

Organization: Cooper Landing Safe Trails Committee

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1: What Regulation do you wish to change?

There are no current federal subsistence regulations regarding trap placement in unit 7 on the Kenai Peninsula.

2: How would the new regulation read?

Add the Following Language to Trapping Regulations for Unit 7.

"Trap setback of 50-yards around the perimeter of the campgrounds listed with the exception of: traps with an inside spread of 5 inches or less which are set at least 4 feet above the ground or snow level, size 3 leg-hold marten traps in boxes or smaller traps, and size 110 and 120 conibear traps in boxes"

Campgrounds

- Quartz Creek Campground
- Crescent Creek Campground
- Russian River Campground
- Tenderfoot Campground (Summit Lake Rec. Area)"

3: Why should this regulation change be made?

- The Board of Game recently passed a regulation of a 50-yard trap setback around the perimeter of campgrounds. This would be an easily managed regulation having inter-agency agreement and less confusing for trappers.
- Campgrounds are groomed and maintained for ski trails and have heavy recreational use all winter with children and dogs.
- It would acknowledge the requests of non-consumptive users when evaluating trapping regulations in this small region of the state and show willingness of the Federal Subsistence Program to make regulatory changes that do not significantly interfere with the subsistence opportunity to trap.
- It would help reduce long term user conflicts occurring in a high density multi recreational use region of the State.
- It aligns with USFS Mission for management of USFS lands to include the management for multiple uses using a balanced approach, well as their **"Our Values"** statement cites, managing for **"Safety. In every way: physical, psychological, and social"**

- Local residents are supportive of a more balanced approach to management of recreational uses as indicated from a local survey by Cooper Landing Community Safe Trails Committee.
- According to ADF&G data, 99.6% of Alaskans don't trap and only .4% do. Land use management should adjust to this current usage.

4: What impact will this change have on wildlife populations?

This change will have no effect on wildlife populations.

5: How will this change affect subsistence uses?

This change will likely have minimal or no effect on federal subsistence trapping harvest as it will restrict trapping on a small portion of USFS federal lands in Unit 7. Subsistence trappers will be required to set traps at least 50 yards from the specified locations mentioned in the regulation. The mandatory 50-yard setback may result in increased time and effort to set traps within these zones as trappers would be required to set traps 50 yards away from designated campgrounds; that translates to 60 steps or under a minute snow machine ride.

Traps set by federal subsistence users that are 50 yards from specified campgrounds may result in 1) reduced risk of traps being physically disturbed by other recreational users, 2) possible increased harvest due to less disturbance (noise, scents, movements) by recreationist activities, given they are further from trails, and 3) reduced potential trapping of non-target species like dogs, etc.

With the Board of Game recently passing the 50-yard trap setback from campgrounds, adoption of this proposal by the Federal Subsistence Board would be a consistent step forward towards providing for more balanced recreational opportunities, and subsequently reducing user conflicts, within a small but significant region of the State that experiences higher density concentrated recreational uses.

6: How will this change affect other uses, such as sport/recreational and commercial?

The goal of submitting this proposal is to find a solution to a growing conflict between recreation users and subsistence trappers in a manner that minimizes disruption to subsistence trapping. In accordance with its mission statement, The US Forest Service (USFS) is required to manage its lands; to balance the short and long term needs of people and nature by:

- Working in collaboration with the communities and our partners;
- Providing access to resources and experiences that promote economic, ecological, and social vitality; and
- Connecting people to the land and one another

This issue has a long history locally and is experiencing increased interest as the nature of our community changes. Cooper Landing is experiencing a shift to a younger general age population, which lends itself to more family winter outdoor adventures. Cooper Landing is also becoming a year-round destination for all-season activities, evidenced by the number of cars at the trailheads in the Summit Lake Area, new year-round businesses like the Brewery and vacation rentals. The addition of the Three Bears store and the completion of the new bypass will attract more visitors and increase winter activity in this part of the Kenai Peninsula. There are plans for more residential housing, and a recreation area is in the planning phase.

There is a growing interest among local community members in finding a solution that is mutually beneficial and positive for all users. In 2015, a survey was done that indicated 83% of the Cooper Landing community wanted trap setbacks as compared to a 2021 survey that indicated **90%** wanted trap setbacks. The Cooper Landing Safe Trails Committee sent this to every landowner, post office box holder and many businesses in Cooper Landing (total 420) had a 35% return rate. The results were overwhelmingly supportive of creating trap setbacks close to highly used public areas. An average of 90% with a standard deviation of ± 8 , thought that it is necessary and appropriate to have areas where families can ski, skijor, hike, snowshoe, snowmachine, and enjoy winter recreation safely from the possibility of dogs or humans getting injured by a trap. The Cooper Landing Community Safe Trails Committee is merely a reflection of what the residents are asking for and reflecting those desires.

There were many comments on the survey that indicated a half-mile or mile setback would be better; we thought that was excessive and are more interested in protecting core areas near trails that have a more concentrated public use.

With respect to the Federal Subsistence trappers, our goal was to limit our request to only areas highly used by the public, realizing there is still a vast backcountry for trappers to use. Several responses from local trappers indicated support for this regulation change. It was a trapper who suggested the 100-yard setback for traps on the Homer trails.

A difficult-to-measure yet vital aspect of the current situation is the emotional stress and fear associated with the threat of traps close to trails/beaches/roads. As indicated by local meetings and the survey, people do not take their dogs to their favorite places due to fear of encountering a trap. Another group affected is the bird hunters with bird dogs; these dogs are typically well-behaved and under strict voice command, yet there was a fatality on a highway pullout where an irresponsible trapper placed a trap 50 feet from the road. User groups and land uses are expanding and changing, and the need to change these regulations is overdue. The disproportionate number of recreational users to trappers is 99.6% v. .4% yet our public lands are almost 100% in favor of the subsistence users. ADF&G estimates only about 3,000 people trap currently. A balance of uses on public lands is required by USFS and by ANUCA when it does not significantly impact subsistence users. As it stands, the regulated use favors trappers in accessibility and allocation. Excluding a minor amount of federal lands in Game Unit 7 for use by subsistence trappers would have a minimal effect on the subsistence trapping opportunities yet would resolve ongoing conflicts with the other user groups.

These campgrounds were chosen as they are actively maintained and groomed by volunteers that receive community donations to do this service. Skiers, skijorers, walkers, fat tire bike

riders and snowshoers all use these campgrounds recreationally throughout the winter season. There is an abundance of non-consumptive activities that are contrary to trapping activities.

A compromise between the user groups appears to be gaining support, and we believe a respectful resolution is possible. Signs asking trappers to voluntarily set traps 400 yards (1,200 feet) were put up in 2019 -2023 in the areas listed in this request. New signs have been designed and placed in February 2025, around sensitive areas by the Cooper Landing Safe Trails Committee, suggesting a voluntary 100-yard setback of traps.

While one local trapper believes this may have had a positive impact, recreationalists believe adherence is not enough; there needs to be well understood enforceable boundaries. It is only through adopted regulations that recreationists may have peace of mind and certainty about trap locations.

An ANILCA section 810 analysis was completed as part of the FEIS process on the Federal Subsistence Management Program. The intent of all Federal subsistence regulations is to accord subsistence uses of fish and wildlife on public lands a priority over the taking of fish and wildlife on such lands for other purposes, unless restriction is necessary to conserve healthy fish and wildlife populations. The final section 810 analysis determination appeared in the April 6, 1992, ROD and concluded that the Federal Subsistence Management Program, under Alternative IV with an annual process for setting subsistence regulations, may have some local impacts on subsistence uses, but will not likely restrict subsistence uses significantly.

We're not affecting subsistence use significantly; the areas we've designated are a very small percentage of the wilderness area to trap in in Unit 7.

ANILCA

Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act

Section 804

Except as otherwise provided in this Act and other Federal laws, the taking on public lands of fish and wildlife for non-wasteful subsistence uses shall be accorded priority over the taking on such lands of fish and wildlife for other purposes. Whenever it is necessary to restrict the taking of populations of fish and wildlife on such lands for subsistence uses in order to protect the continued viability of such populations, or to continue such uses, such priority shall be implemented through appropriate limitations based on the application of the following criteria:

1. customary and direct dependence upon the populations as the mainstay of livelihood;
2. local residency; and
3. the availability of alternative resources.

Trapping in the areas designated in this proposal:

- *does not constitute a "mainstay of livelihood"*
- *it negatively affects local residency and*
- *there are plentiful alternative resources.*

...therefore, appropriate limitation can and should be legally applied.



Kenai Peninsula Winter Recreation Map - Cooper Landing Area

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Miles

FOREST SERVICE CAMPGROUNDS A.

1. Russian River Campground
2. Cooper Creek Campgrounds North & South
3. Quartz Creek Campground
4. Crescent Creek Campground

