

To: Board of Game, Fax 907-465-6094

Re: Comment in opposition to Proposal 91

From: Karen Olson, 3303 West Sunrise Road, Wasilla, AK Contact # 907-841-5955
(Owner of so-called "feral cattle on Bald Mountain" which are the subject of Proposal 91,
to be considered at the March 2016 meeting.)

Date: March 4, 2016; sent via fax March 18, 2016

First, the proposal lumps cows in with true game animals. The stated rationale for the existing rules on containing musk oxen, bison and reindeer was that all three occur in the wild in Alaska, and cannot be distinguished should game farm animals accidentally mingle with wild animals considered to be state property. Elk was added to this section because of the nearness to certain species that occur naturally in parts of Alaska.

Cows are not native to Alaska, and cannot breed with game species. They are also clearly distinguishable from any state-owned species.

Therefore, they do not pose the same dilemma that the other named animals could, and there is no justification for their inclusion.

Second, the wording of the proposal clearly targets only one person's animals, although verbiage is proposed that once my cattle are disposed, the same rule should go forward across the state. Surely this is not the purpose of proposals going before a statewide board.

Third, this proposal perfectly highlights the anti-agriculture bent that permeates much of official Alaska, and which ensures the state will remain an incomplete and unbalanced economy until the last driller and gouger is gone.

Therefore, I would like to make some additional points.

There are no true feral cattle in Alaska, although some have been repeatedly abandoned without human care by successive owners in the Aleutians. There are certainly none on Bald Mountain off the end of Schrock Road.

But what Alaska does have in abundance are feral hunters.

Feral hunters who neither know nor care where private property intersects with state land. Feral hunters who truly believe that Alaska and its people should provide them with free food, merely for the price of some fun harvesting equipment.

Feral hunters who think that it's fine for Alaska's publicly owned animals to wander and pillage privately planted fields and agricultural products without financial consequence,

as they have for decades wherever agriculture struggles in this least farm friendly of all states.

Feral hunters who believe that cattle farm-fed through every winter for the last 60 years on domestic hay should be theirs free of charge.

Here are the facts in my case, and since my specific case prompted the proposal I believe you should listen:

A federal grazing lease on two sections of vacant land above my land at 3303 West Sunrise Road began in 1955. A small dairy herd used it until 1964. After that, a herd of hardy Scottish Highland beef cattle flourished there in summer, and came to the homestead headquarters in the winter for feed, water and shelter.

Eventually, the state claimed the land from the federal government, and worked out a lease with my family.

Then, the Mental Health Trust took over the land, making it effectively private, and not part of the state's regular property. The Trust had no grazing lease protocols. I was finally granted a grazing permit, revocable in 90 days, at a per-animal-unit rate that was among the most expensive in the country.

It was about this time, 20 years ago, that I noticed a steady diminishing in the returning numbers of cattle each winter. Mental Health gave me signage informing hunters and hikers going to Bald Mountain that any use of its land required permission from Mental Health. Most of the signs were taken down by the hunting population. After I managed to post the signs high in the trees, they lasted longer but became targets and eventually shredded away. Hunters used the land, ruining the trails my father built, without permission, and they trespass to this day.

I no longer deal with Mental Health, due to terminal discouragement. They have no mechanism to help a farmer who holds a lawful permit nor to safeguard their own property from trespass and harm. After thousands of dollars paid and yearly poaching accelerating, I have given up on the authorities.

Feral, heedless hunters have cut wires, bushwhacked ways around countless barriers, and have poached an unknowable number of my cattle on land I was leasing. Over the years, I estimate at least fifty poached.

Worse, these same hunters have shot and killed at least three cattle on my own land. One cow was killed several years ago within a few feet of an equipment fuel tank, a power pole, and a shop. Then, the shooter apparently awakening out of the adrenaline mist, the dead cow was left without follow-up for me to find in the morning. This would be considered wanton waste if she were a moose. As it was, it was a theft on private property, and wanton waste as well. However, the Troopers refused to investigate.

These perpetrators do not need the Board of Game to give them the imprimatur of legality for doing what they have done illegally, with tacit approval from Fish and Game, for decades.

An area such as Bald Mountain is in a special situation. To get to state land off Schrock Road, one has to follow a section line trail, ironically also built by my father. There is private homesteaded land, Knik Tribal land, and private Mental Health Trust land, on either side for miles, up to the timberline. Hunters should not even be leaving the section line easement trail. The state itself has designated the area above the timberline as critical moose habitat, and it joins a designated moose management area to the east.

It seems to me that hunters shouldn't even be allowed in the area until and unless they are made aware of the legal character of the land and the domestic livestock.

They should not be given to think that private livestock outside a fence is automatically theirs. There is no legal precedent for this belief. Further, knowing this class of hunters as I do, they will simply use their wirecutters and make a cow fenceless, and defenseless, in the snap of a wrist.

Here is the final irony: The so-called feral cattle on Bald Mountain are down to just a few head eating purchased hay in my yard right now.

After an investment of decades and a cumulative total of dollars in the middle six figures, the feral poachers and their apologists have won. No need to pass a stupid, vicious law taking away my property; it's already happened.

The best thing I can suggest is the Gamers and the Farmers in Delta, in Pt. MacKenzie, and on the fringes of Palmer, Wasilla and Fairbanks, try to reach a fair accommodation. Gamers should acknowledge that it has been farmed feed, ravaged by moose and bison, that has seen the state's animals through many a tough winter. And yet there is no recompense.

If accommodation is impossible, farming on the frontier should be outlawed. That way, the Game exclusivists will be at least honest, and farmers no longer need waste their hopes and monies tripping over the rigging against them.