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August 26, 2020

## **Thirteen groups sue Interior, NPS for paving way for destructive hunting practices that threaten bears and wolves on national preserves**

ANCHORAGE, AK—A lawsuit filed today in federal District Court in Alaska charges the Interior Department and National Park Service with violating multiple laws when adopting a rule that would open up national preserves in Alaska to hunting practices like baiting brown bears and killing wolves during the denning season.

“The century-old governing mission of the National Park Service includes protecting America’s ecosystems and wildlife, not turning lands into massive game farms,” **said Jim Adams, Alaska regional director for the National Parks Conservation Association.** “Unfortunately, under the Trump administration, the Park Service is ignoring that mission in rolling back previous prohibitions and moving to allow baiting grizzly bears and trapping wolves in their dens on Alaska’s national parklands. The National Parks Conservation Association rejects these egregious sport hunting rules and is ready to fight back by taking the administration to court.”

With the new rule, NPS reverses its longstanding position that the State of Alaska may not implement sport hunting regulations on national preserves that are designed to decimate predators in order to increase the numbers of moose and caribou available for people to hunt. The agency’s new rule illegally clears the way for the state to allow activities like bear baiting and killing of wolves during denning season in all national preserves in Alaska, including those in Denali and Wrangell-St. Elias.

“This arbitrary and unjustified reversal of federal regulations undermines the very purposes established for these lands by Congress,” **said Katie Strong, senior staff attorney with Trustees for Alaska.** “Any rule that leads to the manipulation of predator populations rather than the preservation of wildlife diversity clearly and absolutely breaks federal law.”

Today’s [suit charges the agencies](#) with violating the National Park Service’s Organic Act, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, and the Administrative Procedure Act. The State of Alaska generally manages sport hunting on federal lands, but that management discretion must stay within the bounds of federal mandates.

Law firm Trustees for Alaska filed the lawsuit on behalf of 13 clients: Alaska Wildlife Alliance, Alaska Wilderness League, Alaskans FOR Wildlife, Center for Biological Diversity, Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, Copper Country Alliance, Defenders of Wildlife, Denali Citizens Council, the Humane Society of the United States, National Parks Conservation Association, Northern Alaska Environmental Center, Sierra Club and Wilderness Watch.

**Client statements:**

“Bear baiting. Killing black bear sows and cubs while they hibernate. Shooting wolves and coyotes and their pups while denning. These practices are unsportsmanlike, and baiting bears with human food also creates a substantial hazard for other public land users,” **said Andy Moderow, Alaska director at Alaska Wilderness League.** “These approaches to wildlife management are completely out of step with the mission of the National Park Service to protect wildlife populations for future generations, and we intend to continue fighting this absurd rollback.”

“The National Park Service has always prohibited extreme sport hunting practices on federal parks and preserves in Alaska to ensure public safety, maintain natural wildlife diversity, and balance public use of federal lands,” **said Nicole Schmitt, executive director of the Alaska Wildlife Alliance.** “Nothing in ANILCA, the Statehood Act, or any other law says that the Park Service has to go along with what the state wants to do on these federal lands – which in this case is to allow the sport killing of browns bears over greasy donuts and dog food, permit the sport shooting of wolves and coyotes while they’re denning, allow blinding black bears with flashlights and shooting them for sport while they’re hibernating, and more. The Park Service’s sudden about-face to sync itself with the state and allow such gruesome sport hunting practices on National Preserves is in violation of the agency’s founding mandates and widely opposed by the public. It’s important to note that this rule specifically regulates sport hunting; subsistence users have and will continue to have access to harvest on National Preserves in Alaska.”

"Techniques such as killing bear sows with cubs at den sites or harvesting brown bears over bait are clearly inappropriate within units of the National Park System," **said Phil Francis, Chair of the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks.** "The National Park Service is mandated to conserve wildlife, not exploit it through these objectionable hunting practices.”

“The National Park Service is now overtly sanctioning the killing of defenseless bear cubs and wolf pups in their dens; the exact opposite of what most believe is ‘fair chase,’” **said Jamie Rappaport Clark, president and CEO for Defenders of Wildlife.** “This controversial practice is extreme and wholly inconsistent with the Park Service’s mission to conserve wildlife and wild places. We are suing to protect Alaska’s irreplaceable wildlife and hold the National Park Service accountable to their conservation mission.”

"Denali Citizens Council strongly supports the conservation values of the National Park Service and of Denali National Park and Preserve,” **said Nancy Bale, board member with the Denali Citizens Council.** “We supported the NPS wildlife preserves rule signed in 2015 that prohibited

certain hunting practices on the NPS preserves, while continuing to allow most state-regulated hunting and trapping in those areas. We are highly disappointed that NPS, our country's premier habitat and wildlife conservation agency, waited less than five years to do a complete reversal of the well-defended 2015 rule. We are confident that this reversal will be found deficient and we support Trustees for Alaska in pursuing that end."

"The National Park Service was sorely misguided in deciding to allow such inhumane and unsporting trophy hunting practices of Alaska's iconic, beloved and highly sentient bears and wolves," **said Laura Smythe, a staff attorney for the Humane Society of the United States.** "Not only are these practices biologically destructive and contrary to the agency's legal duties, but recent polls have continually shown that the majority of Alaskans oppose allowing these cruel practices on national preserves in the state."

"This reversal explicitly disregards the federal laws established to protect wildlife," **says Elisabeth Balster Dabney, executive director of the Northern Alaska Environmental Center.** "Good sportsmanship, sound science, and National Park Service mandates all work together to keep predator species thriving and surviving. Predator species are essential to the health of ecosystems. This reversal cannot stand."

"Allowing bear cubs to be killed with their mothers and wolf pups to be targeted in their dens is unjustifiably cruel," **said Andrea Feniger, director of Sierra Club's Alaska Chapter.** "It's also detrimentally short-sighted. The science is clear that we are in the midst of a climate and extinction crisis. There's an urgent need to manage these lands to protect wildlife."

"It is outrageous to target ecologically important animals like wolves and bears so that hunters might have more moose and caribou to kill," **said Collette Adkins, carnivore conservation director for the Center for Biological Diversity.** "Not only are destructive predator control practices harmful and unsporting, they're illegal when done on federal public lands set aside to protect biodiversity. I'm hopeful that the court will set things right again."

"If these new National Park Service regulations are allowed to stand, our Alaska National Park Preserves will be transformed by hunting methods such as the baiting of bears for easy killing, and the extermination of entire wolf families during their denning season when they are most vulnerable," **said Fran Mauer, Alaska Chapter of Wilderness Watch.** "Maintenance of natural predator and prey relationships, a predominant purpose for the Preserves, will no longer prevail. Instead, these great wild lands will be converted to game farms for sport hunters."

Contacts:

Kati Schmidt, communications director, National Parks Conservation Association,  
[kschmidt@npca.org](mailto:kschmidt@npca.org), 415-847-1768

Corey Himrod, senior communications manager, Alaska Wilderness League,  
[corey@alaskawild.org](mailto:corey@alaskawild.org), 202-266-0426

Nicole Schmitt, executive director, Alaska Wildlife Alliance, [nicole@akwildlife.org](mailto:nicole@akwildlife.org), 907-917-9453

Emily Thompson, associate director of engagement, Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, [Emily\\_Thompson@protectnps.org](mailto:Emily_Thompson@protectnps.org), 202-758-3936

Collette Adkins, Carnivore Conservation Director and Senior Attorney, Center for Biological Diversity, [cadkins@biologicaldiversity.org](mailto:cadkins@biologicaldiversity.org), 651-955-3821

Gwen Dobbs, director of media relations, Defenders of Wildlife, [gdobbs@defenders.org](mailto:gdobbs@defenders.org), 202-772-0269

Nancy Bale, board member, Denali Citizens Council, [nancy@denalicitizens.org](mailto:nancy@denalicitizens.org), 907-244-2510

Emily Ehrhorn, senior specialist of media relations, the Humane Society of the United States, [eehrhorn@humanesociety.org](mailto:eehrhorn@humanesociety.org), 202-779-1814

Ginny Cramer, Sierra Club, [virginia.cramer@sierraclub.org](mailto:virginia.cramer@sierraclub.org), 804-519-8449

Fran Mauer, Alaska chapter representative, Wilderness Watch, [fmauer@mosquionet.com](mailto:fmauer@mosquionet.com), 907-455-6829 or 907-978- 1109

Dawnell Smith, communications director, Trustees for Alaska, [dsmith@trustees.org](mailto:dsmith@trustees.org), 907-433-2013