

**PROPOSAL 281**

**5 AAC 75.022. Freshwater sport fishing.**

Prohibit fishing in fresh water with live earthworms in the genus *Lumbricus*, as follows:

5 AAC 75.022. Freshwater sport fishing.

(a) Unless otherwise provided in 5 AAC 47 – 5 AAC 75, a person may not fish in fresh water with

- 1) fixed or weighted hooks and lures, except those of standard manufacture;
- 2) multiple hooks with gap between point and shank larger than one-half inch;
- 3) a spear;
- 4) an arrow;[.]
- 5) **live earthworms in the genus *Lumbricus*.**

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Nonnative European earthworms, particularly species in the genus *Lumbricus* (for example, Nightcrawlers ), have caused substantial damage to natural areas where they have been introduced in northern North America, causing loss of soil surface layers, reductions in native plant and animal species, and increases in nonnative weeds (see <http://greatlakeswormwatch.org/forest/index.html>). This same pattern is already taking place in some places in Southcentral Alaska where *Lumbricus* earthworms have been introduced.

Other northern states have recognized invasive earthworms as a serious problem and enacted laws to restrict their spread. In Minnesota it is illegal to release nonnative species including exotic earthworms under Minnesota Statutes 84D.06 (see Minnesota DNR's information on this topic at <https://www.dnr.state.rn.us/invasives/terrestrialanimals/earthworms/index.html>). Under Wisconsin's invasive species rule (Wis. Adm. Code ch. NR 40), exotic earthworms of the genus *Amyntas* are classified as restricted species, making it illegal to transport, transfer, or introduce these worms in Wisconsin (See Wisconsin DNR's fact sheet on *Amyntas* earthworms at <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Invasives/fact/jumpingWorm/index.html>). As with Minnesota and Wisconsin, Alaska is vulnerable to invasion by nonnative earthworms, but in Alaska these worms have not yet been spread to most of the state.

One of the main ways that *Lumbricus* earthworms are moved to previously *Lumbricus*-free areas in Alaska is through their use as live bait and dumping of unused bait. These worms do not disperse much on their own. If they are not moved by people then it will take them hundreds to thousands of years, if ever, to spread to areas of Alaska currently free of these worms. If this proposed change is not adopted, then *Lumbricus* worms will continue to be brought to new areas in Alaska, where they will substantially alter natural systems.

Alternative species of earthworms are readily available that could be used as fishing bait in Alaska with far less risk to Alaska's natural systems. Examples of safer alternatives include *Bimastos rubidus*, an earthworm species native to Alaska, and the popular vermicomposting worms *Eisenia andrei* and *Eisenia fetida*, which are not cold tolerant.

**PROPOSED BY:** Matt Bowser

(Formerly ACR 11)

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