



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

DIVISION OF HABITAT
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February 21, 2017

The Honorable Click Bishop
Senate Community and Regional Affairs Committee
State Capitol Building, Room 121
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Chairman Bishop:

This letter is submitted to express the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's (ADF&G) support for Governor Walker's Critical Habitat/Special Areas: Boundary Descriptions bill, SB 61. This bill proposes amendments to the statutory boundary descriptions of nine of the state's thirty-two Special Areas.

ADF&G is responsible for managing the refuges and critical habitat areas (CHA) addressed in this bill. SB 61 allows us to more efficiently and effectively manage the fish and wildlife habitat resources in these areas by allowing the existing regulations and policies to be applied consistently across cohesive lands areas.

Your predecessors in the Legislature created these special areas with the intent that the habitat and fish and wildlife populations be conserved for the people of the state. Although the changes proposed for the Izembek, Cape Newenham and Palmer Hay Flats refuges, and for the Port Moller, Egegik, Pilot Point, Fox River Flats, and Kachemak Bay critical habitat areas affect relatively small areas, there are benefits to the habitat resources, as well as to their department managers and users.

Correcting these typographical errors and minor historical oversights in the legal descriptions will revise the boundaries to match the areas intended for protection. When the areas' boundaries are contiguous and align with geographical features on the ground, they are easier to identify in the field for all users.

The Dude Creek CHA was created in 1988 after years of input and effort from members of the community of Gustavus. At the time, the lands in the expansion area were held by the Mental Health Trust and were not incorporated into the CHA.

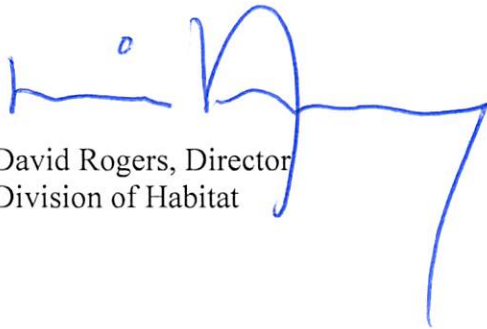
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Several years later, a co-operative agreement was formed between The Nature Conservancy, the Departments of Fish and Game and Natural Resources, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to purchase the tracts of land adjacent to the CHA, and donate them to the state to become part of the Dude Creek CHA, further protecting sandhill crane and other wildlife habitat, and the public's use of this area. Amending the legal description to incorporate these lands, and giving ADF&G full statutory authority to manage the habitat as part of the CHA will complete this years-long process.

We encourage the Legislature to pass SB 61 to correct long-standing errors and to aid the department in carrying out their duties to manage important areas of wildlife habitat throughout the state.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



David Rogers, Director
Division of Habitat



Bruce Dale, Director
Division of Wildlife Conservation