



To Indigenous Peoples of Alaska:

In recognition that the indigenous peoples of Alaska have traditionally harvested fish, wildlife, and plants, and that they have been stewards of these lands and resources for millennia, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) are joining together to reconcile an unhappy period of history related to unintended impacts of past harvest regulations of migratory birds and their eggs.

We are jointly acting on this topic because both agencies had a role in implementing Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) regulations in the 1960s and 1970s.

For millennia, northern indigenous peoples have lived following seasonal cycles of harvesting animals and plants. Migratory birds have a special place in indigenous cultures in Alaska because, traditionally, when birds arrived in the spring, people's food caches were often empty, and the people were hungry. Today, modern socio-economic conditions prevent famine, but food security remains a major concern. The spring harvest of birds and eggs was and is nutritionally, culturally, and spiritually important to Alaska Native peoples.

In the early 1900s, bird populations in North America were severely depleted because of commercial hunting. The MBTA was signed into law in 1918 to stop commercial hunting and to protect and restore bird populations. To allow birds to breed and rebound, the MBTA set a harvest closure for birds and their eggs between March 10th and September 1st across North America. However, these regulations failed to recognize the importance of migratory birds for indigenous peoples.

In Alaska, the spring harvest of birds and eggs is a crucial part of the seasonal cycle of the subsistence activities, and in some areas, the harvest closure period was the only time that the birds were present. After the treaty was enacted, Alaska Native peoples were forced to unlawfully hunt birds to feed their families and carry on a traditional way of life, causing extreme hardship for many.

With a better understanding of the Alaska Native relationship to the land, governmental officials eventually recognized the need for change, and Congress amended the MBTA in 1997 to allow for the spring and summer harvest by rural Alaska residents. The amendment also included provisions to formally include subsistence users in bird harvest management and conservation leading to the creation of the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council (AMBCC) in 2000. Today, the AMBCC includes representatives of the USFWS, the ADF&G, and Alaska



Native leaders from all Alaska's regions for the co-management of a spring migratory bird harvest program.

Despite these actions, hunters and their families still resent the past regulations. At meetings across Alaska, we still hear reports from subsistence users about the negative impact past bird harvest regulations had on their livelihood.

The Apology

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service together want to reconcile the past and acknowledge that those regulations harmed hunters and their families. We seek to continue rebuilding relationships with Alaska's Indigenous peoples who were affected by the unintended consequences of past harvest regulations.

Over the years, thanks to Alaska Native leaders and hunters, we learned of the spiritual connection, the intricate and vast knowledge, and the profound stewardship that indigenous peoples have with migratory birds. We have been humbled by your generous volunteerism and years of dedication to the AMBCC so that together we can support healthy bird populations, traditional ways of life, and sustainable harvest opportunities for generations to come. We are sincerely grateful for your patience and for your willingness to work together. We recognize your tenacity, your brave vision, and your resilience in the face of the insensitivity of the past harvest regulations.

On behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, please accept our sincere apology for any harm that past harvest regulations has caused to you and your families. Our predecessors' regulations were shortsighted in that they caused long term and unnecessary pain. We ask for your forgiveness as we continue our journey for healing together. Learning from past mistakes, we look forward to continuing to work together with Alaska Native peoples for the conservation of the bird resources that are dear to all of us and to support traditional subsistence cultures and ways of life.

Signed:

/S/ Gregory E. Siekaniec

09/13/2018

/S/ Samuel R. Cotten

09/13/2018

Gregory E. Siekaniec
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Date Samuel R. Cotten
Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Date