

Alaska Professional Hunters Association sues Department of Interior

On Feb. 10, the Alaska Professional Hunters Association, the Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation, and two rural Alaskans filed suit against the federal government seeking to overturn two Obama-era restrictions governing the management of National Wildlife Refuge and National Preserve lands within Alaska's borders.

The APHA and Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation believe the rules are an overreach of the federal government into the traditional state role of game management, and that this action in Alaska sets a dangerous precedent that puts hunting at risk on hundreds of millions of acres of public land nationwide.

The 96 million acres of National Wildlife Refuge and Park Service lands at stake in this lawsuit cover an area slightly larger than Montana, the fourth-largest state in the union.

"Game management belongs in the hands of boots-on-the-ground state biologists who understand the traditions, goals, game animals and ecosystems better than anyone" said Evan Heusinkveld, president and CEO of the Sportsmen's Alliance and Foundation.

"I say this without pretense; Alaska is different. We are a culturally diverse, resource rich State with vast potential if our people and resources stay healthy. These rules especially hurt rural Alaskans where hunting and fishing for food is not a historical footnote; it is a day to day reality", said Sam Rohrer, President of the APHA.

The USFWS and Park Service rules ban common hunting practices; arguing that wildlife management, where harvesting of predators is concerned, should automatically be considered predator control. APHA and the Sportsmen Alliance Foundation and two wildlife dependent Alaskans disagree.

"Alaska is world renowned for its management of fish and game. Biologists from around the world admire and respect our managers; even to the point of travelling to my home Island of Kodiak to learn about bear management principles. These rules are a misguided attempt to impose urban values on the most rural state in America" continued Rohrer.

Alaska has specific protections that have been set out in law. On three occasions Congress has directed that the state—not the federal government—has the primary authority to set hunting and fishing rules in Alaska: 1959 in the Alaska Statehood Act, 1980 in the Alaska National Interest Land Claims Act (ANILCA) and 1997 in Refuge Improvement Act (which also made hunting and fishing priority public uses on all refuge lands).

"Many of APHA's members guided before the huge conservation units described by ANILCA came into existence. As a lifelong Alaskan, born after 1980, I grew up with an awareness that there is a law called ANILCA where promises were made by congress to prioritize our way of life. USFWS and the Park Service are breaking promises made to Alaskans by Congress. This lawsuit is about sticking up for the little guy, it is about

holding bureaucrats accountable for illegally breaking Congresses promises”, said Rohrer.

Alaskans and sportsmen around the country have shown broad support for the position of the APHA and Sportsmen’s Alliance Foundation. The State of Alaska has filed suit to overturn the rule changes, as has Safari Club International. All of Alaska’s senators and representatives oppose the changes, as does the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), along with numerous other national organizations. AFWA, which is a partnership made up of state wildlife management professionals across the country, has stated that the rules compromise state authority to manage fish and wildlife.

“It is clear that the federal government has overstepped its authority in this issue, and we’re confident that our lawsuit, coupled with Congressional action and the formal review promised by Interior Secretary-nominee Representative Zinke, will ultimately restore proper and commonsense authority to game management in Alaska”, said Heusinkveld.

About the Alaska Professional Hunters Association: APHA has been a leading Alaskan organization since 1973, guarding the continual flow of regulator restrictions on hunting and public land access. APHA is continually at the forefront of advocating for management of our wildlife for balance and abundance. Stay connected to APHA on [Facebook](#).

About the Sportsmen’s Alliance: The Sportsmen’s Alliance protects and defends America’s wildlife conservation programs and the pursuits – hunting, fishing and trapping – that generate the money to pay for them. Sportsmen’s Alliance Foundation is responsible for public education, legal defense and research. Stay connected to Sportsmen’s Alliance on: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)