

ALASKA BOARD OF GAME
FINDINGS ON BROWN BEAR MANAGEMENT
ON THE MCNEIL RIVER STATE GAME REFUGE

The Board of Game at the fall meeting in Fairbanks passed a regulation that created a drawing permit to allow continuation of brown bear hunting in portions of GMU 9A adjacent to McNeil River State Game Sanctuary.

The following items were factors in the board's decision:

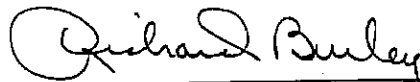
1. Brown bear hunting in the sanctuary has been prohibited since 1955 and will continue.
2. Brown bear viewing in the sanctuary has become a world-famous attraction over the past two decades with increasing numbers of people applying for permits to watch a steadily increasing number of bears at McNeil River Falls.

Increases have occurred in viewing interest and bear numbers while hunting was allowed in the area north of the sanctuary.

3. Carefully regulated hunting and viewing are compatible as demonstrated by experiences during the past two decades at the sanctuary.
4. In 1991 the Alaska legislature created the McNeil River State Game Refuge to:
 - A. Protect brown bear and other wildlife.
 - B. Manage human use and activities and maintain unique bear viewing opportunities
 - C. Provide opportunities that are compatible with A; including wildlife viewing, fisheries enhancement, fishing, hunting and trapping, and other activities.
5. The Alaska legislation reaffirmed the authority of the board to determine if brown bear hunting should continue in the refuge.
6. In order to enhance and maintain the viewing opportunities, the board decided to limit take of brown bear to 3 per year by drawing permit.

7. The known range of some bears in the McNeil/Katmai region is far in excess of the combined range of the refuge and sanctuary. Closing the refuge to hunting would not protect all individual animals.
8. Expert testimony on habituation and bear behavior was unambiguous on the point that you cannot generalize on the dynamics of habituation as it relates to individual bears after they have left the viewing area or prior to their arrival. There is no evidence that principals of fair chase would be violated.
9. The board previously has acted to accommodate non-consumptive use by closing state lands adjacent to the sanctuary to brown bear hunting. In combination with Katmai National Park and Preserve, this created 7400 square miles where brown bear are protected.
10. It is very clear from department testimony that the bear population in the sanctuary is both healthy and growing. The adult mortality rates are similar to the Katmai - a large and totally protected area - as they are in the McNeil sanctuary/refuge.

DATE: November 9, 1993
Fairbanks, Alaska



Richard Burley, Chair
Alaska Board of Game

VOTE: 6 favor, 1 absent