

**TO THE HONORABLES CO-CHAIR
U.S. SENATOR DANIEL K INOUE,
CO-CHAIR U.S. SENATOR
BEN NIGHTHORSE CAMPBELL,
AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

**A Report to the Committee Hearing on the Impacts on Tribal Fish
and Wildlife Management Programs in the Pacific Northwest.**

**Presented 2:00PM, June 4, 2003
Room 485
Russell Senate Office Building**

**Alaska
Private Land**

Wildlife Habitat in Crisis

Presented by:





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May 27, 2003

The Honorable U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye Co-Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
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Room 485 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6450

To the Honorable Co-Chair U.S. Senator Daniel K Inouye, Co-Chair U.S. Senator Ben
Nighthorse Campbell, and Committee Members:

SUBJECT:

A Report to the Committee Hearing on the Impacts on Tribal Fish and Wildlife Management
Programs in the Pacific Northwest.

Alaska's Private Land Wildlife Habitat in Crisis

On behalf of Alaska Village Initiatives, its statewide membership, Officers, Directors and Staff, we greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide the enclosed testimony for consideration by the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. Alaska Village Initiatives is Alaska's oldest and largest statewide Community Development Corporation, and one of the few remaining CDC's nationwide, created in 1968 during President Johnson's War on Poverty. Our mission is to improve the economic well being of America's rural communities in Alaska. Our membership and board are composed of 95% Alaska Native Tribes and ANCSA Corporations representing some of America's largest aboriginal communities still living on and from our ancestral lands.

I, myself, am a member of the Taantakwaan Teikweidee or the Bear Clan of the Tongass Tlingit Tribe from the Ketchikan area. Please allow me to also introduce the Chairperson of Alaska Village Initiatives, Roseann Demmert. With her is AVI Director, Katherine Andersen, who is the Chair of Village Wildlife Conservation Consortium.

Also with us is Dr. Bruce Borup, formerly the head of the Business Department for Alaska Pacific University, and most recently the new Chief Executive Officer of the Cape Fox Corporation, the ANCSA Village Corporation for the Alaska Community of Saxman, south of Ketchikan.

Our main mission here today is to share with you three critical issues affecting Alaska Native Tribes and Corporations in the management of Alaskan wildlife and wildlife habitat.

1. **The Crisis at Hand.** The first issue is that from an Alaskan Native perspective, Alaska's wildlife habitats and populations are facing the greatest survival challenge in our history. We, as Alaskan Natives and as a State, need your help. At

no time in Alaska's history has the demand been greater for wildlife. This demand comes from predation, from recreational hunting, fishing and viewing, and from subsistence use as the primary economy in Rural Alaska. The greatest pressure is from tourism, which doubled in the last seven years and is positioned to double again in the next seven years as more Americans reach for retirement and their Alaskan Wildlife experience.

Alaska's wildlife habitat is ill prepared to meet this demand, with decreasing wildlife populations on Federal, State or Alaskan Native owned lands. As evidence, please consider the following:

- a. **There is no comprehensive statewide management plan.** In spite of the fact that Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act is now more than 30 years old, there is, as of yet, no comprehensive statewide plan, either with the State of Alaska or any U.S. Agency, on the effective and cooperative management of wildlife habitat on nearly 40 million acres of Alaska Native private lands.
- b. **There is no accurate wildlife census.** In spite of the availability of the modern technology of heat detecting cameras that track small birds and animals from an altitude of 2000 feet, the State of Alaska primarily relies on an observer looking out the window of a small plane trying to count animals through the trees. No one truly knows what Alaska's wildlife census really is.
- c. **There is no unifying leadership.** As a result of our reliance on unaudited and unverifiable wildlife census figures, we have endless discrepancies and debates, spanning decades, over why harvest levels have fallen short and who is to blame. Environmentalists blame hunters, the oil, mining and timber industries. Hunters, who often work in those industries, blame rural residents and Alaskan Native Subsistence Users. Hunters and Subsistence Users blame predators that are the favored species of Environmentalists, and the whole thing starts all over again.
- d. **There is no comprehensive scientific approach applied to public and private lands.** We have millions of acres of dead and dying forests that are now over-mature and disease ridden. Without occasional forest fires or prescribed burns to promote new growth, there is less food for wildlife. Without food, the current ecosystem collapses. Starve it and it dies. As a comparison, the Scandinavian nations on less habitat acreage produce 26 times Alaska's capacity as a result of a highly productive habitat that produces higher quality and quantity feed for moose.
- e. **There is no capacity for increased control or enforcement.** The State of Alaska no longer has the capacity to meet the exponential growth in the demand for Alaska's wildlife. One Alaskan Fish and Game officer oversees an area the size of California, with no administrative support.
- f. **There is insufficient awareness of the current crisis.** Despite having one of the leading wildlife harvest management systems in the country; Alaska's wildlife production level on a per acre basis, ranks last, among all U.S. states. In fact, based on the 2001 records, it appears that four times more grazing wildlife was harvested from the lands within 100 miles of where we sit today, here in Washington, D.C., than was harvested in all of Alaska's 365 million acres. As demand to increase access to Alaska's wildlife habitat grows, so

does this paradox of the image the world has of Alaska as “The Last Frontier”, and America’s last and best hope for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat.

- g. There is injury to Alaska’s habitat and Native Tribes.** Remote areas such as the Upper Kuskokwim have seen as much as a 97% reduction in moose population in the last decade. The estimated replacement cost of that 800 lb. moose in winter’s protein is \$3 to \$5 per pound, or \$2,400 to \$4,000, far beyond the capacity of most Alaska Native and Non-Native rural families alike, placing greater reliance on food stamps and subsistence salmon harvests.

- 2. There is however hope and good news.** The hope and good news is we now know that our Lower 49 sister states have had more successful wildlife production due to an economic resource tool that not only helped them restore wildlife habitat, but also enabled them to access the tourism market in a sustainable and ecologically stable manner. Until very recently, this funding was not available to Alaska.

That economic resource tool is the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), which provides funding nationwide to private landowners for the purpose of conserving and restoring wildlife habitat on privately owned lands. USDA also conducts the Natural Resource Inventory which provides data USDA utilizes to plan its funding formula to landowners. In 2001 USDA NCRS provided more than \$355 million for this purpose.

However there are challenges:

- a. Alaska is excluded.** The 1997 Natural Resource Inventory specifically excludes all federal lands and Alaska. The December 2000 revision of the Natural Resource Inventory reports no data for Alaska. Alaska is the only state to be so excluded and only recently began receiving a small amount of habitat funding from NRCS.
 - b. Alaska receives a token amount of habitat funding.** USDA provided \$523,000 to Alaskan landowners in 2001 or 0.15% of the NCRS budget. In comparison, one Lower 49 state alone, received over \$19 million, more than 5% of the NCRS budget. Only Rhode Island received less overall funding than Alaska, however, on a per acre basis Alaska received only 2% of what Rhode Island received. Far less than half of the \$523,000 impacted the habitat on Alaskan Native lands.
 - c. Local USDA Directors** are aware of this disparity and are doing what little they can to address this obvious inequity. The Natural Resources Inventory has been conducted every five years since 1982 and after 20 years no correction of Alaska’s omission has been proposed or planned.
- 3. Alaska Village Initiatives respectfully requests** rapid action by this Committee and USDA, on behalf of Alaska’s wildlife habitat, to help Alaska Native communities recover and Alaska, as a State, to better prepare for the ever increasing demands of our fellow Americans who are coming to participate and experience Alaska’s wildlife habitats, as part of our national heritage.

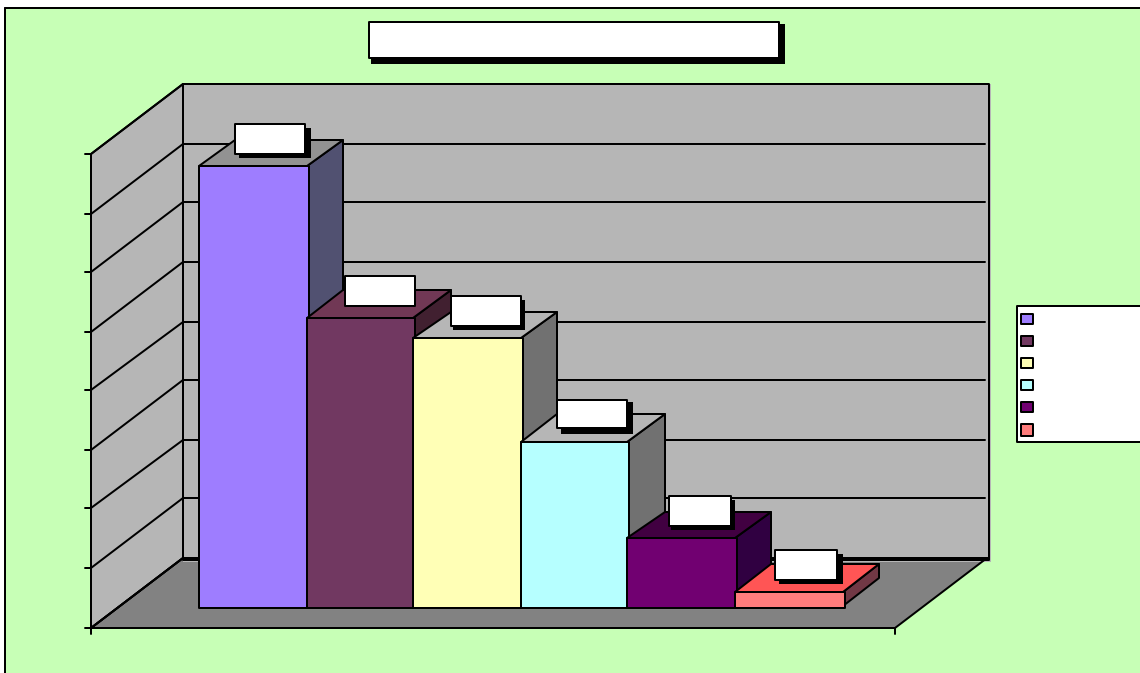
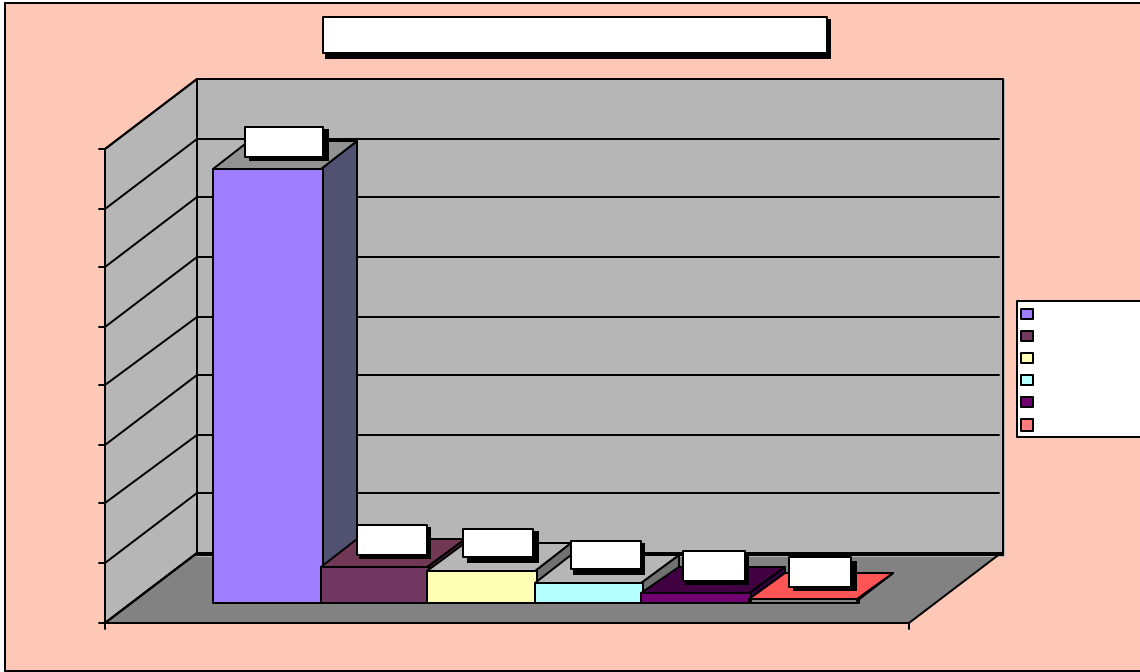
Alaska Village Initiatives is an economic tool created by this Congress to serve our citizens and our country in this small way. It has been our duty, and our joy, to serve in this capacity for over thirty years. It is our hope that by providing this testimony, we have been of service here today. Our members and our board, as the Aboriginal Tribes and Native Corporations of Alaska, have been taught to care for the land as for each other. However, the growing demand for access to Alaska's precious wildlife resource now exceeds our humble abilities to provide that access without incurring further damage to that habitat. Economic hardship has forced many Native Allotment landowners to sell out, and we are seeing signs that ANCSA lands may soon be for sale to the highest bidder. Our Tribes and Corporations culturally welcome visitors, however the demand is now so great that we now are asking for and needing your help. As Americans, we don't want to be shamed by having to turn away our own, for we ourselves understand what it is to be turned away.

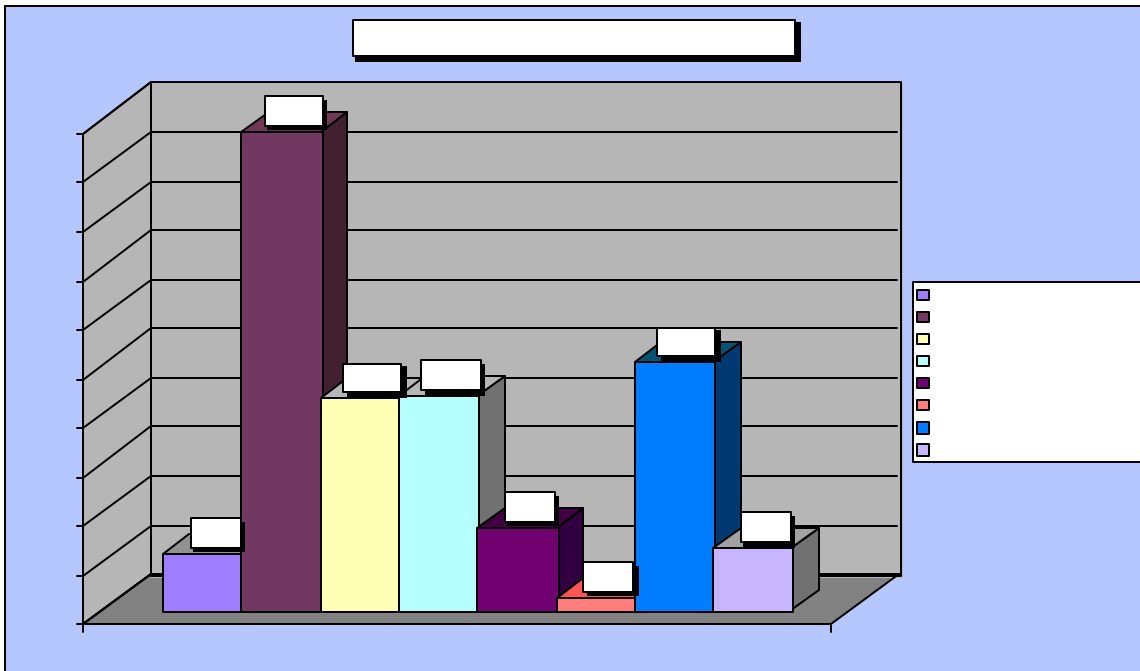
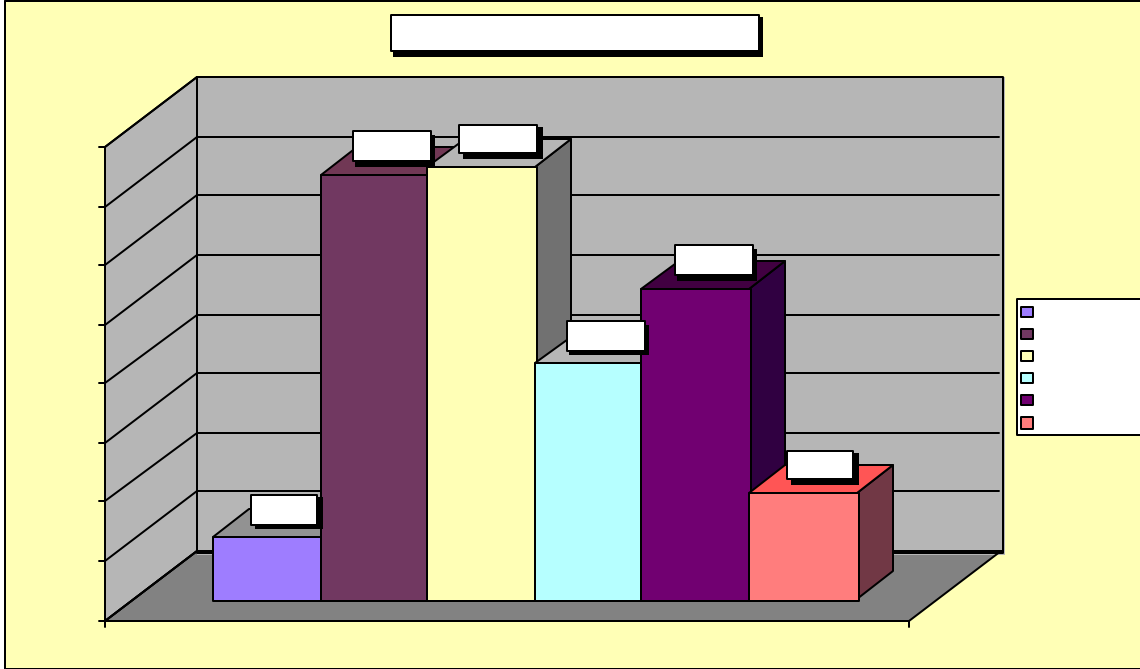
Alaska's wildlife habitat is indeed America's national treasure, whether it is in a national park or on private lands. This is America's challenge of how best to provide for the protection of and access to Alaska's premier wildlife habitat in a safe and sane manner. This Congress saw fit to protect that resource on private lands in the Lower 49 states, as their habitats were impacted with an increase in visitors. We respectfully request that Alaska now be included as a full participant in the protection of wildlife habitat on private lands, as provided to all other states.

We thank you for your time and kind attention. If we at Alaska Village Initiatives may be of any service, please call on us. On behalf of all our Tribes and Members, Gunaalcheesh, Quayana, Anabasi, Howa, and Thank You.

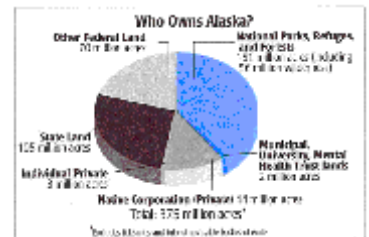
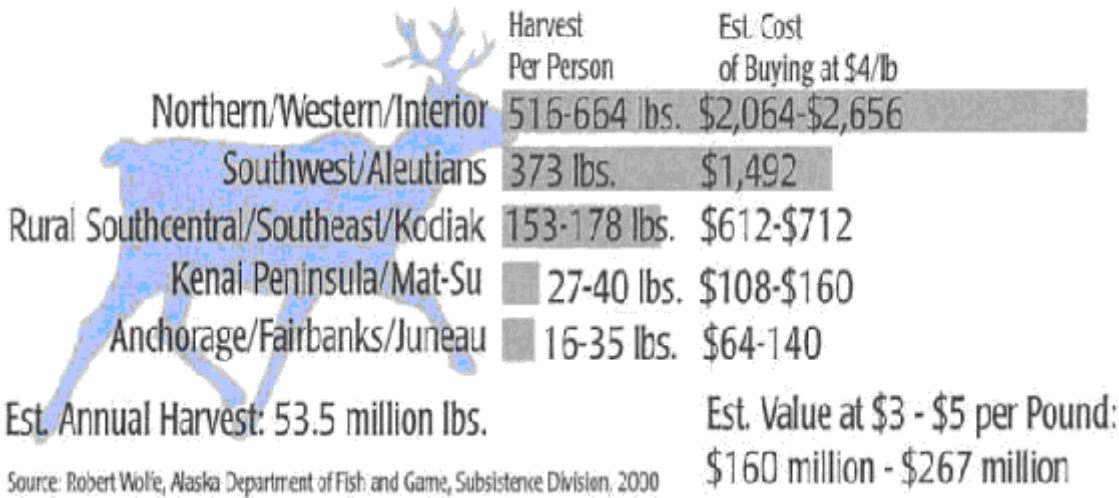
Sincerely,

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What's the Annual Subsistence Harvest Per Person, and What Would it Cost to Buy That Food?



Alaska Sport Hunting and Fishing Licenses, 1970-2000

