

June 20, 2025

To: Federal Subsistence Board

Public Comment: WP-26-18, 26-19, 26-20, 26-21, 26-22, 26-23

From: Rhonda Lynn

Subject: Public Comment for Inclusion-Multiple Wildlife Proposals related to furbearers

I am a long time resident of Cooper Landing and I hunt, fish and enjoy my subsistence life style greatly. I also own and hunt with my dog. In fact, taking my dog bird hunting is one of the reasons I love living in a rural area. The tendency of some trappers to set traps close to trails because it's easy makes it impossible for me to enjoy local trails. Traps are often abandoned and using these trails during the entire year puts dogs at risk. The catch is you have no way of knowing.

I am very supportive of WP-26-18; 26-19; 26-20; 26-21; 26-22; 26-23. In the many years I have lived in Cooper Landing there have been significant demographic changes. Rather than a community of long term senior residents, we have become a community of younger families and part time residents who live here primarily for the recreational opportunities or to raise their families in a safe area. Agencies have done much to expedite that change including the extensive expansion and improvement of roads making weekend visits to recreate not just a warm season occurrence but the new normal. This has greatly expanded the number of people using our trails, pullouts and other recreational areas year round.

A 2021 survey showed that 90% of the population of our town supported making recreational areas safe from traps. State and federal agencies have failed to recognize and address this shift in evaluating the balance between user groups. A balance that both state and federal policy/regulation dictate must be practiced. Given that 99.6% of the users of state and federal lands in our communities are not trappers compared to less than 1% who are trappers, it seems the time has come for significant steps to find balance between the safety of the 96% versus the convenience of the 1%. Other Alaska areas, like Cooper Landing, have taken steps to recognize those changes - the MatSu Borough, Cordova, Valdez and Juneau to name four. Those restrictions include 200yard buffers in Cordova.

On a personal level, I own and hunt a trained bird dog. My dog represents not only an economic and emotional commitment but also my passion for hunting and the outdoors. For me to execute my right to subsistence bird hunt in our community I have to put my costly and well trained dog at risk. It would simply be unethical to hunt my dog anywhere around Cooper Landing when I know that traps can be anywhere and are only signed if the trapper happens to practice that *voluntary* guideline.

Comments such as "keep your dog on a leash" to someone who hunts with retrievers is absurd. Like many others in our community, I have found traps unsprung months after trapping season is over. I can return to these set traps time and time and see that no one has been there to check them. Yet, if I spring that trap I'm legally at risk. I truly want to believe that my friends and neighbors who trap are "responsible" trappers. However, the Board must recognize with so much public land in our area and so many easily accessible snow machine trails, our community is a magnet for people from larger communities to pop down and throw out a few traps. They may plan to return and check them but it's probably next week or next month but life happens and the traps are left. The current regulations protect the rights of these unethical trappers and continue to take opportunities away from other subsistence user groups.

Having participated in the effort to make trails safe for everyone for over twenty years I am baffled and appalled by the refusal of agencies to recognize that one powerful lobby should not be allowed to exercise their rights at the expense of the majority. What has been requested is reasonable and long over due. I urge the Board to move into the future.