

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

January 21, 2016

Dan Ashe, Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C. St., NW
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Request for Extension of Time for Public Comments for Proposed Rule on Non-Subsistence Take of Wildlife and Public Participation and Closure Procedures on National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska, Rule FWS-R7-NWRS-2014-0005

Dear Director Ashe:

We write to request the public comment period on the proposed rule and draft environmental assessment on national wildlife refuges in Alaska, Proposed Rule FWS-R7-NWRS-2014-0005, be extended to 121 days. The Federal Register publication of the proposed rulemaking provides a 60-day public comment period, but that will not provide sufficient time to adequately consider, examine, and comment upon this proposed rule and draft environmental assessment. The 121-day public comment period requested would be consistent with the National Park Service comment period on a rule on a similar topic (Hunting and Trapping on National Park Service Preserves in Alaska) last year.

We are seeking an extension for several reasons. First, the proposed rule and draft environmental assessment are lengthy and complex and will require time to review and understand, including to research the biological and legal basis behind them. Second, the proposed rule changes were made known at the end of the holiday season after assurances were given by the agency to stakeholders that the public comment period would be at least 90 days. Third, without an extension of time, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may be precluding the input of many rural Alaskans who depend on subsistence. Although this proposed rule does not revise federal subsistence regulations per se, there may be unintended impacts on federal subsistence users.

One of the leading reasons Alaskans voted for Statehood was to take control of fish and game management given the multiple failings of federal wildlife management. That was why Alaskans fought so hard for specific provisions to protect Alaska management of wildlife during congressional consideration of ANILCA and why Section 1314 of the Act was included — to guarantee Alaska would maintain its paramount position of control over its fish and game resources. Many Alaskans are concerned that your agency's proposed regulations are setting a precedent for the federal takeover of wildlife management in the State. Others across the country are concerned that these policies could spread to the rest of the country as well, so it is not just Alaskans who need to review and examine these proposals. We have heard from Americans nationwide who also need more time to carefully consider how the regulations may impact all states' ability to manage their wildlife resources.

We request a prompt extension of the public comment period to allow a robust review of the merits, ramifications, and legal foundation of the regulations. Your earliest consideration of this request is appreciated.

Sincerely,

		
Lisa Murkowski United States Senator	Dan Sullivan United States Senator	Don Young Congressman for All Alaska

cc: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R7-NWRS-2014-0005, Division of Policy, Performance, and Management Programs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MS BPHC; 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803.