

FINDINGS OF THE BOARD OF GAME
The Establishment of the Nenana Controlled Use Area
96-100 -BOG

The Board of Game (BOG) heard public testimony, staff reports, Advisory Committee reports and discussed the issue of airboat use for moose hunting in GMU 20 at its meetings of January and March 1996. Based upon these reports, extensive oral and written public testimony and after due consideration the BOG finds that:

1. Airboat use has become increasingly controversial in the Fairbanks area. The BOG heard numerous complaints from subsistence and personal use hunters regarding the effect of airboats on local hydrologic regimes, waterfowl use, beaver dams, and other habitat concerns (especially the formation of trails), interference with traditional still hunting and calling methods of hunting moose, ethics of fair chase and concerns about public safety.
2. Airboat use began in the Tanana Flats in the early 1960s but due to their construction use was limited to relatively deeper waterways. Airboat use did not become common until the mid-1970s to early 1980s. Through time airboat construction has improved to the point that they can access areas of very shallow water and other areas not readily accessible by most boats. Initially airboat use was heaviest on military lands in the Tanana Flats. In 1989, the 6th Light Infantry Division requested the Army Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory (CRREL) to conduct a one-summer long evaluation of the environmental impacts of airboats on military lands. The results, published in January 1990, did not reach firm conclusions on many aspects of the environmental impacts of airboats (see attached).
3. Since the completion of the CRREL report, airboat use in the Tanana Flats has expanded both in absolute numbers and in the areas which are being accessed. The military has once again commissioned CRREL for further research regarding the expansion of airboat trails, recovery of vegetation, changes in water levels and effects on waterfowl attributable to airboat use.
4. Airboat use increases during moose hunting season. Much written and oral testimony was received indicating an incompatibility of airboat use which produces noise levels of 88 - 135 db and still hunting or calling methods of hunting in the same area due to disturbance of moose and the inability of hunters to hear and be heard calling.
5. Residents in the Nenana Controlled Use Area (NCUA), through the Nenana Advisory Committee, proposed the NCUA as a way to ensure that subsistence needs for moose were met. They testified that the customary and traditional method used by subsistence hunters involved still hunting and calling moose. No contrary evidence of other important subsistence methods has been presented.

6. The BOG has a POLICY FOR OFF-ROAD VEHICLE USE FOR HUNTING AND TRANSPORTING GAME (5AAC 092.0004) which states "(a) . . . If the Board of Game, through its public process, finds that off-road vehicle use attributed to hunting activities in a specific area has resulted or is likely to result in one or more of the following conditions, it will, in its discretion, take action to avoid or minimize the conditions: . . . (4) chronic conflicts with other user groups leading to a decline in the quality of the outdoor experience. . . . (c) In this section, 'off-road vehicle' includes . . . airboats operated outside of a navigable waterway."

7. The purpose of the NCUA is to mitigate chronic conflicts between groups of hunters and to minimize possible habitat impacts. The restriction of airboats is intended to limit noise disturbance to moose hunters including subsistence hunters who use still hunting and moose calling methods of hunting while still allowing reasonable access to the area for moose hunting by all. An area of comparable habitat, size and accessibility remains available to airboat hunters in adjacent areas of GMU 20A and GMU 20C. This adjacent area has traditionally been less important for subsistence hunters and more frequently used by airboat hunters than has the NCUA.

8. Little waterfowl hunting occurs in the NCUA thus there should be few enforcement conflicts during moose hunting season.

9. The BOG adopted the NCUA (5AAC 92.540) at the Spring 1996 BOG meeting. The BOG finds that this regulation, combined with the moose hunting seasons for GMU 20A and GMU 20C provides reasonable opportunity to satisfy subsistence uses of this moose population while continuing to maximize opportunity for moose hunting by all Alaskans. The moose seasons for the area are:

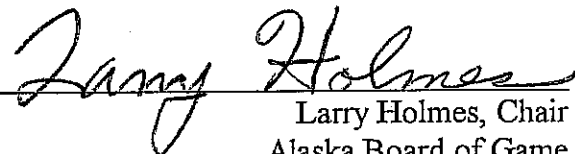
residents and non-residents 1 bull Sept. 1 - Sept. 25

10. The testimony presented indicated that airboats often cost between \$20,000 and \$30,000, new, and that some people may purchase airboats primarily for moose hunting. Thus it may be that some people will be unable to use what most would consider to be a sizable investment exactly as originally planned. Nevertheless, the BOG finds that resolution of the user conflict and the habitat and subsistence concerns identified above, warrant the restriction and further note that these costs to private persons should be largely mitigated by the fact that large areas near Fairbanks remain open to airboat use for moose hunting.

Based upon the best available information presented to it, the BOG believes that regulations now established for moose hunting in this area will resolve a contentious user conflict and provide reasonable opportunity for all moose hunters in the Tanana Flats area.

Date: April 18, 1996
Juneau, Alaska

Vote: $\frac{6-0}{1 \text{ absent}}$


Larry Holmes, Chair
Alaska Board of Game

THE USE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF
AIRBOATS ON THE TANANA FLATS
FORT WAINWRIGHT, ALASKA

JANUARY 1990

FINAL REPORT TO

U.S. ARMY 6TH INFANTRY DIV (LIGHT)
DEPT OF ENGINEERING AND HOUSING
FT. RICHARDSON, AK.

Charles H. Racine, Biologist and Project Leader
Geologic Branch
CRREL
Hanover, NH

Richard Bishop, Wildlife Biologist
Ak. Dept. Fish and Game (Retired)
Fairbanks, AK

Charles Collins, Physical Scientist
CRREL
Ft. Wainwright, Ak.

Peggy Kuropat, Wildlife Ecologist
Inst. of Arctic Biology
University of Alaska
Fairbanks, AK

James Walters, Geologist
Dept. of Earth Sciences
Univ. of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, IA

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. An airboat management plan should be developed for the Tanana Flats portion of Ft. Wainwright to include consideration of the nesting behavior of trumpeter swans. Methods to achieve temporal and/or spatial separation of airboat and swan use of the area should be considered. If the trumpeter swan population continues to increase in Interior Alaska, additional nesting space may be desirable.
2. Using color aerial photos (1:24,000 scale) obtained on 16 Sept 1990, develop a detailed map and analysis of airboat trails to serve as a baseline for future monitoring of trail expansion.
3. Determine the spring rates of recovery or regrowth of the marsh vegetation following single or multiple passes on an airboat in experimental test lanes and on actual trails.
4. Using remote sensing techniques, determine the vegetation and wetland habitat types being used by trumpeter swans for nesting within the flats.
5. To determine the success of swan spring nesting attempts in relation to airboat traffic, conduct nesting surveys in late May/early June in addition to the August census.
6. Conduct studies to understand the hydrology and flow of water through the Tanana Flats and in particular the floating marshes used by airboats. Information on rates of flow, water depths/levels and connections with the Tanana River is needed to predict the long-term impacts by airboats.
7. The Ft. Wainwright Natural Resource office should initiate annual aerial surveys of beaver dams and houses during the fall. Of particular interest is the role of beavers in maintaining water levels and flow within the airboat use area.
8. Determine the use levels of the study area by military aircraft as a potential source of disturbance to wildlife. The historic role of this activity in relation to wildlife concerns should be reviewed and its future role considered.
9. Develop a program to monitor and analyze weather data in relation to swan breeding success. Knowledge of spring breakup dates, snowmelt, and water levels would be particularly useful.