

CACFA Cabin Committee Report – October 9, 2026
By Randy Zarnke, Committee Chair

ANILCA Protected Cabins for Traditional Activities: During the lead-up to passage of ANILCA, Congress recognized cabins as a necessary part of the Alaskan way of life. Cabins were essential to effectively trap and to conduct many other “traditional and customary” activities. In drafting ANILCA Section 1303, Congress clarified its intent to protect the Alaska way of life on all Federal lands:

*This section provides the Secretaries with authority to permit the continued use of cabin in Alaska even though the occupants may not hold legal title to these cabins . . . these residents carry on a unique lifestyle which may further the purposes of or may not necessarily endanger the units established by this Act. . . . **The Committee intends the Secretary utilize this permitting system to permit the continuation of this lifestyle where ever possible . . .***

One of Congress’s four purposes for ANILCA was to balance the transfer of over 100 million acres of general public lands into conservation units with many unique provisions to allow ongoing public uses not allowed on conservation lands in the rest of the country. Despite this clear statutory direction, no federal land management agency administers cabins consistent with ANILCA, resulting in few permits for new or existing cabins, eviction of law-abiding trappers and families, impacts on Alaskans’ social and economic opportunities, and loss of Alaskans’ traditional way of life Congress intended to continue.

CACFA’s Long Involvement: Beginning in the 1980s until its hiatus in 2016, this Commission prioritized implementation of ANILCA’s unique protections for public uses, such as suing NPS for its incomplete cabin regulations. CACFA members continued advocating for cabin rights with the delegation and BLM RAC even after defunding in 2016. After reauthorization in 2024 at CACFA’s first regular meeting in February 2026, an ANILCA Overview was provided by ANILCA Trainers, including specifics of ANILCA’s cabin provisions and examples of implementation issues with all four federal land management agencies. A brief listing of ANILCA’s cabin provisions and examples of issues by agency is in **Attachment 1**. CACFA provided the delegation a table in 2018 showing how differently BLM, FWS, and FS implement the same ANILCA provisions (**Attachment 2**). The delegation attached this table to letters in 2019, which asked the Secretaries for a task force to resolve discrepancies and adopt ANILCA-based regulations.

CACFA Cabin Committee Established: After the ANILCA Trainers’ Cabins video at the February meeting, I gave a briefing on the Alaska Trappers Association (ATA) efforts to resolve obstacles Alaskans face in applying for BLM cabin permits. CACFA invited BLM’s State Director to brief us on current BLM activities and to hear the 4 decades efforts by CACFA, the BLM RAC, delegation, State, and ATA to resolve BLM’s implementation of ANILCA’s cabin provisions. At the May 2026 CACFA meeting, Director Pendergast committed to assign staff to improve BLM’s permit process in consultation with CACFA. **Chair Lean established a Cabin Committee to focus on resolving cabin issues, first with BLM then other federal agencies.** (I agreed to serve as chair while focus on BLM issues, then another Chair will be named.)

Progress with BLM – After the May meeting, BLM staff met once with our Cabin Committee and later provided me a verbal update on tentative options to resolve some issues. BLM staff will provide an update tomorrow following my recap of attempts to resolve issues. The 2024 cooperative effort resulted in drafting a “Guidelines” for cabin applicants and BLM administrators alike (**Attachment 3**).

NPS – CACFA invited NPS Regional Director Don Striker to the October 2026 meeting to hear miners with longstanding patent issues and to hear about NPS cabin permitting issues.

FWS and FS – An invitation will be sent to the Forest Service State Forester to attend the February 2027 meeting in Juneau and to the Fish and Wildlife Service after coordinating schedules.

October 9, 2026, Cabin Committee Report – Attachment 1

ANILCA Cabin Provisions: Alaskans were greatly concerned during the years of ANILCA hearings, that the transfer of 100 million acres of multiple purpose land into conservation units would prevent their continued traditional way of life. Members of national preservation-focused organizations testified in favor of allowing cabins, including in Wilderness, as essential for continuing traditional activities. The bipartisan Senate Resources Committee report acknowledged some allowed uses need cabins, shelters, caches and other minimal facilities: *“Without recognition of these incidental uses and facilities, guiding, trapping and other allowed uses, while technically allowed, would be impossible to conduct . . . [so] those related uses and facilities . . . shall also be allowed.”* The following summarize some ANILCA provisions:

NPS units – Sec. 1303(a): Paragraphs 1-3 authorize permits for continued use and construction of facilities in NPS units based on pre-ANILCA “residency” and “occupancy,” subject to certain conditions and regulations; and authorize designation for public use. Paragraph 4 allows construction of new facilities if necessary for subsistence or other allowed uses. **Sec. 205:** authorizes onshore facilities in support of commercial fishing.

Non-NPS CSUs & Areas (FWS Refuges, all Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers, BLM Areas, Nat’l Trails, FS Monuments) – Sec. 1303(b)-(c): New cabins may be permitted if necessary to continue ongoing activity or allowed use and no reasonable alternative site. Pre-ANILCA trespass cabins may be permitted for a claimant and may be used for traditional and customary use as well as subsistence uses. No use or construction allowed for “private recreational use.” **Sec. 304(d):** allows onshore facilities in support of commercial fishing in refuges.

All Federal land (general BLM and FS; all NPS, FWS, FS & BLM CSUs & Areas) – Sec. 1303(d): Pre-ANILCA permitted cabins allowed and transferrable; renewal only terminated if a notice and finding of “direct threat or significant impairment” to the CSU or general federal land. **Sec. 1306:** authorizes administrative sites and visitor facilities under specific provisions. **Sec. 1316:** *“On all public lands where the taking of fish and wildlife is permitted . . . the Secretary shall permit . . . continuance of existing uses, and the future establishment, and use, of temporary campsites, tent platforms, shelters, and other temporary facilities and equipment necessarily related to such activities”.*

Designated Wilderness – Sec. 1315: allows new, replacement, and existing cabins for administrative use and public use and for public health and safety (in NPS, FWS, and FS CSUs); requires notify Congress of intent to remove or construct public use cabins.

Examples of ANILCA Cabin Implementation Issues by Federal Agency:

NPS regulations permit cabins in which Alaskans “resided” full time but not those “occupied” seasonally and authorize cabin use for subsistence and some guides but not for “other allowed uses”. Cabin owners were denied permits and cabins designated as administrative or public use cabins, preventing occupant’s continued traditional activities.

FWS regulations omit some provisions, later added to the Regional Policy. Managers either unaware or chose to: not provide those to applicants; apply infeasible or unreasonable fees and stipulations; incorrectly assert cabins are not allowed in CSUs; or verbally say will deny applications regardless.

BLM has no ANILCA-based cabin regulations so attempts to merge FLPMA regulations with ANILCA provisions in the Alaska Supplement to BLM Manual (require cabin applications filed as rights-of-way applications triggering hurdles, fees, and stipulations to preempt ANILCA protections). Managers and plans often incorrectly assert cabins are not allowed in CSUs or use NEPA to stall indefinitely.

FS has no ANILCA-based cabin regulations; manages cabins through their Regional Handbook; incorrectly apply Forest Management Act provisions to preempt ANILCA provisions such as limiting transfers.

None define “private recreational use” [exclusive permittee use for recreation], which ANILCA prohibits, but some incorrectly interpret ANILCA prohibits cabins for any recreational use.