Memorandum of Agreement would provide for stronger tribal role in subsistence wildlife management in Southcentral Alaska

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ANCHORAGE – U.S. Department of the Interior Deputy Secretary Michael L. Connor today signed an agreement with officials from the Ahtna Intertribal Resources Commission (AITRC) which coordinates natural resource management issues for the eight federally recognized tribes in the Ahtna region to create a cooperative wildlife management demonstration project on federal and Ahtna Corporation lands in Southcentral Alaska.

The Memorandum of Agreement with the Commission will foster a greater role for the Ahtna people in managing subsistence moose and caribou hunting for tribal members under the Federal Subsistence Management Program.

“As Alaska’s population has grown, the Ahtna people have borne the brunt of increasing hunting pressure on their traditional lands because these areas are fairly accessible to much of the Railbelt region, home to 70 percent of Alaska’s population,” said Deputy Secretary Connor. “This agreement is an effort to help preserve their traditional way of life, put food on the table and improve wildlife habitat and populations for everyone.”

Recognizing the importance of traditional ecological knowledge and cultural practices, the agreement commits Interior to begin a process under the Federal Subsistence Board to allow the Ahtna Commission to administer caribou and moose hunts for tribal members under the Federal Subsistence Management Program. The Federal Subsistence Board would establish broad parameters for the initiative, which also would sanction joint work on wildlife management and habitat issues across federal and Ahtna lands. The Ahtna Corporation’s traditional region encompasses more than 1.5 million acres from Cantwell to Chitina.

“The DOI and AITRC share mutual concern for conservation of healthy wildlife populations and their habitats, as well as ensuring sustainable and sufficient harvests for customary and traditional subsistence uses. The ability of our people to pass down traditional knowledge and customary practices from generation to generation has allowed us to thrive for thousands of years. We are very thankful for the work of Secretary Jewell and Deputy Secretary Connor and their staff to make sure our traditional ecological knowledge and customary and traditional management practices are heard and represented,” said AITRC Board Chair Christopher Gene.

Rural Alaskans in the Ahtna region who are not tribal members will continue to hunt on federal lands under the Federal Subsistence Management Program as before and will not be affected by the agreement. Federal lands in the Ahtna region include portions of Denali National Park and Preserve,

Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve, Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge, and scatted Bureau of Land Management lands around the Richardson and Denali Highways.

The Ahtna Cooperative Management Demonstration Project is the first cooperative agreement established nationwide under Department of the Interior's Secretarial Order No. 3342, which Interior Secretary Sally Jewell announced last month at the annual Alaska Federation of Natives conference. The Secretarial Order encourages federal land managers to involve Native Americans in the management of fish and wildlife resources on federal lands that are part of their traditional lands.

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