



TRUSTEES FOR ALASKA

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Contacts:

Pat Lavin, Alaska Representative, Defenders of Wildlife
plavin@defenders.org, 907-276-9410

Jim Adams, Alaska Regional Director, National Parks Conservation Association
jadams@npca.org, 907-538-5898, available after 1:30p Alaska time

Fran Mauer, wildlife biologist, Alaska Chapter of Wilderness Watch
fmauer@mosquitonet.com, 907-455-6829

Katie Strong, Staff Attorney, Trustees for Alaska
kstrong@trustees.org, 907-433-2008

Interior tells agencies to redo wildlife regulations

NPS, USFWS told to reconsider prohibitions that conflict with State practices

The U.S. Department of Interior directed the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reconsider wildlife regulations that protect bears and wolves on National Preserves in Alaska and on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

The directive came in two memos sent to NPS and USFWS last week. Both instruct the agencies to reconsider “prohibitions that directly contradict State of Alaska authorizations and wildlife management decisions...” These contradicting prohibitions banned the state from authorizing practices such as using bait to hunt bears, and killing cubs or sows with cubs. Such hunting regulations directly conflict with federal mandates to protect wildlife on federal land for natural diversity.

Interior’s misplaced directive not only instructs agencies to reevaluate regulations protecting wildlife on federal lands, but also to pull back regulations that went through extensive notice and comment, and were supported by the majority of people who commented.

The Interior’s directive comes months after the State of Alaska brought a lawsuit against the Interior in February 2017. The State’s suit

seeks to dismantle the recently finalized hunting regulations that prohibit certain predator control practices on lands managed by NPS and USFWS. Trustees filed on behalf of 15 clients to defend against those lawsuits.

“Rewriting regulations founded on good science and public input to meet a state objective to kill predators to increase game populations undermines the whole intent behind our Preserves and Refuges,” said Pat Lavin, Alaska Representative for Defenders of Wildlife. “The Department of Interior has the responsibility to prohibit state regulations that conflict with the purposes of Preserves and Refuge lands.”

NPS and USFWS manage wildlife on Preserves and Refuges to protect natural diversity of wildlife. These agencies generally allow the State to regulate sport hunting, but they do not allow the State to regulate it in a way aimed at significantly reducing wolf and bear populations.

“The Interior is basically promoting a states’ rights agenda instead of good science at great cost to our public lands,” said Fran Mauer of Fairbanks, retired wildlife biologist with the Alaska Chapter of Wilderness Watch. “Look at what happened with the Forty Mile area wolf control program. The state has been killing wolves in that area for years in an effort to increase the Forty Mile caribou herd. Now they admit wolves aren’t the problem. Predators are key to the health of other animals, plant life, and complex ecosystems, and manipulating them for seemingly simple ends backfires.”

Millions of Alaskans and Americans go to Preserves and Refuges to see wildlife every year. They support thousands of jobs and over a billion dollars of economic activity annually.

“Interior’s directive to the National Park Service is outrageous. It ignores the years of work, taxpayer dollars, and the individuals who spoke up in support of park bears and wolves in Alaska during the lengthy public process,” said Jim Adams, the Alaska Regional Director of the National Parks Conservation Association. “The National Park Service must have the authority to prevent the potentially indiscriminate killing of bears and their cubs on national parklands.”

Trustees for Alaska is a non-profit public interest environmental law firm founded and based in Alaska to defend and protect Alaska lands, waters, wildlife and communities. Trustees filed today’s motion to intervene on behalf of 15 conservation groups:

*The Alaska Wildlife Alliance
Alaskans for Wildlife
Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges
Denali Citizens Council
Copper Country Alliance
Kachemak Bay Conservation Society*

Defenders of Wildlife
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Refuge Association
Northern Alaska Environmental Center
The Wilderness Society
Wilderness Watch
Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club
Center for Biological Diversity
The Humane Society of the United States