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July 15, 1999

David B. Allen
Regional Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1011 E. Tudor Rd.
Anchorage, AK 99503-6199

Dear Mr. Allen:

The State of Alaska appreciates your invitation to participate in the revision of the Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCPs) for National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska. We agree that participation by representatives of the Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will contribute substantially to improving the quality and relevance of the revised plans. We also envision the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF), Department of Public Safety, Department of Environmental Conservation, and other state agencies as valuable participants in certain phases of selected refuge plan revisions.

Current budget restrictions unfortunately prevent us from participating to the fullest extent possible or desirable. We do believe, however, that some participation at key points by state agency staff with specific expertise and knowledge of individual refuge issues, as well as individual agency policies, will be valuable and achievable. To this end, we suggest a process for state participation as follows:

1. The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) provides agency review drafts of all CCP documents to the Division of Governmental Coordination (DGC) for informal state agency review and comment prior to release to the public; FWS will also provide updates of scheduling of public meetings, data solicitations, and projected review dates;

2. DGC will provide informal or formal consolidated state comments on all informal or formal review drafts as appropriate. If FWS receives any independent agency comments directly, we request they be forwarded to DGC for appropriate consolidation;
3. The ADF&G statewide ANILCA Program will identify and coordinate with individual department representatives with fish and wildlife expertise whom FWS may work with directly on specific refuge issues or planning phases;
4. Based on staff availability, DNR, DOTPF, and other state agencies as appropriate, may identify staff representatives to coordinate directly with FWS for certain phases of CCP revision efforts or for selected refuges.
5. FWS staff will provide the opportunity to meet with available state staff during scoping to identify and address state concerns, and will continue opportunities for such dialogue throughout refuge plan development to assure accuracy of data and resolve management conflicts to the greatest degree possible;
6. FWS will notify identified state agency representatives in advance of interdisciplinary team meetings and provide an agenda; state staff will attend as issues, concerns, and time constraints warrant;
7. DGC will be available to monitor and help ensure adequate communication between FWS and state agency representatives.

If there are ways the above process can be improved, please let me know so we can fine tune a mutually acceptable approach. In the meantime, we are placing emphasis on the internal review of the template of generic management direction underlying the new CCP plans. We expect that a thorough review and dialogue at this stage will pay off with fewer unresolved issues at the refuge-specific level.

Our intent is to optimize communication between FWS and individual state agencies at key points on key issues, without making it burdensome to either FWS or the state. We anticipate that the level of our involvement will vary depending on the refuge, and indeed, on some refuges, we may not be involved until the public review phase. We are attaching a brief synopsis of the State's role in ANILCA CSU coordination. We suggest that this, along with the above outline if agreeable, be circulated among refuge managers and other appropriate FWS staff involved in the revision process.

In the last few years, there have been several informal discussions about the merits of providing some limited federal funding to state agencies (particularly DNR) that would allow more effective and mutually advantageous state participation. The most recent round of budget cuts have drastically reduced DNR's ability to work with adjacent landowners, not to mention it's ability to manage its own lands. Such funding, if available even in modest amounts, would go a long way toward improving overall management of public use, especially within refuges that experience substantial recreational river use. If federal funding for state participation is a

plausible option, please contact me to discuss the details. As you know, setting up funding arrangements sometimes requires a bit of lead time and state agencies are in the process of setting up budgets for the new fiscal year. Early consideration of this possibility would be appreciated.

Thanks again for your invitation to participate in a meaningful way. We look forward to working with you and your staff on the refuge CCP revisions.

Sincerely,

Sally Gibert
State CSU Coordinator

cc: Ken Rice, Chief of Planning, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
John Katz, Governor's Office, Washington, D.C.
Pat Galvin, Director, Division of Governmental Coordination
John Shively, Commissioner, Department of Natural Resources
Frank Rue, Commissioner, Department of Fish and Game
Joseph Perkins, Commissioner, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Michele Brown, Commissioner, Department of Environmental Conservation

bcc: Tina Cunning, DFG-Anch
Terry Haynes, DFG-Fbx
Patty Bielawski, DNR-Anch
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