

Refuge Hears Opposition to Cattle Eradication Proposal

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Austin Roof/KSDP

On January 15, 2014, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service held an open house in Sand Point as part of a public scoping process to address "unauthorized" wild cattle herds on two refuge islands.

Speaking with KSDP before the meeting, Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge Manager Steve Delehanty said they are visiting Sand Point.

Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Steve Ebbert said public concerns he has heard are about the impact of wild cattle on the islands' environment, salmon streams and even archaeological sites.

Wosnesenski Island is about 35 air miles from Sand Point and has a long history with local residents. David Osterback, owner of the Wosnesenski herd & President of the Qagan Tayagungin Tribe, talked about his family settling on the island in the late 1800's and his grandfather bringing the cattle there in the 1930's.

This is not the first time the Fish & Wildlife Service has dealt with wild cattle in the East Aleutians. In 1985 the Fish & Wildlife Service removed all cattle from Simeonof, Chernabura & Caton islands. Mr. Ebbert recounted the end of the herd on Simeonof.

Residents at the open house expressed their desire to see the herds continue to be locally managed. The ten cattle moved from Simeonof to Unga Island are now about 100 head and managed by the Unga Corporation. The bison herd of about 120 head on Popof Island are managed by the Shumagin Corporation.

QTT Executive Director Tiffany Jackson cited these examples.

This scoping process is the start of a journey to develop either environmental assessments or environmental impact statements that will guide the refuge in resolving the cattle issue.

The Fish & Wildlife Service held open houses in Homer and Kodiak as well. Public comments on the scoping may be submitted to the Fish & Wildlife Service until January 31st, 2014.

(KSDP's Virgil Porter also contributed to this report.)