



United States Department of the Interior

KENAI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
P.O. Box 2139
Soldotna, Alaska 99669-2139
(907) 262-7021



IN REPLY REFER TO:

13-5018

October 25, 2013

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge
(907) 262-7021, kenai@fws.gov

Or

Andrea Medeiros, 907-786-3695,
andrea_medeiros@fws.gov

SUBJECT: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Issues Emergency Closure of Brown Bear Sport Hunting on Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

SOLDOTNA, AK – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today announces an emergency closure of sport hunting of brown bears on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge), effective October 26, 2013 at 12:01 am. The emergency closure is issued pursuant to federal regulations at 50 CFR 36.42.

Operating under the assumption of lagging indicators, the known human-caused brown bear mortalities on the Kenai Peninsula in 2013 now total at least 66 bears. This includes a minimum of 43 brown bears taken during spring and fall hunting seasons, and 23 bears killed through defense of life and property takings, illegal takings, agency kills of problem bears, and vehicle collisions. Total mortalities now represent more than 10 percent of the best available estimate of a total Kenai Peninsula brown bear population, numbering 624 bears.

“This level of mortality is not scientifically sustainable,” said Refuge Manager Andy Loranger in announcing the Refuge emergency closure.

In addition to the total number of mortalities, a high number of reproductive-age female bears have been killed. Prior to 2013, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game limited the annual number of human-caused mortalities of adult female brown bears at 10. At least 22 adult females, or 33 per cent of all known mortalities, have been killed so far this year—more than double the previously established limits.

“Survivorship of adult female bears has been shown to be the primary driver of brown bear population dynamics. Losing so many adult female bears will have immediate negative impacts on this population,” said Refuge Supervisory Wildlife Biologist John Morton.

“Kenai brown bears are highly valued by the public for many reasons, and play an important ecological role,” continued Loranger. “If allowed to continue this season and into the immediate future, the Service believes that this level of mortality, which includes a high rate of loss of adult female bears, will result in a substantial reduction in the Kenai Peninsula’s brown bear population. This would create a conservation concern for this population, which in turn would negatively impact hunters and many other Refuge visitors who value and enjoy viewing and photographing bears.”

Actual human-caused mortalities are higher than the documented number. “Unreported human-caused mortalities are also occurring at an unknown rate, and must be considered when identifying sustainable harvest levels,” said Morton.

While this emergency closure is only temporary under applicable regulations and will last for 30 days, the Service intends to develop and implement a longer term brown bear harvest management strategy on the Refuge.

“As it has in previous years, the Service envisions developing and eventually implementing harvest parameters after appropriate public input and review, in an effort to ensure that harvests remain sustainable, and which focus on adequately protecting adult female bears for the healthy reproduction of the brown bear population on the Kenai Peninsula,” Morton said.

The Service will hold public hearings in the near future at which this strategy will be presented to the public. Hearing dates will be released at a later date.

“We do not take this closure lightly and will work with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game to develop a strategy to collaboratively manage brown bear populations that is consistent with the mandates of both agencies,” said Loranger.

For additional information, please contact the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge office during regular business hours at (907) 262-7021.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfws, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfws>.



United States Department of the Interior
KENAI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
P.O. Box 2139
Soldotna, Alaska 99669-2139
(907) 262-7021



NOTICE OF EMERGENCY CLOSURE

Emergency Closure: Sport hunting of Brown Bears on
Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Effective Date and Time: October 26, 2013 at 12:01 AM

Issued by: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Kenai National Wildlife Refuge
Soldotna, Alaska 99669

NOTICE:

Pursuant to 50 CFR 36.42, the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) is closed on an emergency basis to the sport hunting of brown bears, effective at 12:01 AM, October 26, 2013. This emergency action is taken as a resource protection measure, necessary because total human-caused mortalities of brown bears, including mortalities of adult female brown bears, on the Refuge and on the Kenai Peninsula as a whole during 2013 have exceeded sustainable levels. This emergency closure will be published and posted on appropriate signs, will remain in effect for 30 days, and will expire at 12:01 am on November 25, 2013.

A public hearing(s) will be held at time(s) and location(s) to be announced by Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.