

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 26, 2012

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Vice Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment  
and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment  
and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Inouye, Vice Chairman Cochran, Chairman Reed and Ranking Member Murkowski:

This is the time of year Alaska Native people along the Yukon and Kuskokwim (Y-K) rivers are usually harvesting and preserving Chinook (king) salmon for their winter food supply. However, the majority of these fisheries are closed by federal and state managers because of poor returns, and biologists are predicting 2012 will be one of the worst Chinook runs on record. To make matters worse, the President's 2013 budget proposal for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Wildlife Refuge System under Wildlife and Habitat Management proposes a \$2.89 million reduction to the Alaska Subsistence Management Program.

With the summer salmon run on the Y-K margins so weak and the need for counting fish and managing the resource so important, the Service cannot sustain a cut of this type. The \$2.89 million decrease will result in the loss of 11 staff positions, a 25 percent decrease in fish population and harvest assessments, and an elimination of status and trends information collection for more than 16 native fish populations. How can we tell people asking difficult and important questions about what happened to this year's salmon that we are cutting the budget for counting, analysis and research?

The Service serves as the lead agency in administering the Federal Subsistence Management Program for the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture. This program

coordinates the regulation and management among federal managers of subsistence harvests by rural Alaskans on 237 million acres of land. It also provides information and analysis for the regulatory function of the Federal Subsistence Board and support for the advisory functions of the 10 regional councils.

Subsistence hunting and fishing allows Alaska Natives to get relief from the high costs of fuel, food and transportation in these areas, and the burden is on the federal government to manage the subsistence resources to ensure the food security of the villages along the Kuskokwim and Yukon rivers. People along the rivers are resorting to extreme measures and harvesting fish, despite closures by the state and federal authorities; because they are afraid they will not have enough food to last through the winter.

Better management of this fishery requires new investment in key management tools, including research, data collection, fish weir maintenance, biologists, aerial surveys, genetic sampling for stock compositions and bolstering the Bethel test fishery. I understand the Department of the Interior budget is stretched very thin this year, but due to the dire circumstances subsistence users face right now, I urge the Committee to sustain at least Fiscal Year 2012 funding levels.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my staff. I look forward to your timely response to this very urgent matter for Alaskans.

Sincerely,



Mark Begich  
United States Senator