

June 26, 2025

To: Federal Subsistence Board

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

From: Sandra Holsten

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

I am a long time resident of Cooper Landing. I hunt and fish and enjoy me subsistence life style greatly. I am of an age where I can't physically go where I used to when hunting, hiking or skiing. I also own and hunt with my dogs. In fact, taking my dog bird hunting is one of the reasons I opted to live 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. Because traps are often abandoned using these trails during the entire year puts dogs and children 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 I have seen significant demographic changes. Rather than a community of older long term 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 norm". This has greatly expanded the number of people using our trails, pullouts, campgrounds and even pull outs 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 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(s) 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 well trained dog at risk. Hunting retrievers are born with noses that will find any morsel of food/bait well beyond shooting range. They do this by advancing in front of you and flushing the bird. Consequently, they find the baited trap before the owner. 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. Retorts such as "keep your dog on a leash" to someone who hunts with retrievers is absurd. Like most hikers 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.

All the proposals I am commenting on are very reasonable requests. I will highlight the ones I think are “no brainers”. The Russian River trail is heavily used by dog owners throughout the year. Looking at the cabin and campground use alone shows the recreational value of the users far outweighs the use by trappers. Anyone who lives in Alaska realizes those recreational overnight users come with dogs. Add to that the day users when the campground trails are groomed for skiing/skijoring and the current refusal to implement set backs for trapping is unjustified. Likewise Resurrection Trail (South End) is a go to for winter recreation. Once the By Pass is finished that area becomes a snow machine mecca because the parking lot and facilities adjacent to Juneau Falls. Because snow levels reach that area but not the current accesses, snowmachine access will dramatically increase. That increase in snowmachines will naturally bring in an influx of trappers because the snow levels will allow for much better and longer access to a the tail. Likewise, recreational snowmachine use, skjoring, and backcountry skiing will also increase. Heavy use of two user groups with no separation of trapping from recreation will be much harder to do when user groups are pitted against each other because of conflicts.

Having watched 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.