

Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

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In Reply Refer To:

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Dear Eastern Interior Federal Land Managers,

I write on behalf of the Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council) to raise concerns about air taxis that transport hunters and to request increased oversight of their operations on Federal public lands in the region.

The Council met in Fairbanks on March 3-5, 2026. During the meeting, Council members and members of the public raised the following concerns:

1. Wanton waste and poor meat care – when hunters are dropped off and left in the field too long, it can lead to spoiled meat. Nonresident hunters often prioritize antlers over meat, which can lead to waste. When enforcement does not know where hunters are being dropped off, they cannot monitor camps for this issue.
2. Public safety – air taxis sometimes cannot retrieve hunters in a timely manner, leading to situations where local search and rescue must intervene, incurring significant costs. At other times, nonresidents may not be prepared for field conditions and variable and harsh weather in Alaska, which can lead to rescue situations.
3. Trespass and illegal operations – the Council regularly receives reports of trespassing on Native corporation lands and Native allotments, yet there is a lack of penalties and insufficient means to enforce trespass. Additionally, the Council has received reports of aircraft covering their tail numbers to avoid being reported, which is extremely concerning and illegal.
4. Accountability and enforcement – law enforcement is stretched thin and often receives reports after the hunting season, making it difficult to investigate wanton waste or illegal activity. Air taxi reporting is not required to be submitted in a timely manner.

The Council strongly urges Federal land management agencies in the Eastern Interior Region to adopt or pursue the following actions:

A. Require Timely In-season Reporting (Not End of Year)

Federal managers and law enforcement must receive actionable information when hunters are *in the field*, not months later when evidence is gone. As a condition of special use permits or commercial use authorizations, the Council recommends that agencies require:

- Transporters submit real-time GPS coordinates to Federal enforcement at both drop-off and pickup.
- Operator name, aircraft tail number, client list, hunt area, and pick-up schedule submitted *before* entry onto Federal lands.
- Prompt notification if schedules change due to weather or mechanical issues.

- 24-hour reporting requirements for transporters for any client left past their planned pickup date, any emergency extraction, any instance of unreturned communication with a client, and any known or suspected violation committed by a transporter's client.

B. Strengthen Permit Conditions and Enforcement Authority

- Outline clear consequences for operators who abandon clients, obscure aircraft numbers, exceed permit conditions, or who are repeatedly associated with wanton waste or other illegal activities.
- Ensure the ability for Federal managers to suspend, revoke, or deny permits for repeated violations.
- Enhance collaboration between State and Federal law enforcement and VSPOs, where appropriate.
- Confiscate the aircraft of transporters who cover tail numbers and report to FAA.

C. Evaluate Transporter Liability for Search and Rescue (SAR) Search and Rescue costs should not fall on local communities or rural volunteer groups. We ask Federal agencies to explore whether transporters can be held financially liable for negligence leading to SAR deployment and whether SAR cost-recovery provisions can be tied to Federal permitting.

D. Improve Outreach and Education

We request joint agency coordination for:

- Hunter ethics education emphasizing meat-first harvest practices as required by law.
- Information for non-resident hunters on respecting Native allotments and private lands.
- Brief mandatory pre-hunt orientations for transported clients.
- Opportunities for donating meat and other useable animal parts

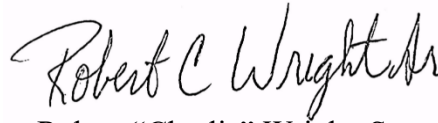
E. Establish a Taskforce to Address Trespassing

Bring together land managers and law enforcement to work with local communities, Doyon, and Tanana Chiefs Conference to find ways to more effectively address this on-going issue. Provide training on the required documentation and reporting needed to effectively convict trespass.

Additionally, the Council asks that U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management managers collaborate on a presentation for our fall 2026 Council meeting to provide an overview and comparison of how guide and air taxi operations are permitted and monitored across the Federal lands in our region. We would like this to include a summary of the number of guides and transporters permitted per area, numbers of guided and transported hunters annually, and the number of animals harvested by guided and transported hunters annually. Please also coordinate with law enforcement to identify any existing limitations or authorities relevant to the Council's recommendations above. We also plan to contact the Big Game Commercial Services Board to learn more about how they regulate guides and transporters on State lands.

We look forward to your response and to working together to protect the subsistence way of life while ensuring safe and lawful use of Federal lands. If you have any questions or would like to follow up, please contact me through our Subsistence Council Coordinator Brooke McDavid at (907) 891-9181 or brooke_mcdavid@ios.doi.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert C. Wright, Sr." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "R" and "W".

Robert "Charlie" Wright, Sr.
Chair

cc: Federal Subsistence Board
Interagency Staff Committee
Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
Karlin Itchoak, USFWS Assistant Regional Director for National Wildlife Refuges
Kent Slaughter, BLM Acting Fairbanks District Manager
Office of Subsistence Management
Administrative Record