

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 26, 2012

The Honorable Daniel Akaka
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
838 Hart Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-0001

Dear Chairman Akaka,

Once again I request an oversight field hearing in Alaska on the topics of food security and subsistence rights of Alaska Native peoples. From your time at this month's Alaska Federation of Natives annual convention you know how deeply important subsistence and food security are to the first peoples of Alaska. Thank you again for joining us in Anchorage.

As you know, I made the oversight hearing request of the committee in February 2011 and am renewing it now. With Senator Murkowski and Congressman Young stating at this year's convention they also have concerns about subsistence management in Alaska and would support a field hearing, I believe the time is right to move forward.

The Senate Indian Affairs Committee has the resources, expertise and credibility to hold an oversight field hearing in the near future to address concerns about the current management of Alaska's fish and wildlife and the impact on subsistence rights. As you likely know, the State of Alaska and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) have upheld burdensome salmon conservation measures that have devastated thousands of subsistence fishermen from the Kuskokwim to the Yukon rivers. This summer more than 30 fishermen were cited by the Alaska State Troopers and arrested in their own villages for fishing for their elders and families. Our primary concern is the impact these conservation efforts have on Alaska Native communities that rely on subsistence hunting, fishing and gathering for their daily sustenance. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act granted land and money to the Alaska Native peoples, yet failed to address their hunting and fishing rights. The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) stated a rural preference in hunting and fishing rights and therefore provides the federal government a role in all of this.

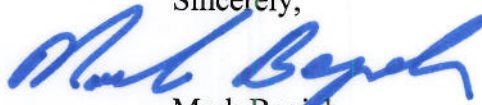
The result is a dual management system between the State of Alaska and the USF&WS for Alaska Native customary and traditional hunting and fishing practices. Both the federal and state boards manage the same wildlife populations under different regulations. The result is confusion and concern regarding the management of food security and regulations that are disrupting the subsistence way of life. Alaska Native people suffer under some of the highest prices for food and energy in the nation and access to subsistence hunting and fishing allows them some relief. The burden is on the federal government to ensure the USF&WS and the State of Alaska efficiently and effectively manage subsistence resources for the food security of Alaska Native peoples.

Letter to Chairman Akaka
October 26, 2012
Page 2

Chinook salmon is important not only for the survival of Alaska Natives, but also for the subsistence economy and way of life. Understanding the causes and effects of the declining salmon is crucial to the state and the country as a whole. With more than 60 percent of all United States fisheries located in Alaska there is much at stake for those who rely on a healthy, reliable, and robust returns. Which is why I strongly urge you to authorize the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs to hold a field hearing in Alaska focused on food security and subsistence rights.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Mark Begich
United States Senator