor Road). <i>Area from the mean high water mark to 100yds back.</i>	Cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, fat tire biking, skijoring, snow machining
7	<u>Cooper Landing- Kenai Lake Beach-west side (Waikiki Beach)</u>	Kenai Lake Beach (Locally known as Waikiki Beach) ¼ mile north to ¼ mile south of the lake access road at mile 5.8 Snug Harbor Road. <i>Area from the mean high-water mark to 100yds back.</i>	Cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, fat tire biking, skijoring, snow machining

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

We are requesting that the Board of Game amend Alaska Administrative Code No. 5 AAC 92.550 to establish a 100-yard trapping and snaring buffer in two small areas in Cooper Landing listed and described in the table provided, unless they are elevated three feet above ground or snow level, enclosed, underwater, or under ice. Trapping would still be permitted in the areas listed below if they are elevated three feet above ground or snow level, enclosed, underwater, or under ice. All other forms of lawful trapping would also still be allowed near the below-listed beaches, provided they are placed farther than 100 yards from the trail.

The purpose of this proposal is to create a solution to the growing conflict between recreational uses of land and trapping in a manner that protects the safety of individuals, families, and pets when utilizing the most popular beaches in the Cooper Landing area. As dangerous encounters between user groups and traps in recreational areas increases, reports are considered incomplete because land managers and law enforcement do not track trap injury incidents nor is there a database for community documentation. As of late February 2022, seven dogs had been caught in traps throughout Southcentral Alaska, and two dogs were killed, as reported via the Alaska Press. Bird dogs are typically well-behaved and under strict voice command, however, there was a fatality where a trap had been placed 50 feet from the road. Search and rescue dog owners have voiced concern about the safety of their dogs in emergency missions. Incidents of abandoned or “ghost traps” found at the Russian River Falls Trailhead and Williams Beach increase the community’s fear of risk.

Why should this regulation be amended?

The District Ranger for the Chugach National Forest supports proposals for regulatory measures of 100-yard setbacks and trapline signage. It is the intention of the NFS to allow all user groups to utilize multi-use public lands safely, and to balance the opportunities for all. *See attachment*

The proposed trap setbacks have increasing community support in Cooper Landing. A 2015 survey indicated that 83% of the respondents supported trap setbacks, and in 2021 when a similar survey was conducted of property owners and residents of Cooper Landing, results showed an increase to 90% who felt that trap setbacks were necessary. The community of Cooper Landing clearly supports trap and snare setbacks in and around areas utilized for winter recreation.

Indicated in the surveys and local meetings was people's emotional stress and fear when taking their families, children or pets to their favorite recreational places due to the danger of encountering a trap. This safety concern grows as Cooper Landing residents' demographics change to a younger, more outdoor enthusiast-oriented population. This proposal targets several beaches used by those who cross-country ski, snowshoe, hike, fat tire bike, skijor, snow machine, and train search-and-rescue dogs.

As the community evolves, there is an increasing call for measures that protect all residents and visitors. This proposal aims to create a safer environment for winter recreation by implementing trap setbacks, which will help reduce the risks and alleviate the fears associated with accidental encounters. Families can enjoy outdoor activities with peace of mind, knowing that the areas they frequent are secure from hidden dangers.

Year-round outdoor recreation is a significant and growing segment of Cooper Landing's economy. Easily accessible by road, Cooper Landing is located only 100 miles south of Anchorage, the largest city in the state. Cooper Landing's primary economy is based on summer recreation and tourism; however, year round recreational activity is expected to increase with the anticipated bypass completion and the addition of Three Bears grocery store in the future. Local businesses desire to 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). The proposed trapping setback aims to benefit business owners who promote Cooper Landing as an area for visitors to enjoy with family and pets.

What other support do you have for developing your proposal?

- The Precautionary Principle is widely recognized in international law and policy. It suggests that if an action or policy has the potential to cause harm to the public or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause-and-effect relationships are not fully established scientifically. We are seeking trapping regulations that will be preventative and ensure the safety of all area user groups reducing the risk of accidental encounters.
- The proposed 100-yard trapping and snaring setback is not significant enough to limit a trapper's opportunity to trap near beaches. Proposing setbacks for *only the most popular and heavily used beaches* leaves all other areas unrestricted. Trappers who follow the Trapper's Code of Ethics third tenet to "promote trapping methods that will reduce the

possibility of catching non-target animals,” presumably set traps back from heavily used beaches.

- A former Cooper Landing trapper and trappers from other nearby Units have endorsed a 100-yard setback as reasonable and logical. The proposed 100-yard setbacks-do 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 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 1 minute.
- The proposed 100-yard trapping and snaring setback would also align with the “Our Values Statement” set out by the U.S. Forest Service, which includes the intention of managing for “*Safety. In every way: physical, psychological, and social.*”
- The proposed 100-yard setback distance will not impact the Board of Game’s ability to manage wildlife along the listed beaches, though trapping nuisance wildlife may be required within the setback and environmentally necessary. A similar proposal requesting a 100-yard setback from trails has been submitted and endorsed by the Homer AC. Having regulations that are consistent will make management, education, and enforcement easier in Units 7 and 15.
- As of the 2019 census, there are 741,147 residents of the state of Alaska. Based on sealing records, license sales, and the annual "Trapper Questionnaire," the Alaska Department of Fish and Game estimates the number of trappers in the state between 2,500 and 3,500, meaning only .4% of the Alaskan population is actively trapping. By adopting this safe trapping regulation in Unit 7, the Board of Game would better represent the majority of constituents and the current area's recreational uses.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

Several members of our Cooper Landing AC endorse this proposal and two members of the Cooper Landing Safe Trails have been trappers.

The Cooper Landing Safe Trails Committee met in April 2025 with members of the Southcentral Trappers Association to work together on solutions to reduce trap/pet conflicts; during the discussion we gained a better understanding and appreciation of the trappers' concerns. Advocating for pet owner responsibility and not overreaching with more setback requests in the future were two concerns we heard clearly.

We took careful consideration of all land users while drafting this proposal, which will reduce conflicts between all user groups of shared recreational areas. We value the preservation, history, and tradition of trapping in Alaska for current and future generations. Providing a safe buffer on the two beach areas indicated will reduce conflicts and potentially improve the public image of trappers for those who are opposed to the activity.

PROPOSED BY: The Cooper Landing Safe Trails Committee (HQ-F25-020)
