



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

1011 E. Tudor Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199



FWS/FES

FEB 14 2012

Representative Alan Dick
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 104
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Representative Dick:

I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our support for the ongoing cooperative efforts between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) regarding the State's proposal to reintroduce wood bison to Alaska. For the last several years, the Service has worked closely with ADF&G to find the most effective approach to this issue that will minimize Endangered Species Act (ESA) requirements as well as any potential future effects on proposed development projects and communities in the State. We also have explored how best to transfer management authority of any reintroduced wood bison to the ADF&G, which we agree is the appropriate agency for this responsibility. As a measure of our commitment, the Service provided \$200,000 in Federal funds to support the captive wood bison at the Wildlife Conservation Center near Portage from July 2011 to June 2012, while we helped to find a way forward.

We also would like to set the record straight regarding some inaccurate information in the House Joint Resolution No. 32, introduced to the Alaska State Legislature on February 1, 2012. The resolution urged the United States Congress to remove wood bison from protection under the ESA and to grant control of wood bison in Alaska to the State.

The characterization of the ESA in the Resolution, which states that as a result of litigation, implementation of the current law serves to defeat its original purpose, is inaccurate. In fact, for more than 35 years, the ESA has prevented the probable extinction of hundreds of species across the Nation and contributed to the recovery of many others. Three of those species that have recovered are native to Alaska [Aleutian Canada (cackling) goose, American peregrine falcon, and Arctic peregrine falcon]. As a matter of record, the Service's Alaska Region has conducted over 5,500 ESA consultations on proposed projects since 2002, and we have never stopped a single project or required major modifications to a proposed action. We coordinate closely with project proponents to minimize adverse effects to species, while allowing proposed development projects to proceed.

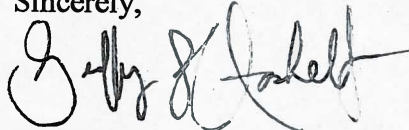
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The Resolution alleges that new litigation challenging whether endangered species can ever be hunted resulted in the Service being unwilling to proceed with the negotiated exemptions. This statement is incorrect. The Alaska Region has communicated extensively with our Washington Office on this issue. In October 2011, the Service Director reached a decision that supports future hunting of wood bison as an appropriate management tool. Since then, our position has remained constant: the Service supports hunting of wood bison as an appropriate population management tool. In Canada, hunting has been used to effectively manage wood bison populations since 1988.

The statements claiming that if wood bison were released in the State, their habitat could become subject to the "restrictive provisions" of the ESA and result in exorbitant economic costs are unfounded. These exaggerated statements about the ESA are creating a negative and fearful environment that makes it more difficult to achieve common ground. The Service is working with the State to designate the Alaska population of wood bison as a nonessential, experimental population with an associated State management plan. This would provide the State with assurances they have requested, including the ability to remove wood bison from the landscape in the event the State decides that the reintroduction of wood bison is not in the State's best interests. The nonessential, experimental designation minimizes the requirement for consultation under the ESA for federally funded or federally permitted development projects on all State and private lands, and on most Federal lands.

My staff and I would be happy to meet with you and members of your staff to further clarify issues relating to wood bison reintroduction or the ESA in general. Please contact me at (907) 786-3542 if you would like to arrange a meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Kelly J. Lohr", written in a cursive style.

Regional Director

cc: Cora Campbell, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game