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Media Contacts:

Nicole Schmitt, Director, Alaska Wildlife Alliance, nicole@akwildlife.org, 907-917-9453

Gwen Dobbs, Director of Media Relations, Defenders of Wildlife, gdobbs@defenders.org, 202-772-0269

David Raskin, President, Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, davidc.raskin@me.com, 425-209-9009

Fran Mauer, Alaska Chapter Representative, Wilderness Watch, fmauer@mosquionet.com, 907-455-6829

Lorraine Temple, Resident of Cooper Landing, lthuskys@gmail.com, 907-299-2855

Alaska Wildlife Alliance – Alaskans FOR Wildlife – Defenders of Wildlife – Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges – National Wildlife Refuge Association – Wilderness Watch

Controversial Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Baiting and Trapping Rule gets new hearing, extended public comment

ANCHORAGE, AK — After receiving substantial public opposition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) announced that it will hold an additional public hearing and public comment period on controversial proposed brown bear baiting and trapping regulations in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

The comment period is reopened from October 9 to November 9 and a virtual public hearing on the proposed rule is scheduled for Monday, October 26 at 4:00 p.m. Alaska Standard Time.

In June, FWS proposed a new rule for the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge that would allow brown bears to be killed over bait within the refuge for the first time, overturning decades of consistent prohibition of this practice. The proposed rule would also open new areas of the refuge to trapping along trailheads, campgrounds and roads while removing accountability measures such as trap-check requirements, trap identification or bycatch mitigation practices.

The above groups have commented extensively on the proposal and issued the following statement:

“We urge the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to listen to all the public input and uphold its long-standing protections for brown bears and other wildlife on the Kenai Refuge. The FWS should also keep the refuge’s trails and campgrounds safe for the 1 million annual hikers, campers and other refuge visitors.”

Over 34,000 public comments were submitted in response to the proposed rule in addition to tens of thousands of petitions submitted in opposition to the proposal. In their comments, wildlife conservation organizations and the public called for FWS to uphold its obligation to hold a hearing in the affected vicinity prior to making a final determination.

Due to public engagement and concern over the proposed rule, FWS is holding a virtual hearing and providing more time for the public to comment.

The public can comment on the proposed rule. The proposed rule and associated documents can be found at <http://www.regulations.gov> under Docket No. FWS-R7-NWRS-2017-0058. To listen to the meeting by telephone, listen and view through the Internet, or provide oral public comments by phone or webinar [you must register here](#).