

Refuge Allows More Time to Comment on 'Invasive' Cattle

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Lauren Rosenthal/KUCB

Southwest Alaska residents will have a few extra weeks to weigh in on invasive cattle near Kodiak and Sand Point.

The Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge was supposed to stop taking suggestions on how to handle wild cow herds on Wosnesenski and Chirikof islands last week.

Refuge manager Steve Delehanty says they've already gotten about 100 comments. But they decided to keep the door open for a few reasons:

"Partly, it just gives people more time to put their thoughts together and give us their ideas. But partly, it is procedural. We have to publish a notice in an official government publication called the Federal Register.

Legally, the refuge has to take comments for a full 30 days after the notice goes up. So Delehanty says they'll be accepting emails, faxes, letters, and phone calls from residents through February 20.

The refuge started this process because they're worried about how the cattle are affecting ecosystems. Wosnesenski and Chirikof islands are uninhabited. But scientists have found eroded salmon streams and trampled archaeological sites there. And they've traced that damage back to the cows.

Both islands are publicly owned. In the last few months, the refuge has hosted meetings in Sand Point, Homer and Kodiak to gauge public opinion.

Delehanty says there wasn't a lot of consensus -- some people think the herds are pesky, while others have come to rely on them.

"In Sand Point, a lot of the discussion focused around Wosnesenski and a lot of passionate expression of value for the animals just as a meat resource -- as something that people in the community use by harvesting a beef or two, occasionally.

The public comments will be used to write up an environmental report and a proposed plan of action for each island.