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To: Senate Resources Committee March 14, 2007
Inre: Senate Bill 67 – “An act establishing the Jay Hammond State Game Refuge; and providing for an effective date”

Dear Chairman Huggins, Vice-chair Stedman, and Senators Green, Stevens, McGuire, Wielechowski, and Wagoner,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed Jay Hammond State Game Refuge in the Bristol Bay region.

Alaska Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (ABHA) fully support SB 67 and ask that you work to ensure its passage. ABHA is a dedicated group of hunters and anglers committed to the long-term conservation and wise stewardship of our fish and wildlife and habitat that we cherish and depend upon, and to ensuring future generations have the same hunting and fishing opportunities available to us now.

As Alaskans, you know the value of our great state’s renewable and nonrenewable resources. You also know that we must balance the development of our nonrenewable resources with protections for the unique fish and wildlife resources we are privileged to steward.

The Bristol Bay region is world-renowned for the commercial and sport fisheries it supports, the pristine nature of its watersheds, the great subsistence opportunities available to those who live in the region, and the quality hunting and fishing experiences sought by large numbers of residents and nonresidents alike. It is imperative that you, as representatives of the people of the State of Alaska, and as hunters and anglers yourselves, ensure that the Bristol Bay region is carefully managed and developed in order to protect the vital natural systems that so many of us depend upon.

The Bristol Bay region deserves and requires stringent habitat protection standards. The levels set for water and air quality, vegetation and habitat protection, the long-term safety of industrial structures, among many other

concerns, must reflect the remarkable quality and nature of the land and waters we are putting at risk. Unlike other areas of the state, this region is distinguished by its high productivity of salmon, including the largest red salmon run in the world. This fact makes water quality protection of preeminent importance. Another unique attribute of this area is its geologic instability, making it prone to unpredictable and potentially large seismic events. These two realities are a red flag, and a call to give special consideration to this particular region.

Without question, the greatest threat to the renewable resources of Bristol Bay is large-scale hard rock mining. There are numerous examples of streams in British Columbia that have been impaired or lost entire runs of salmon due to slow, prolonged acid leaching common to large mines that generate huge amounts of waste. The thorniest aspect of these mines is the fact that the waste tailings and pits continue to act as hazards long after the mine is abandoned. The risks last centuries, and it is the State of Alaska that will be responsible for monitoring and attempting to restore any damaged watersheds as long as the risk remains.

There is no debate about these risks. The only debate is about whether or not we now have sufficient safeguards in place to adequately protect the Bristol Bay region from these risks.

The Jay Hammond State Game Refuge bill adds safeguards in a positive way by raising the bar on habitat protections to acceptable—but not insurmountable—heights. It should be noted that Refuge status would not preclude hard rock mining in the region; rather it would force industry to develop areas in ways that are compatible with Refuge protections.

We must all insist on these protections. Let's hand our children and grandchildren something that will become ever more valuable in the future: productive, pristine, vital and functioning natural systems, developed carefully and wisely, and continued unparalleled hunting and fishing opportunities.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 67, and for your service to the people of the State of Alaska.

Sincerely,

Dave Lyon

Co-chair Alaska Backcountry Hunters and Anglers