



June 24, 2026

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Re: Petition Opposing the State of Alaska's Request for Secretarial Review of Federal Subsistence Board Actions on Wildlife Proposals WP26-31 and WP26-75

Dear Secretary Burgum and Secretary Rollins,

On behalf of the Northern Alaska Environmental Center (NAEC), we submit this response opposing the State of Alaska's request for Secretarial review of the Federal Subsistence Board's (FSB) actions on Wildlife Proposals WP26-31 and WP26-75.

The State's request mischaracterizes both the governing legal standard and the administrative record. The State frames these closures as if they could only be justified by a population-level biological emergency. That is not the standard under Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). ANILCA authorizes federal action not only for conservation, but also to ensure the continuation of rural subsistence uses. The record before the FSB contains substantial evidence of competition, displacement, food insecurity, incomplete harvest data, lack of current biological surveys, Tribal support, Regional Advisory Council (RAC) support, and rural subsistence need.

As Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) Chief Chairman Brian Ridley stated during the December 17, 2025 joint Eastern Interior and Western Interior Regional Advisory Council meeting, "Title VIII of

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ANILCA is not discretionary.” He further stated that any review of the Federal Subsistence Management Program should be judged by whether it is “meeting the needs of rural and tribal subsistence users in practice.” That is the proper lens for evaluating the State’s request.

The Secretaries should reject the State’s request and allow the FSB’s decisions to stand.

I. ANILCA Protects the Continuation of Rural Subsistence Uses, Not Merely Biological Conservation

The State’s letter repeatedly asserts that there is no conservation emergency sufficient to justify closure. But that argument is too narrow. Title VIII of ANILCA was enacted to protect rural subsistence uses on federal public lands. The FSB is not required to wait until a wildlife population collapses before acting to protect rural subsistence opportunity.

A closure may be justified where competition from non-federally qualified users (NFQUs) threatens the continuation of subsistence uses, even if overall population data do not show immediate biological collapse. In rural Alaska, subsistence opportunity cannot be measured only by whether some animals remain on the landscape. The relevant inquiry includes whether rural residents can meaningfully access and harvest those animals for food, culture, household needs, and community sharing.

The record for both WP26-31 and WP26-75 demonstrates that rural subsistence users are facing real and documented barriers to meeting customary and traditional needs. Those barriers include competition from non-local hunters, displacement from traditional hunting areas, aircraft and riverboat disturbance, unequal access to equipment, incomplete harvest reporting, low or outdated survey data, and the compounding food security crisis caused by salmon declines.

As Chief Ridley stated, “Interior and Yukon River communities are experiencing food insecurity.” That food-security context matters. Moose closures cannot be evaluated in isolation from the collapse of salmon harvest opportunity and the increasing difficulty rural families face in feeding themselves from the land and water.



II. WP26-75 Was Supported by Substantial Evidence of Subsistence Need, Competition, and Uncertainty

The State's request gives the impression that WP26-75 was unsupported by the record. That is incorrect.

WP26-75 addressed moose hunting in Unit 25D Remainder. The Office of Subsistence Management (OSM) summarized the proposal during the December 18, 2025 Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Council meeting by explaining that "the moose density in this area is very sparse," that "no aerial surveys for moose have been done in Unit 25D Remainder since 2015," and that there were "concerns about the ability of federally qualified subsistence users to meet their needs for moose due to the low number and competition with non-federally qualified users."

The record also shows that harvest data are incomplete. OSM explained that harvest tickets "do not have a strict reporting requirement" and therefore "reported harvest should be considered a minimum." This directly undercuts the State's reliance on reported harvest numbers as if they were complete and definitive.

Local and Tribal support is also clear. The Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments (CATG) supported WP26-75 by resolution. The Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Council (EIRAC) supported the original proposal in December 2025 by a 6–2 vote. After OSM developed a narrower modification based on public and Council concerns, EIRAC unanimously supported the modified version in March 2026.

This shows that EIRAC and OSM did not ignore concerns about the scope of the original proposal. Instead, OSM reviewed the record, heard concerns from the public and EIRAC, and developed a targeted river-corridor modification focused on the areas where conflict was most likely to occur.

At the March 4, 2026 meeting, OSM explained that after "reviewing years of public comments and subsistence studies," it appeared that "a lot of the conflict is along the river corridors." OSM therefore presented "a targeted closure along the river corridors,"



including areas “mostly hunted by local subsistence users” and where “most of the user conflict seems to occur.”

The State cannot fairly characterize this as arbitrary or unsupported. The FSB had before it substantial evidence of subsistence need, incomplete harvest information, lack of current survey data, Tribal support, RAC support, and user conflict concentrated in identifiable areas.

III. WP26-75 Evidence Shows Competition, Disturbance, and Displacement of Rural Users

The record includes direct testimony from rural users regarding competition and disturbance. Testimony from Venetie described hunters flying in during the fall, buzzing moose and caribou, camping near local hunters, and interfering with local hunting. The testimony also described aircraft activity affecting villages, funerals, and subsistence activities.

The record further reflects that these disturbances have direct harvest impacts. One rural user testified, “this year we didn’t get one in the fall,” and explained that for families that rely on the fall hunt, outside disturbance “does make it harder for us.”

That testimony is directly relevant to ANILCA’s subsistence-continuation standard. The harm is not limited to biological overharvest. Competition and disturbance can reduce rural opportunity, displace local hunters, and make it harder for families to secure winter meat.

Chair Wright also emphasized the direct food-security issue in Unit 25D Remainder, stating during the March 4 meeting: “There’s a lot of people in Fort Yukon alone. It’s a big village, that has a hard time getting meat.” This is precisely the type of rural subsistence evidence ANILCA requires the FSB to consider.

Community comments from Central further supported the modified proposal. As summarized into the record, community members observed “lower numbers of moose than in past years” and stated that the modified proposal would “increase the likelihood of subsistence users meeting subsistence needs.”



The record also reflects concern that some families are able to harvest while others are not, depending on access to boats, equipment, fuel, time, and location. This kind of household-level disparity is not captured by generalized harvest numbers. A community may show some successful harvest while still experiencing reduced subsistence opportunity, higher costs, displacement, and unmet need.

IV. WP26-31 Was Supported by Evidence of Extreme Competition, Displacement, and Unmet Subsistence Need

The State's challenge to WP26-31 likewise ignores critical record evidence. For WP26-31, the record includes evidence from the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission's (AITRC) Community Harvest System (CHS) showing that federally qualified users (FQUs) in Game Management Units (GMUs) 11, 12, and 13 are not meeting customary and traditional moose needs.

AITRC reported that "successful harvests have not yet occurred" under the CHS, even as participation has increased and the data show "persistent challenges" in GMUs 11, 12, and 13. AITRC identified those challenges as including "access limitations and increased traffic" and "increased competition from non-local and urban hunters."

The harvest-effort data are stark. In fall 2025, AITRC reported "290 days that were hunted by 24 registrants," with "no successful harvests." AITRC further concluded that FQUs participating in the CHS "are not meeting their customary and traditional needs for moose" in GMUs 11, 12, and 13.

AITRC also tied the closure proposal directly to displacement. The testimony stated that AITRC is seeing "too much traffic," including "a lot of non-local urban hunters" coming into camps and "pushing families out who have hunted there for years, generations."

This is powerful record evidence that subsistence needs are not being met. It directly rebuts the State's reliance on generalized population statistics and broad assertions that subsistence needs are being satisfied.



The Southcentral Regional Advisory Council (Southcentral RAC), as the home-region Council, supported WP26-31. The record reflects that Southcentral RAC's support was based on "an extreme level of competition with state users" for moose in Unit 13. The record further states that NFQUs arrive "in large numbers with high-powered off-road vehicles," while FQUs "do not have comparable equipment" and are not able to access areas where they can safely hunt.

The record also identified cultural harm. It states that this competition "is also eroding local cultural practices" and makes "passing along knowledge and tradition almost impossible."

The State's letter overlooks or minimizes this evidence. But ANILCA requires the FSB to consider exactly these kinds of impacts: whether rural residents can continue customary and traditional subsistence uses in practice, not merely whether a general harvestable surplus exists on paper.

V. Overall Harvest Numbers Do Not Prove Subsistence Needs Are Being Met

The State repeatedly relies on generalized biological and harvest statistics. Those statistics do not answer the central ANILCA question.

A harvestable surplus does not guarantee that rural subsistence needs are being met. Overall harvest numbers can mask inequitable distribution, localized displacement, crowding near access corridors, competition during key harvest windows, lack of equipment, fuel costs, and the inability of elders and lower-income households to participate. Reported harvest also may undercount actual harvest or fail to distinguish between FQUs and other users.

The record for WP26-75 specifically acknowledged that reported harvest "should be considered a minimum." The record also showed that OSM could not determine from available data exactly how much harvest was by users with customary and traditional use. The State cannot rely on incomplete data to claim there is no subsistence impact.



For WP26-31, AITRC's CHS provides the kind of user-specific information that broad population statistics miss. That evidence shows significant effort by FQUs with no successful moose harvests over multiple years. The State's broad claims do not overcome that record.

VI. The FSB Was Entitled to Weigh Local Knowledge, Tribal Evidence, and RAC Recommendations

The State's request places heavy weight on the positions of the State and some technical staff. But the FSB is not bound to adopt the State's preferred interpretation of the record.

RACs exist because ANILCA requires meaningful rural participation in federal subsistence management. Tribal testimony, local knowledge, community harvest information, and RAC recommendations are not secondary evidence. They are central to determining whether subsistence uses can continue.

The importance of RACs was directly addressed during the December 17 joint meeting. Public testimony explained that the Regional Councils have deference because members "live on the land" and have "personal knowledge," and that the Councils make recommendations based on "customary and traditional knowledge."

Chief Ridley similarly emphasized that RACs "must function as meaningful decision-making bodies, not advisory groups where recommendations are overridden." He also stated that RAC membership "must prioritize active subsistence users and indigenous knowledge holders."

In these proposals, the FSB had before it evidence from affected users, Tribal entities, RACs, and local residents. The FSB was entitled to credit that evidence, especially where the record also showed incomplete harvest reporting and outdated survey information.

Secretarial review should not be used to override the FSB simply because the State disagrees with how the FSB weighed local and Tribal evidence.



VII. Federal Subsistence Decisions Must Not Prioritize Outside Sport-Hunting Advocacy Over Alaska Rural Residents

NAEC is also concerned that the State's request aligns with a broader effort by outside sport-hunting interests, including Safari Club International (SCI), to weaken federal subsistence protections and expand non-subsistence hunting access on federal public lands in Alaska.

SCI is a nonprofit advocacy organization that promotes sport hunting. It does not represent the federally protected subsistence rights of rural Alaska residents, Tribes, or FQUs. It would be unacceptable for federal decision-makers to give greater weight to the priorities of a national sport-hunting organization than to the testimony, food-security needs, customary and traditional uses, and lived experience of Alaska rural residents.

This concern was raised directly during the December 17 joint RAC meeting. Public testimony stated that the current review appeared "politically motivated as an open access issue" and "not an issue of subsistence rights, or of ANILCA Title VIII, or of fish and wildlife conservation." The same testimony stated that SCI's recommendations did not appear to reflect "a food sovereignty agenda" or "a subsistence agenda."

The record also raised specific concerns about SCI's proposed changes to closures. Public testimony stated that SCI was seeking to require that the State "rubber stamp any closure of the Federal Subsistence Board" and characterized that effort as "an all-access issue." The testimony further warned that such changes would take away the FSB's "primary tool to protect those species and those populations."

ANILCA Title VIII was enacted to protect rural subsistence uses, not to maximize sport-hunting access. The federal subsistence program must be guided by the federal rural priority, the federal trust responsibility, Tribal consultation, RAC recommendations, and the administrative record developed from affected communities. The preferences of outside hunting advocacy organizations cannot lawfully or ethically displace the needs of rural Alaskans who rely on moose and other wild foods for food security, culture, community sharing, and continuity of traditional lifeways.



The State's request should therefore be viewed in context. It is not merely a technical disagreement over wildlife management. It is part of a broader push to narrow federal subsistence authority and elevate non-subsistence hunting access over the protections Congress guaranteed to rural Alaska residents under ANILCA. The Departments should reject any approach that gives outside sport-hunting advocacy greater influence than Alaska Native Tribes, rural communities, FQUs, and the RACs created to represent them.

VIII. The Closures Are Targeted Federal-Land Measures, Not an Improper Expansion of Federal Authority

The State argues that these closures conflict with State management authority. But the FSB's actions apply to federal public lands under ANILCA Title VIII. The FSB acted within the federal subsistence framework Congress created.

For WP26-75, OSM narrowed the proposal to river corridors where the record showed the greatest conflict. That modification shows restraint, not overreach. It responds to concerns raised by the public while still protecting the areas most important to local subsistence users.

For WP26-31, the limited federal land base does not make the closure unlawful. To the contrary, it shows that the FSB adopted a targeted measure within its jurisdiction. The State cannot simultaneously argue that the affected federal lands are limited and that the FSB's action represents an impermissible takeover of wildlife management.

Chief Ridley's testimony provides the appropriate principle: "Consultation with the state of Alaska is important, but consultation is not deference." Federal authority must be exercised independently when necessary to uphold the federal subsistence priority.

IX. The Secretaries Should Deny the State's Request

The State's request would weaken the rural subsistence priority Congress enacted in ANILCA. It asks the Secretaries to treat conservation data as the only meaningful evidence and to disregard the lived realities of rural subsistence users.



The record does not support that outcome. The record shows:

- Incomplete harvest data;
- Lack of recent survey information for Unit 25D Remainder;
- Tribal support for WP26-75;
- EIRAC support for WP26-75, including unanimous support for the modified proposal;
- Evidence of river-corridor conflict, aircraft disturbance, and displacement;
- Community testimony that rural users are struggling to meet moose needs;
- AITRC evidence that FQUs in GMUs 11, 12, and 13 are not meeting customary and traditional moose needs;
- Evidence of non-local and urban competition in Unit 13;
- Southcentral RAC support for WP26-31 as the home-region Council;
- Evidence that cultural practices and intergenerational subsistence knowledge are being harmed by loss of meaningful harvest opportunity; and
- The need to ensure that outside sport-hunting advocacy organizations are not given priority over Alaska rural residents, Tribes, and federally qualified subsistence users.

That is substantial evidence and it is more than sufficient to support the FSB's actions under ANILCA Title VIII.

For these reasons, NAEC respectfully requests that the Departments deny the State of Alaska's request for Secretarial review and allow the FSB's actions on WP26-31 and WP26-75 to stand.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Krystal Lapp".

Krystal Lapp
Interim Executive Director



Cc:

Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator, Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Council, Office of Subsistence Management

Nissa Pilcher, Council Coordinator, Southcentral and Western Interior Regional Advisory Councils, Office of Subsistence Management

Federal Subsistence Board, Office of Subsistence Management

Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Council

Southcentral Regional Advisory Council

References and Hyperlinks

1. State of Alaska, Governor Mike Dunleavy, June 2, 2026, letter to Secretary Doug Burgum and Secretary Brooke Rollins, "Request for Secretarial Review of Federal Subsistence Board Actions on Wildlife Proposals WP26-31 and WP26-75." Attached as Exhibit A.
2. U.S. Department of the Interior, Federal Subsistence Management Program, Eastern Interior Alaska Regional Advisory Council transcript index: [Eastern Interior Alaska Meeting Transcripts](#)
3. U.S. Department of the Interior, Federal Subsistence Management Program, Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Council, March 3, 2026, transcript: [March 3, 2026 EIRAC Transcript](#)
4. U.S. Department of the Interior, Federal Subsistence Management Program, Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Council, March 4, 2026, transcript: [March 4, 2026 EIRAC Transcript](#)
5. U.S. Department of the Interior, Federal Subsistence Management Program, Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Council, March 5, 2026, transcript: [March 5, 2026 EIRAC Transcript](#)
6. U.S. Department of the Interior, Federal Subsistence Management Program, Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Council, December 16, 2025, transcript: [December 16, 2025 EIRAC Transcript](#)
7. U.S. Department of the Interior, Federal Subsistence Management Program, Joint Eastern Interior and Western Interior Regional Advisory Council, December 17, 2025 transcript: [December 17, 2025 Joint EIRAC/WIRAC Transcript](#)
8. U.S. Department of the Interior, Federal Subsistence Management Program, Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Council, December 18, 2025, transcript: [December 18, 2025 EIRAC Transcript](#)
9. U.S. Department of the Interior, Federal Subsistence Management Program, April 2026 Federal Subsistence Board wildlife regulatory meeting materials and Board actions: [April 2026 Meeting Materials and Board Actions](#)
10. U.S. Department of the Interior, Federal Subsistence Management Program, recent Board actions summary: [Recent Board Actions: How Do They Affect You?](#)
11. U.S. Department of the Interior, Federal Subsistence Management Program, Unit 13 moose closure fact sheet: [Fact Sheet: Unit 13 Moose Closure](#)