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PRESS RELEASE

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Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) Responds to National Park Service Closure Announcements

"Of course we're very disappointed with the National Park Service" said ADF&G Commissioner Denby Lloyd of the recent announcement by federal officials, "We have authority to manage wildlife populations, and these federal closures of state general and subsistence hunting and trapping are unjustified."

The National Park Service (NPS) announced recently that it is closing the taking of black bears and wolves on three preserves, which are units of the park system whose laws specifically allow for state regulated subsistence and general hunting and trapping. "Allowing park managers to supersede state regulations based on undefined "values" is an unwarranted and confrontational intrusion upon the state's management prerogatives" said Commissioner Lloyd.

The taking of animals in state hunting and trapping seasons is authorized by the Alaska Board of Game (BOG) after an extensive open public process with input from many user groups. The Board also considers scientific evidence presented by state and other experts. "These closures are a blatant attempt to undermine our public process and may be a violation of ANILCA" said Board of Game Chair Cliff Judkins.

Many believe that the NPS is circumventing public process to pursue an internal agenda. "This is so unfortunate. The NPS is relying upon poor interpretations of scant data. We have shared with them information that clearly shows that bear and wolf populations in these areas are healthy, but they have apparently chosen to ignore these facts." continued Commissioner Lloyd.

The recent decisions also ignore the input that is required from federal Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) and were made without full consultation with the State.

The National Park Service cited a need to "protect" wolves that occasionally range onto the Yukon-Charley preserve, but the State cited currently healthy and sustainable wolf populations throughout the area as evidence of the disconnect between federal management and local concerns.

The NPS is closing the taking of black bears in dens due to park "values," but failed to clearly articulate those values or how they would be violated by state hunting and trapping seasons. Moreover, they failed to recognize a customary and traditional activity that has long been practiced by rural residents in this area which has a priority under law.

"The NPS is not following the direction provided in ANILCA or their own regulations" said Tina Cuning, an ANILCA expert with ADF&G. "The NPS justification to protect bear populations is not supported because bears in these areas are abundant and the harvest would not cause a conservation concern or the State wouldn't have authorized it."

“The State has responsibility to manage its wildlife populations on all lands in Alaska, including federal lands, in order to help meet subsistence needs” said Craig Fleener, Director of the Division of Subsistence for ADF&G. Congress clearly stated in ANILCA Section 1314(a) that “nothing” in this Act changes the state’s management except as provided in Title VIII—the subsistence priority in ANILCA. “Denning is a customary and traditional practice” said Fleener.” “These means and methods, allowed by the BOG, recognize Alaska Native traditions and were justified because of the abundance of bear populations.” said Fleener.

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