

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

BOARD of GAME

**SARAH PALIN,
GOVERNOR**

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March 26, 2008

The Honorable Sarah Palin
Governor for the State of Alaska
3rd Floor, State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Governor Palin:

At our spring Board of Game meeting in Fairbanks, we considered a proposal from the public to create a wildlife refuge to protect the Tangle Lakes area from possible mining activity and the habitat destruction that might result. We heard compelling testimony from the public and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) about the area's significant value to wildlife. We were impressed by the extent of public support for protecting the Tangle Lakes area in the long term primarily as wildlife habitat and as an important source of long-term opportunities for hunting, fishing, and recreation.

The Alaska Board of Game shares the public's concern for the future of wildlife habitat in the Tangle Lakes area, but we recognize the limitations on the Alaska Board of Game regarding proactive measures to protect and enhance wildlife habitat. In the absence of a clear and present danger to wildlife, we haven't the authority to act preemptively to create a habitat reserve or a wildlife refuge.

While our legal charter does not allow us to create a wildlife refuge as the proposal requested, we can work proactively with ADF&G and land management agencies, notably the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR). We seek your support for immediate discussions between these and any other appropriate state agencies to thoroughly catalog wildlife-related values, identify important habitat, affirm the extent of hunting, fishing, and recreation activities, document potential threats to those values and activities, and discuss possible courses of action designed to protect wildlife resources and uses in the area. We recognize the potential for mineral extraction in this area and in associated mineral leases, but remain convinced the long-term value of maintaining wildlife habitat far outweighs the potential benefits of possible development projects known at this time.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Cliff Judkins, Chairman
Alaska Board of Game

cc: Commissioner Denby Lloyd, Department of Fish and Game
Commissioner Tom Irwin, Department of Natural Resources
Representative John Harris, Speaker of the House of Representatives
Representative John Coghill
Representative Woodie Salmon
Representative David Guttenberg
Senator Lyda Green, Senate President
Senator Gene Therriault
Senator Albert Kookesh
Representative Craig Johnson, Co-Chair, House Resources Committee
Representative Carl Gatto, Co-Chair, House Resources Committee
Senator Huggins, Chairman, Senate Resources Committee

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Copper Country Alliance

FROM: Robert Tobey

DATE: 19 December 2002

SUBJECT: Wildlife Resources in the Denali Block

Thank you for the opportunity to present Wildlife Conservation's perspective on the resource value of the Denali Block. The Denali Block is important both as wildlife habitat utilized by a variety of species and public use land. This area falls within Game Management Unit (GMU) 13 with wildlife management responsibility that of the Glennallen office. The area also has dual federal management on federal lands for subsistence hunting. Land management authority is under the Department of Natural Resources. Land management guidelines were established with public input in the Copper River Basin and Delta Management plans. Both plans call for primary use of the land in question as wildlife habitat and public recreation with only incidental mining activity.

The range around Tangle Lakes is particularly critical to caribou. The Nelchina Caribou Herd is the largest, most important road-accessible caribou herd in Southcentral Alaska, and many caribou from the herd utilize the Denali Block. As many as 5000 caribou have wintered around the Tangle Lakes in recent years. Caribou behavior usually results in caribou selecting different winter ranges every year to take advantage of forage availability on ungrazed range. The fact that caribou have wintered in the Tangle Lakes area on an almost every other year basis shows this range is important. The area is also an important fall staging and rutting area used by up to 20,000 caribou in recent years. The loss of the Denali Block could have a substantial negative impact on the Nelchina Caribou Herd.

The Tangle Lakes is also one of the most heavily hunted areas in GMU 13. Because of the proximity to the Denali Highway and mild terrain, access to caribou in the fall and winter is good, drawing thousands of hunters every year.

The Denali Block also contains good moose habitat. Unlike the majority of GMU 13 where moose numbers are low, moose density in this area is high, making it an important moose hunting area. The Block is especially important to resident subsistence hunters trying to optimize opportunity by subsistence hunting for both moose and caribou at the same time.

The Denali Block also provides the most important small game hunting area in GMU 13. The Tangle Lakes region has been written up in a number of national sporting magazines, and even the subject of a television show, as a major Alaskan ptarmigan hunting destination. I have personally interviewed

numerous small game hunters traveling to the Denali Block just to hunt ptarmigan. This area has been promoted widely to non-resident bird hunters as well as residents because it offers exceptional hunting access.

The other important big game animal in the area is the grizzly bear. Because of the good fall berry crop in the area, and the importance of this dietary component, the Denali Block is important fall grizzly habitat.

Additional species in the area of importance are the wolf and fox. This is some of the best wolf and fox habitat because of the large prey base available to support these carnivores. Extensive hunting and trapping of these furbearers occurs in this area. Trapping is an important yearly source of income for many local residents, and sport hunters converge on the area to try for wolves.

Waterfowl use of the Tangle Lakes is also heavy. The lake system provides a staging area for migrating trumpeter swans, ducks, loons and other water birds. Nesting habitat for waterfowl is abundant and the area is an important waterfowl breeding area. Local waterfowl hunters are drawn to the Tangle Lakes seeking widgeon, mallards, and the less common long-tailed ducks. Since waterfowl are federally managed, I don't have specific survey numbers. Fish & Wildlife Service does swan surveys in the Copper River Basin, and perhaps they could provide some population estimates.

Finally, non-consumptive recreation is also extremely important in the Denali Block for Alaska residents and tourists alike. The upland habitat types and abundance of wildlife has made this area the number one recommended viewing area for those wanting to see both moose and caribou. The Glennallen Fish & Game office recommends this destination for those seeking a high quality wildlife viewing trip. During the winter season, many snowmachiners from across the state are also drawn to the Tangle Lakes area for recreational activities in addition to ptarmigan, caribou and moose hunting. The loss of this habitat as a wildlife viewing and recreational destination could greatly compromise the aesthetics of the Copper River Basin.

It is my position that the importance of the Denali Block as wildlife habitat, tourist destination, sport fishing, subsistence and sport hunting, subsistence food gathering and trapping area exceeds all mining value. All these uses except mining have minimal impact on the land and are renewable yearly. Certainly an impact study and cost benefit analyses are warranted in view of the high value of current uses compared to an unknown mining value.

Sincerely,


Robert Tobey