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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

PUBLIC MEETING

Public Comment
Anchorage, Alaska
August 26, 2014

Temporary Closure of Sport Hunting for Brown Bear
on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Recorded and Transcribed by:
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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2
3 (Anchorage, Alaska - 8/26/2014)

4
5 (On record)

6
7 MR. ELLIS: Good evening, everybody.
8 We're going to go ahead and get started in the interest
9 of time. We don't want to hold anyone up. My name is
10 Mitch Ellis. I'm the chief of the Refuge system here
11 in Alaska. We have several folks here tonight that are
12 going to talk briefly. I mean the point of the hearing
13 tonight is really to get your input. I guess we'll go
14 about 20 minutes or so with some introductory remarks.
15 Probably not even that.

16
17 To my left is Andy Loranger. He's the
18 Refuge Manager at Kenai Refuge. The Deputy Refuge
19 Manager, Steve Miller. And we have Andrea Medeiros,
20 our hearing officer tonight. So she's going to
21 maintain law and order tonight, right? Okay, good.

22
23 But I did want to welcome everybody.
24 The public process is very important to us in the Fish
25 and Wildlife Service. We do value public input. We
26 have a lot of statutes, laws, regulations and policies
27 that we have to follow. Many of those require public
28 input. This is one of those times where it's not only
29 a good idea and we would have done it anyway, but it's
30 actually required per our regulation to get input, so
31 all good stuff.

32
33 We have 16 National Wildlife Refuges in
34 Alaska. Just under 80 million acres of land that we're
35 responsible for and we take that very seriously. We're
36 very proud of the employees that we have and the job
37 that we do and the services that we provide to the
38 citizens of Alaska and really to the entire country.
39 These are national conservation areas that are here for
40 everyone's enjoyment.

41
42 With that said, I think before Andrea
43 takes over for the hearing itself, Andy, you're going
44 to give some opening remarks and then we're going to
45 have a brief presentation by John Morton, who is our
46 biologist at Kenai Refuge.

47
48 So, with that, Andy.

49
50 Thank you.

1 MR. LORANGER: Thank you, Mitch.
2 Thanks, everyone, for being here. Real quickly we have
3 Candace Ward and Leah Eskelin, both of the Refuge staff
4 that were here at the registration table. I'd like to
5 introduce them as well.

6
7 As Mitch said, my name is Andy
8 Loranger. I'm the Refuge Manager of the Kenai National
9 Wildlife Refuge. I'd like to welcome you this evening
10 and thank you for attending this public hearing for
11 your interest in wildlife conservation and the Refuge.

12
13 This public hearing is being held to
14 provide information about and to receive public
15 testimony on the Fish and Wildlife Service's proposed
16 temporary closure of sport hunting of brown bear on the
17 Kenai Refuge. The Service has developed this proposal
18 under its authorities provided in the Alaska National
19 Interest Lands Conservation Act and the National
20 Wildlife Refuge Administration Act as amended.
21 Pursuant to Federal regulations in Title 50, parts
22 36.32 and 36.42 of the Code of Federal Regulations,
23 those regulations provide that a public hearing be held
24 prior to the Service implementing this type of
25 regulatory action.

26
27 I'll begin by providing a brief
28 overview of last year's emergency closure of brown bear
29 hunting on the Refuge and the current proposal, provide
30 you with the underlying basis for both and conclude by
31 summarizing our next steps.

32
33 On October 26, 2013 the Service issued
34 a 30-day emergency closure of brown bear sport hunting
35 on the Refuge. At the time of the closure, based on
36 data provided to us by the Alaska Department of Fish
37 and Game, 66 documented human-caused mortalities of
38 brown bears had occurred on the Kenai Peninsula. Final
39 totals for 2013 were 71 known human-caused mortalities
40 of Kenai brown bears, including 46 bears taken during
41 spring and fall hunting season and 25 non-hunting
42 related mortalities. Known human-caused mortalities in
43 2013 included 23 adult reproductive-aged female bears
44 or 12 percent of the estimated 188 independent female
45 bears thought to be in the Kenai population in 2010.

46
47 The Fish and Wildlife Service is
48 currently proposing a temporary closure of brown bear
49 hunting, which would be effective September 1st, 2014
50 to May 31st, 2015. To date, in 2014, a total of 54

1 human-caused brown bear mortalities have been
2 documented on the Kenai Peninsula. Of these, 52 were
3 taken by hunters during the spring from late April to
4 the end of May. The sex and age composition of the
5 harvest included 30 adult males, five adult females,
6 nine sub-adult males and eight sub-adult females. Two
7 additional bears, one adult male and one sub-adult
8 female, have been killed in defense of life or property
9 this summer on the Kenai Peninsula.

10

11 The State of Alaska is currently
12 managing the 2014 harvest of brown bears on the Kenai
13 Peninsula under annual caps of 70 total bear human-
14 caused mortalities and 17 adult females. Based on the
15 available data on Kenai brown bear demographics and
16 human-caused mortality provided by the Alaska
17 Department of Fish and Game and modeling conducted by
18 our biologist, the Fish and Wildlife Service believes
19 that the overall levels of known human-caused mortality
20 in 2013 and 2014 have caused the Kenai brown bear
21 population to decline.

22

23 We also believe that the composition of
24 the harvest in 2013 consisting of over 50 percent
25 female bears and including 23 adult female bears will
26 affect the future productivity of this population. Dr.
27 Morton will provide more detail in his presentation to
28 follow.

29

30 The Service is proposing this temporary
31 closure of sport hunting of brown bears on the Kenai
32 Refuge as a resource protection measure to ensure
33 consistency with Refuge establishment purposes and
34 other legal mandates. The Service supports hunting as
35 one of six legislatively mandated priority public uses
36 of National Wildlife Refuges as long as it is
37 compatible with Refuge purposes and the mission of the
38 National Wildlife Refuge system.

39

40 Given our interpretation that the
41 current levels of known human-caused mortality,
42 including hunting mortality, are resulting in a
43 population decline and that reasonably anticipated
44 future harvest levels will continue this trend, the
45 Service has proposed this temporary closure as an
46 action necessary to ensure the continued compatibility
47 of sport hunting of brown bears as an authorized use on
48 the Refuge.

49

50 Our legal responsibilities include

1 conserving a healthy brown bear population in its
2 natural diversity, ensuring continued opportunity for
3 visitors to hunt, view and photograph bears and
4 maintaining wilderness character in the congressionally
5 designated Kenai wilderness.

6
7 In developing this proposal, the
8 Service considered the low reproductive potential of
9 brown bears as a species and that the Kenai brown bear
10 population remains a relatively small, isolated
11 population which cannot depend on immigration to
12 sustain itself. In addition, we believe that the Kenai
13 brown bear population will continue to be strongly
14 influenced by habitat loss and fragmentation and
15 multiple potential sources of human-caused mortality.

16
17 Lastly, monitoring of the status of the
18 Kenai brown bear population is extremely challenging.
19 Collectively, we believe these factors warrant a
20 cautious approach to managing this population and to
21 ensure meeting the Refuge's legal mandates.

22
23 The Fish and Wildlife Service has been
24 accepting written comments on the proposed temporary
25 closure of sport hunting of brown bears since it was
26 announced on August 12th. We will be accepting written
27 comments through August 27th, tomorrow. Again, the
28 primary purpose of these public hearings is to receive
29 your testimony. We will consider all comments
30 received. We anticipate issuing a decision on the
31 proposed temporary closure by August 29th.

32
33 The Fish and Wildlife Service will also
34 continue to work with the Alaska Department of Fish and
35 Game and other agencies to assess modeling approaches
36 using available demographic and harvest data for Kenai
37 brown bears. Our mutual goal is to develop and
38 recommend a collaborative brown bear harvest management
39 strategy.

40
41 Again, thank you for attending
42 tonight's hearing and I'll now turn it over to Andrea
43 for covering some hearing logistics.

44
45 HEARING OFFICER MEDEIROS: First I just
46 want to make you all aware that there is, of course,
47 the exit at the front for you to leave the building in
48 an emergency and also there's another exit over here if
49 you go through this door on the right-hand side of the
50 room. Then the restrooms are down the hall on the

1 right -- on the left-hand side rather.

2

3 I believe John is going to give a
4 presentation first and then I'll go into -- after the
5 conclusion of John's presentation I'll go into the
6 logistics of the meeting and doing your testimony form
7 and so forth.

8

9 DR. MORTON: Hi, I'm John Morton. I'm
10 the supervisory biologist at Kenai National Wildlife
11 Refuge. I'm here to give you just some of the details
12 of the biological justification for the proposed
13 temporary closure of bear hunting on the Kenai National
14 Wildlife Refuge in this fall and the coming spring.

15

16 Just to go back and make sure you
17 understand the proposal. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife
18 Service proposes a temporary closure of sport hunting
19 of brown bears on the Refuge. The temporary closure
20 would be implemented as a resource protection measure
21 to ensure consistency with our purposes, the Refuge
22 purposes and the closure would be in effect from
23 September 1 through the end of May 2015.

24

25 For those that don't know, the Kenai
26 National Wildlife Refuge has 2 million acres. It's on
27 the Kenai Peninsula just across Turnagain Arm from
28 Anchorage. The light green there is the Kenai Refuge
29 and so in the east we have Chugach National Forest and
30 on the west we have a lot of private lands. The hatch
31 marks, I don't know that you can see them very clearly,
32 represent the two-thirds of the Refuge that's
33 congressionally designated wilderness.

34

35 So under the 1980 Alaska National
36 Interest Lands Conservation Act we got the Refuge --
37 got its legislative purposes and they are to conserve
38 fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their
39 natural diversity, including, but not limited to, lots
40 of species, but specifically bears.

41

42 The other piece that's very relevant
43 here is that we are charged with providing
44 opportunities for compatible fish and wildlife oriented
45 recreation and that includes both non-consumptive,
46 things like wildlife viewing, bear viewing, as well as
47 for hunting, but it's contingent on the one above,
48 conserving fish and wildlife populations and habitats
49 being achieved.

50

1 The other mandates that also affect the
2 Kenai Refuge is the 1964 Wilderness Act again because
3 two-thirds of the 2-million-acre Kenai Refuge is
4 congressional wilderness as well as the 1997 Refuge
5 Improvement Act, which is the organic legislation for
6 the entire National Wildlife Refuge System and includes
7 this piece in here about ensuring biological integrity,
8 diversity and environmental health. Clearly brown
9 bears are clearly part of these pieces of legislation.

10

11 This really could be the summary slide
12 as well as the introductory slide, but this is why the
13 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service believes a cautious
14 approach to the Kenai brown bear population management
15 is warranted given the mandates that I just showed you.

16

17 The first is brown bears in general
18 have low reproductive potential. Second, and this is
19 work that was done by Sean Farley with ADF&G and Sandy
20 Talbot at USGS, U.S. Geological Survey, here in
21 Anchorage. His DNA analysis confirms that the Kenai
22 brown bear population is isolated from and genetically
23 less diverse than mainland Alaskan brown bear
24 populations.

25

26 Thirdly, back in 1998 the Kenai brown
27 bear population was designated a population of special
28 concern by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.
29 That designation stayed in place until 2010. Much of
30 that justification for the designation was, in fact,
31 the fact that the population is both isolated and less
32 genetically diverse.

33

34 Fourthly, the study that the DNA-based
35 mark/recapture population estimate that the Kenai
36 National Wildlife Refuge and Chugach National Forest
37 did in 2010 estimated 582 brown bears on the Kenai
38 Peninsula, of which 188 were adult females.

39

40 Fifthly, the available data suggests
41 that the population increased about 3 percent per year
42 from 1995 through 2011, but 168 bears of which 42 were
43 adult females were killed by humans just in the last
44 three years, resulting in a declining population.

45

46 Lastly, the kind of the summary point
47 here, is Kenai population is still small, it's isolated
48 and highly sensitive to adult female mortality and
49 total human-caused mortality.

50

1 So just to kind of touch on a few of
2 those points, one of the reasons why we are concerned
3 about brown bears is that brown bears in general, not
4 specific to the Kenai population, have relatively low
5 reproductive potential. For those that are biologists,
6 they're a case-selected species, meaning that they're
7 long-lived and have very low rates of reproduction.
8 Females start reproducing when they're about five years
9 old. The first litter or two is usually lost, so
10 really bears don't really get into the reproductive
11 cohort until they're about six and you'll see that we
12 pick that up later in modeling. The cubs stay with the
13 mother for 3.5 years, so it's an extended maternal
14 period. The average weaned litter size is only two
15 cubs, so we often see litters bigger than that, but by
16 the time they wean at the end of 3.5 years you're down
17 to two cubs. They are particularly sensitive to adult
18 female mortality.

19
20 So how many bears are on the Kenai
21 Peninsula. Right now we're saying there's 582 and I'll
22 walk through that. There's been a slight revision from
23 last November when we did public hearings or last fall
24 when we did public hearings. We said there were 624
25 and I'm going to just mention to you why we have that
26 revision. In 2010, we did this very massive DNA-based
27 mark/recapture study and you can see the area that we
28 sampled on the Kenai Peninsula. It was a good chunk of
29 the Kenai Peninsula. It was all of Chugach National
30 Forest and Kenai Refuge, so about 4 million acres.

31
32 On that sample frame we estimated 428
33 brown bears. That 428 is still what we're saying it is
34 and it has been and that was on 11,700 kilometers
35 squared. Underneath that is -- not all that habitat is
36 available. The Harding Ice Field is there, there's
37 some very big lakes, Skilak Lake, Tustumena Lake. So,
38 consequently, we had to subtract that out of the
39 available habitat estimate.

40
41 We've recently revised that.
42 Originally it was 9,500 kilometers squared. We
43 recently revised it back in January of 2013 to 10,200.
44 What that did was it changed the density estimate from
45 what was originally 45 bears to now 42 bears per 1,000
46 kilometers squared. It gives us a slightly different
47 population estimate and that's what you see there.

48
49 The important point here to help put
50 this in context -- you know, we're saying there's 42

1 bears per 1,000 kilometers squared, and if you look at
2 the Alaska brown bear populations and this is based on
3 some work by Sterling Miller in 1997. Basically the 42
4 bears per 1,000 kilometers falls either on a slightly
5 high end of an Interior grizzly bear population or a
6 very low end of a coastal brown bear population.

7
8 So this the population -- I'm going to
9 give you a history of the population management that's
10 kind of led up to where we are now. This goes back to
11 1995 through 2014. The red is the adult female
12 mortality. The yellow is all other forms of human-
13 caused mortality, so primarily that's death in defense
14 of life or property but also includes things like
15 management kills, research kills, road kills, but it's
16 primarily defense of life or property. The total
17 number is the two combined. The top of the bar graph
18 there is total number of bears killed.

19
20 If you go back to -- 1993 was when we
21 had our one and only other population estimate and it
22 was a very coarse estimate. It was 250 to 300 and
23 Alaska Department of Fish and Game did that and it was
24 based on an expert panel that decided that the density
25 of bears on the Kenai was very similar to what was in
26 Susitna, 20 bears per -- I think it was 1,000
27 kilometers squared, and that was simply multiplied by a
28 value to come up with this rough estimate of how many
29 bears were there. That was in 1993.

30
31 In 1995, we went from one bear -- what
32 happened there is ADF&G invoked one bear per four
33 regulatory years and there was varying spring and fall
34 seasons. In 1998 is when Alaska Department of Fish and
35 Game chose to designate the Kenai brown bear
36 population, a population of special concern. By 1999
37 this is when Alaska Department of Fish and Game decided
38 to manage fairly conservatively. We invoked a
39 registration hunt and in that hunt there was a cap
40 placed on total harvest of no more than 14 human-caused
41 mortalities, which of those 14 you could not exceed
42 more than 6 females of any age. That was in 1999, a
43 very conservative hunt.

44
45 In 2001, the IBBST, which is the
46 Interagency Brown Bear Study Team, which is composed of
47 representatives from the three Federal entities,
48 Chugach National Forest, Kenai Fjords National Park and
49 the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge as well as Alaska
50 Department of Fish and Game, did the conservation

1 assessment for Kenai brown bears and to this day this
2 is still the single best document that we have to
3 operate off of.

4
5 In 2003, the cap was liberalized just a
6 little bit more. The cap on the harvest was 20 human-
7 caused mortalities of which no more than 8 females
8 could be taken. The females were now considered more
9 than one year old. COY there stands for cubs of the
10 year. Prior to this, cubs of the year were considered
11 half a bear and as of this it was considered a whole
12 bear. So we were still under a very conservative
13 management regime.

14
15 In 2007, we invoked the Federal
16 subsistence harvest was authorized and then a spring
17 drawing hunt was authorized. In 2009, the cap was
18 liberalized just a little bit more so that you could
19 take up to 10 adult females. Then in 2010 we did our
20 population estimate of 582 bears and the important
21 point to note up to there is when you look back over
22 that window there you have a fairly low take of total
23 human-caused mortality. It averaged -- between 1995
24 and 2011, averaged 4 adult females or 21 bears per year
25 prior to 2012. So fairly conservative leading up to
26 there.

27
28 Starting in 2012 is when the regulatory
29 season -- or, I'm sorry, the new regulations became a
30 little bit more liberalized. In 2012, there was a
31 general registration hunt. During 2012, as a result of
32 that hunt, there were 43 bears killed. In total, 14
33 adult females.

34
35 In 2013, it was very liberalized. The
36 season was extended from 1 September through May 31,
37 which is what it is now. Hunting over bait for brown
38 bears was allowed. We went from one bear per four
39 regulatory years to one bear per regulatory year and
40 there was no cap in 2013. Absolutely none. Neither on
41 adult females or on total number of bears killed.

42
43 It was also then later in November,
44 actually late October, that the Kenai Refuge chose to
45 invoke the emergency fall closure, a 30-day closure.
46 At that point in 2013 there were 71 bears killed, 23 of
47 which were adult females.

48
49 In 2014, there was a cap imposed by the
50 Board of Game and that was 70 bears total or up to 17

1 adult females. So you can see the liberalization
2 during the last three years in particular and in 2014,
3 where we are right now, there's been 54 bears taken, 5
4 of which are adult females and that's to date, leading
5 up to our proposed closure.

6
7 So the question is then, what is the
8 impact of those last three years of liberalized harvest
9 and that's really what's setting the stage for why
10 we're proposing to close the Refuge to bear hunting in
11 the fall of this coming year and spring of 2015.

12
13 What we did is we did a little bit of
14 modeling in a program called Vortex. It's software
15 that's widely used particularly for threatened and
16 endangered species. It's used fairly routinely. The
17 assumptions that we used going into Vortex were -- we
18 used the data and that's the data I was showing you
19 from 1995 through 2011. We assumed it's a polygynous
20 system with all of the adult males breeding.
21 Reproductive age for both males and females is six
22 years. Maximum breeding age for male or female is 26
23 years. The population is half male, half female.
24 Adult female breeding represents about a third of the
25 population in any given moment.

26
27 One of the big assumptions here is we
28 assumed where we're getting our data from is a bunch of
29 -- over the years we've had collared adult female bears
30 on the Kenai Peninsula that originally were managed by
31 the Interagency Brown Bear Study Team and more recently
32 by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Then we
33 assume a stable age distribution and no density
34 dependent mortality.

35
36 So just to show you what I'm setting up
37 in the model, we mentioned earlier that both agencies
38 agree right now that both the Alaska Department of Fish
39 and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service both
40 agree that the population trajectory between 1995 and
41 2011 has been approximately 3 percent per year. The
42 model right now is capturing that, is projecting it.
43 What I'm showing you here is that if we started in 2010
44 and we modeled out for 2020, in other words another
45 decade, we'd go from 582 bears to 754 bears if we had
46 not invoked the liberalized harvest in 2012, '13 and
47 '14.

48
49 And then in 2013 -- 2012 I mentioned
50 there were 43 bears killed in total, 14 of which were

1 adult females. In 2013, during the general
2 registration hunt, what I'm showing you here is that
3 there were 71 bears killed. A third of those were DLPS
4 in 2013, but two-thirds were harvest, and they were
5 widely distributed over both the Refuge and non-Federal
6 lands during that time.

7
8 The 2014 data to date, and that's just
9 leading up to right now where we are right now. It's a
10 very different dynamic because most of the bears were
11 killed during the spring hunt. This past spring 52
12 bears as opposed to two, so most of the bears were
13 harvested. The other difference is that -- well, it
14 had to do with the fact that spring hunting was -- or
15 hunting over bait was allowed this spring. So of the
16 52 bears that were harvested, 40 were taken over bait
17 stations in 2014.

18
19 So this is kind of an important slide
20 from our perspective. This shows kind of what we think
21 is happening. If you start there over on the right in
22 the table in 2010 and you can see the row there in
23 blue, what you see is 582 bears and you can do a very
24 simple -- you can do this either in the model or you
25 can do this just with your calculator if you just back
26 up 3 percent from 2010 back to 1995 you can see the
27 population goes from 582 back to 369 in 1995, which is
28 about what Alaska Department of Fish and Game thought
29 was -- remember their original estimate was 250 to 300.

30
31 What we do in the model is we allow
32 that population of 582 to grow prior to the 2012
33 liberalized season. So in 2010 it's 582. We allow it
34 to grow another 3 percent. So in 2011 it's 599. At
35 the beginning of 2012 it grows another 3 percent to 617
36 bears. When we get to 617, what we do is we use Vortex
37 here to help us estimate what is the effect of the
38 harvest. So the effect of the harvest in 2012 when we
39 killed 43 bears and 14 adult females was we go from 617
40 down to 589, which is a -5 percent decrease. In 2013,
41 when we kill 71 bears, 23 of which were adult females,
42 we go from 589 down to 532, which is a 10 percent
43 decrease in the population. By 2015, which is this
44 coming spring, this is if we stop the hunt right now
45 and we have 54 dead bears and we model that right now
46 we would go from 532 to 492 by next spring. That's an
47 8 percent decrease.

48
49 There's a couple things here I just
50 want to point out. The reasons that this is important

1 is that if we did continue this, if we stopped the hunt
2 right now but there was another spring hunt identical
3 to the hunt that we had this spring, at the end of that
4 hunt next year we would actually -- what the model
5 suggests is we would have about 450 bears at the end of
6 next spring, which is one of the reasons why we feel
7 the need to invoke this closure not only for the fall
8 but the spring as well.

9

10 The one other point I wanted to make
11 was that if you take the high number in 2012, at the
12 beginning of 2012 is 617 bears and you take what we
13 think is going to be the population this spring right
14 now with no additional human-caused mortality, which is
15 492, that's a 20 percent decline in what we think the
16 population is based on this modeling approach.

17

18 The one other point I want to make is
19 this is an extremely conservative approach in the sense
20 that the way I did this is that I allowed -- in the
21 model the demographics are still the same, that it
22 allows the population to grow 3 percent every year even
23 as you harvest off animals. What I didn't do, and
24 there's reasons why I didn't do it, but what I didn't
25 do was I didn't allow those demographics to affect the
26 next year. So what we do know is that adult female
27 mortality obviously truncates what your reproduction
28 can be. So this is a very conservative way of doing
29 this kind of exercise.

30

31 So, in summary, the sport hunting
32 regulatory changes effective 2012 through present, in
33 other words the last two and a half years, have
34 increased human-caused mortality of Kenai brown bears
35 and contributed to a declining population. As
36 currently modeled, that's about 20 percent decline.

37

38 The Kenai adult female mortality
39 averaged four per year from 1993 to 2011 prior to the
40 liberalized regulations, but increased to 14 per year
41 just in the last three years and that represents a
42 change of about 2 percent to 7 percent of what we think
43 were the number of adult females in 2010.

44

45 The other point I wanted to make is
46 that based on data from Alaska Department of Fish and
47 Game the number of telemetry bears just killed in 2013
48 was 17 percent of the bears that were collared in the
49 year during 2013, so a pretty hefty hit.

50

1 The last point is that total bears, and
2 by total bears I mean either sex, all ages, killed by
3 humans, will affect the population dynamics if the
4 total mortality is large relative to the population.
5 In other words, it's just simple math. If you've got a
6 small population and you kill a lot of bears, it's
7 going to affect the population. So total brown bears
8 killed averaged 21 annually from 1993 to 2011 and that
9 number jumped to 56 just in the last three years.
10 That's as a percentage of 582 bears. That's a jump
11 from 4 percent to 10 percent harvested.

12
13 As one of the closing points, out of
14 the conservation assessment for the Kenai brown bear
15 that was done by the Interagency Brown Bear Study Team
16 in 2001, it really does draw attention to the fact that
17 the Kenai Refuge provides the largest continuous
18 homogenous block of brown bear habitat on the Kenai
19 Peninsula. In other words, the Kenai Refuge is, in
20 fact, the refugia for the Kenai brown bear population
21 and that's the only land management unit on the Kenai
22 Peninsula that's mandated by Congress to conserve bear
23 populations and habitat in their diversity.

24
25 So the next steps at this point in
26 addition to the consideration of the current proposal
27 to do the temporary closure for Kenai brown bears is we
28 will continue, as we have been all along, coordination
29 with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in trying
30 to work out details of both the modeling efforts as
31 well as coming up with a joint proposal for the Board
32 of Game next March, the things that we continue to
33 emphasize as a regulatory framework with emphasis on
34 protecting adult females, and reducing the current cap
35 of human-caused mortality, which we think is way too
36 high.

37
38 Lastly, we will continue the no brown
39 bear harvest in the spring. On the Refuge we don't
40 allow brown bear harvesting over bait. We do allow it
41 for black bears, but not brown bears. That's it. I'll
42 be glad to take -- I don't think we're taking questions
43 now during the hearing, but I'll be glad to take
44 questions either during the break or by phone or email.

45
46 HEARING OFFICER MEDEIROS: Thank you,
47 John. So now we're going to start the public testimony
48 portion of the meeting. As your hearing officer, it's
49 my job to make sure that everyone who would like to
50 testify on the proposed temporary closure of sport

1 hunting of brown bears on the Kenai Refuge can do so.
2 If you plan to provide oral testimony tonight, you
3 should fill out a testifier card, which is available at
4 the front desk.

5
6 Your oral testimony will be recorded by
7 the court recorder and will be transcribed for the
8 public record. For the record it is important that
9 everyone who is attending this hearing sign in at the
10 front desk. If you are attending on behalf of an
11 organization or group, please indicate that both on the
12 testifier card and on the sign-in sheet. To provide an
13 equal opportunity for those who want to testify tonight
14 and on the hearing in Soldotna tomorrow, we're
15 providing three minutes for individuals and five
16 minutes for organizations or groups. Those
17 representing organizations or groups.

18
19 Each testifier will be notified when
20 one minute remains and when the total time has elapsed.
21 If following your testimony you feel you have
22 additional information or comments you would like to
23 submit, you can provide those in writing and you can
24 get paper at the sign-in desk for that.

25
26 I will be calling those who have signed
27 up to provide testimony in the order that the card was
28 received. When I call your name, please step forward
29 to the microphone. Begin your testimony by stating
30 your name and spelling it for the court reporter. And
31 if you are representing an organization or group,
32 please say that as well. Please speak clearly into the
33 microphone. If you choose not to speak when you've
34 been provided the opportunity or your remarks are
35 short, then you may not cede your time to any other
36 speaker.

37
38 The time is now 6:45 and we are going
39 to start the public testimony portion of this hearing.

40
41 I have Regis Pappert.

42
43 MR. PAPPERT: I don't have any
44 comments. I have more questions. I'll wait until the
45 break to ask them.

46
47 HEARING OFFICER MEDEIROS: Okay.

48
49 Val, could you please come forward. It
50 appears you've written that you're representing a group.

1 MS. GLOOSCHENKO: I'm going to be
2 speaking for the Friends of the Kenai National Wildlife
3 Refuge here in Anchorage and the president of the group
4 will be speaking in Soldotna tomorrow.

5
6 HEARING OFFICER MEDEIROS: Okay, great.
7 Thank you.

8
9 MS. GLOOSCHENKO: The spelling of my
10 last name is Glooschenko, that is G-L-O-O-S-C-H-E-N-K-
11 O. The Friends of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge
12 have very strong support for this temporary closure.
13 The scientific information is very clear. I'm a
14 biologist personally and I'm aware of the very low
15 reproductive rate for the brown bear population and
16 John Morton's data was extremely clear and very
17 convincing.

18
19 The brown bear population is a growing
20 concern we've watched over the last couple of years,
21 particularly the Board of Game, and I was present at
22 the last two hearings for the Board of Game and there
23 appears to be a real disregard for maintaining that
24 core population within the Refuge. In fact, the
25 statements were very strong that they intend to
26 decrease the population. They consider it a source for
27 brown bears within the Peninsula. So one reason for
28 the take of brown bear being extremely increased was to
29 greatly diminish the brown bear pool within the Refuge
30 itself. This has very long-range effects, as we know,
31 because taking adult females especially in that
32 inordinately high number is going to be affecting
33 populations of the bears in years to come.

34
35 The temporary closure of the Refuge is
36 needed to prevent further detrimental effects on the
37 population. We respect your legal mandates to manage
38 all wildlife, particularly brown bears, on the Refuge
39 in their natural diversity to maintain the wilderness
40 character of the Kenai wilderness and to provide
41 opportunities to both hunt and view bears. This
42 temporary closure is extremely necessary to meet those
43 mandates.

44
45 I would also like you to consider when
46 spring arrives to consider a permanent closure of sport
47 hunting given the profile of the Board of Game to
48 dramatically continue to reduce bear populations
49 throughout the Kenai. So this may be the last hold
50 out, if you like, of this bear population because their

1 numbers will be continuing to be greatly decreased
2 according to what my understanding is having attended
3 the Board of Game hearings.

4

5 So I would encourage the Refuge to
6 continue to work with the State to develop and
7 implement a biologically-sound management approach and
8 the approach should be transparent to the public and
9 should be based on science and not on politics.

10

11 Again, I congratulate John Morton for
12 his excellent presentation and congratulations to you
13 on your proposed closure. It is overdue.

14

15 Thank you.

16

17 HEARING OFFICER MEDEIROS: Thank you
18 for your testimony.

19

20 The next speaker we have is Mr. Evans.
21 Nicole, I'm sorry. I was reading it as Nick.

22

23 MS. WHITTINGTON-EVANS: Hi. My name is
24 Nicole Whittington-Evans and I'm the Alaska regional
25 director of the The Wilderness Society. My name is
26 spelled N-I-C-O-L-E W-H-I-T-T-I-N-G-T-O-N - E-V-A-N-S.

27

28 Thank you very much for this
29 opportunity to speak tonight. Founded in 1935, The
30 Wilderness Society's mission is to protect wilderness
31 and to inspire Americans to care for our wild places.
32 Our organization represents approximately 150,000
33 members nationwide with over 400 members in Alaska, all
34 of whom share an interest in how the Kenai National
35 Wildlife Refuge and its wilderness, lands and resources
36 are managed. Our organization has been involved in
37 these issues for many years and I personally have been
38 involved prior even to my position at The Wilderness
39 Society and I've been with The Wilderness Society for
40 17 years.

41

42 The Wilderness Society strongly
43 supports the Fish and Wildlife Service's proposed
44 closure because Kenai Peninsula brown bears are a
45 sensitive population that is relatively small, as John
46 Morton laid out earlier tonight. State hunting
47 regulations were substantially liberalized in 2012 and
48 2013. These liberalizations have resulted in high and
49 unprecedented levels of mortality of Kenai brown bears,
50 causing a rapid and substantial population decline.

1 Action is needed to ensure adequate
2 protection of adult females and to keep the overall
3 mortality in the Kenai brown bear population at a
4 sustainable level. A temporary hunting closure of the
5 Refuge is needed to prevent further detrimental effects
6 on the population.

7
8 The Fish and Wildlife Service has legal
9 mandates to manage all wildlife and to specifically
10 brown bears on the Kenai Refuge in their natural
11 diversity, to maintain the wilderness character of the
12 Kenai wilderness and to provide opportunities to both
13 hunt and be bears. This temporary closure is necessary
14 to meet those mandates.

15
16 We encourage the Refuge to work with
17 the State to develop and implement a biologically sound
18 management approach for Kenai brown bears. This
19 approach should be transparent to the public and should
20 be based on the best available science. We are
21 submitting written comments in addition to this
22 testimony.

23
24 Thank you very much. Again, hats off
25 to John Morton in his presentation tonight.

26
27 HEARING OFFICER MEDEIROS: Thank you,
28 Nicole.

29
30 The next testifier is Jana, Jana Zeedy.
31 Is it Zeedyk?

32
33 MS. ZEEDYK: Zeedyk. Strange, but
34 true. Yes, so my last name is spelled Z-E-E-D-Y-K and
35 I'm not representing any organization. I'm just
36 representing a relatively new Alaska resident and I
37 came here to work and to also enjoy the wilderness. I
38 had many places that I could have chosen to work and I
39 came here because of the opportunity to be in
40 wilderness and to experience that as I've done
41 throughout my life.

42
43 I wanted to read something more
44 personal. A lot of people have addressed the
45 scientific and the data and the actuarial matters at
46 hand and I wanted to read from Mardy Murie, what was
47 going to be part of her book Two in the Far North,
48 which I read when I first came here.

49
50 She writes what she thought might be

1 part of her preface: There may be people who feel no
2 need for nature. They are fortunate perhaps. For
3 those of us who feel otherwise, who feel something is
4 missing unless we can hike across land disturbed only
5 by our footsteps or seek creatures roaming freely as
6 they have always done, we are sure there should be
7 wilderness. Species other than men have rights too.

8
9 So the actuarials support what will be
10 a healthy population and I think Alaska in the future
11 Alaska does not have the nerds, it doesn't have Kubrick
12 townspeople will come to. It has a great treasure in
13 its wilderness and people in the future are
14 increasingly going to be interested in unspoiled
15 places.

16
17 So I'd encourage the temporary closure.
18 I'm in support of that. Also a permanent closure so
19 people will be able to travel to those unspoiled places
20 and I think Alaska and its animals are intricately
21 connected together. I hope that in this planning there
22 will be that recognition.

23
24 Thank you very much.

25
26 HEARING OFFICER MEDEIROS: Thank you
27 for your testimony.

28
29 The next testifier is Soren.

30
31 MR. WUERTH: Hi. I'm Soren Wuerth.
32 I've been involved as an activist in wildlife
33 management issues in Alaska for a number of years off
34 and on. Usually when I come to hearings like this
35 they're so packed with people who are out to exploit
36 the wildlife that I have time to prepare a lot of
37 testimony, but I'm surprised today to see so few people
38 here. Which I think is good maybe. It shows maybe
39 we're maturing in our views on how we manage wildlife.

40
41 I too want to endorse a permanent
42 closure to brown bear hunting in the Refuge on the
43 Kenai for mostly two reasons. One, it's an isolated
44 species, as you pointed out, with 500 and some odd
45 bears. Of course, that's an estimate. Two, because
46 the population in that area is growing and there's more
47 and more people that want a trophy bear. There's other
48 places to get it where populations are a little
49 healthier. I think you're going to maybe encounter a
50 little resistance. You know, as an Alaskan of 37

1 years, I want to encourage you to protect the species
2 and fulfill your mandate as Refuge managers.

3

4 Also, you know, I guess maybe this is
5 encouraging, but when the beluga whales out here in
6 Cook Inlet were in trouble, Alaska Natives voluntarily
7 gave up hunting the beluga whales. In fact, several of
8 them were advocating on behalf of the whales to find
9 out what was wrong with them. I hope that those people
10 who have in the past hunted brown bears are as
11 concerned with this population as the Alaska Natives
12 were concerned with the beluga whales.

13

14 Thank you so much for dedicating some
15 time to these. There's only so many bears out there,
16 but we seem to keep having children. Have a good day.

17

18 HEARING OFFICER MEDEIROS: Thank you
19 for your testimony.

20

21 That is currently all the testifier
22 cards that we have. Is there anybody who hadn't turned
23 a card in but does wish to testify.

24

25 (No comments)

26

27 HEARING OFFICER MEDEIROS: I see none.

28

29 MR. ELLIS: I think what we'll do is go
30 off the record and we'll take a break here. We're
31 going to continue to stay here through the evening in
32 case anyone else comes in. Again, the staff of the
33 Refuge would be more than happy to answer any questions
34 that you might have during this time. If we do have
35 some additional folks that come in to provide
36 testimony, we'll reopen and go on the record again.
37 Thank you.

38

39 HEARING OFFICER MEDEIROS: So it's
40 approximately 6:55 and we'll take a little break here.

41

42 Thank you.

43

44 (Off record)

45

46 (On record)

47

48 HEARING OFFICER MEDEIROS: We're going
49 to get started again. We have one more person who
50 wants to testify. We're going to reconvene the public

1 testimony. It is now quarter after 7:00 and I do have
2 one additional testifier card.

3

4 It's for Sharon Lowe.

5

6 MS. LOWE: I totally support your
7 efforts to close sport hunting on the Kenai National
8 Refuge. I was just talking to one of your people. My
9 email that I sent today was about Katmai, but I've also
10 been to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and I have
11 seen the bears fishing in their own area and the sport
12 hunters in another area, but the sport hunters were
13 yelling at the bears and shooting at them, trying to
14 make them go away so that they wouldn't want all the
15 fish.

16

17 It was a short time after that that a
18 mother bear with her cubs attacked someone and he has
19 since written a book about that, but I wasn't surprised
20 that one of the bears finally fought back because these
21 sport fishermen were not treating them with any respect
22 and these bears, you know, deserve to be treated with
23 respect.

24

25 I've traveled all over the world and
26 there's no variety of wild animals like Alaska has.
27 The wild animals in Alaska are a national and
28 international treasure. They're not just objects to be
29 shot. So I think we should treat them as national and
30 international treasures because it's just so rare to
31 see them and to see that they will cooperate with
32 people if people are not intent on harming them. They
33 will just do their own thing.

34

35 A lot of the hunters try to make people
36 think that they want to attack everyone. They try to
37 make it sound like every bear is so dangerous, but we
38 know that's not true. So I think they deserve all the
39 respect that we can possibly give them. So that's my
40 testimony.

41

42 HEARING OFFICER MEDEIROS: Thank you
43 for testifying. I don't have any other testifier
44 cards. So, with that, it is now almost 7:20 and I
45 think that concludes the public testimony or public
46 hearing this evening.

47

48 We want to thank you all for coming.
49 We know that your schedules are busy and you're taking
50 time out of your personal lives to join us here, so

1 that's great to see that you've taken that time.

2

3 So thank you again for coming.

4

5 (Off record)

6

7 (END OF PROCEEDINGS)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)
)ss.
STATE OF ALASKA)

I, Salena A. Hile, Notary Public in and for the State of Alaska and Owner of Computer Matrix, do hereby certify:

THAT the foregoing pages numbered 02 through 23 contain a full, true and correct Transcript of Public Hearing taken electronically under my direction on the 26th day of August 2014 in Anchorage, Alaska;

THAT the transcript is a true and correct transcript requested to be transcribed and thereafter transcribed under my direction;

THAT I am not an employee, attorney, or party interested in any way in this action.

DATED at Anchorage, Alaska, this 12th day of September 2014.

Salena A. Hile
Notary Public, State of Alaska
My Commission Expires: 9/16/18