

Senate Resources Committee
Sen. Cathy Giessel, Chair
Testimony on CSHB 161
From: Mike Tinker, AWCA (as requested)
March 24, 2014

Sen. Giessel and Committee members, my testimony last Friday was from an outline only. I have re-created it as best I can remember for your use.

My name is Mike Tinker and I'm representing the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Association (AWCA). The organization began over 45 years ago and is a group of Alaskans, mostly in Fairbanks, with affiliations in other parts of the state. We work on resource issues, especially fish and game. This group has met weekly, year around, for over 40 years. We are businessmen, former legislators, retired managers from both the private and public sector and others interested resource and resource use issues.

To stop the divisive battle over "who gets the last moose", the AWCA did the footwork, research and original draft of the Intensive Management Law for wildlife management. Helping Alaskans get food from our wildlife resources was the goal. The result behind the concept of managing for more game on good habitat rather than hand wringing over small populations, is evident today in the high harvest rate. We brought you the clarification on the use of Alaska's referendum process prohibiting resource allocation by that method. Lastly, we've been on the spear point in the battle with federal agencies on regulatory and enforcement "overreach" for years. Working with Senator Murkowski and Congressman Young we brought out the first federal craziness against individuals both here and across the country.

We fight some of the battles you in government can't. We've created websites to fight the extreme positions of animal rights groups, anti-resource users and others who choose not to understand what's important in our special Alaskan lifestyle.

The department needs more money for management activities. That is the case on both the fish and wildlife sides of the program. We've always supported their activities and budgets with some reservations on the quality of the statutory annual reports and being able to follow where the funds were spent. These problems have not surfaced in recent years because the leadership, especially on the wildlife side, has put in considerable effort to comply. There are

more federal firearms and recreational tax dollars (from the Pittman-Robertson legislation) available to the department. They need to find matching funds to take advantage. In CSHB 161 the use(s) of the “new” income are sort of earmarked for education. Outdoor education is a good thing. However, some educational programs do not qualify for federal matching funds.

The gentleman who spoke for the Kenai Safari Club International was justifiably proud that they had raised “nearly a million dollars” for educational programs. Had they donated that money through the Fish and Game Fund, the department may have had \$4 million for their programs. It’s all about priorities and protecting the ability to use money where it’s needed most.

We hope you’ll join us in helping the department find additional funding, but we caution that this legislation could do that in only a small way. Doesn’t make it bad, just that we cannot sit back and think we’ve solved the funding problems.

I was one of the first instructors who signed on for the Becoming an Outdoor Woman workshops. It’s a great program. It has been very effective in introducing women who do not have much outdoor experience to the out back and giving them the basic skills to hunt, fish, shoot, drive boats, and other outdoor activities.

When we look at draft legislation, we are looking to see if the language will get us to the desired product. That is, the effects of the change(s) should lead to the desired outcome. CSHB 161 has some gray area in this regard. The assumptions of the sponsors are not well identified and the new “formula” created to help with (especially) educational funding for the various fish and game public programs has not been tested to give us an idea of the result. In its original form the bill had several nice sounding references to concepts like the North American Wildlife Model which, fortunately, have been removed. Alaska’s wildlife management process does not need to emulate any other. In many ways we are the world leader in understanding management and especially from the perspective of utilizing those resources. The legislature re-emphasized the priority for using wild game for food only a couple of years ago.

The language has been changed to include non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) in a manner that allows the department to select. In original form it was not clear how the purpose of an NG organization qualified them for participation. Also, the need to raise the percentage of the “sale” of the permit(s) is assumed but not explained. I.e. The example of the dall sheep permit(s) “sold” by the Wild Sheep Foundation has brought in high dollar value (perhaps nearly a million dollars in aggregate over the years) but neither the Alaska Chapter of WSF nor the national organization has ever asked for more money. Why then the need to raise the kick back to 30%.

We’d like to see a bit more detail in both the “cost” of this program and an example of what it’s expected to produce. Are we talking about new income in the thousands, tens of thousands,

hundreds of thousands, etc.? The “cost” to manage agreements and conditions with multiple NGOs is something-not zero. This bill needs an honest fiscal note. We don’t expect the management cost to be high, but it should be estimated. Supporters assume that additional funds would pour in. Our experience watching the sale of state permits at the national organizational level, such as at WSF, shows that a permit that can produce “the biggest trophy” brings the high dollar value. Additional permits for the same species are usually sold at much lower values. Adding additional permits through CSHB 161 would not likely bring in much revenue, especially for species such as black bear, goat, elk, wolf etc. Estimating a most likely scenario for given year’s permits could give the legislature and the department a glimpse of what they might get for new money.

CSHB 161 has improved with the continuing discussions between the sponsors and those concerned about the issues within. It would also benefit from an open hearing in addition to the “invitation only” discussion last week. We recommend that the estimate of what we stand to gain be completed before this legislation is passed into law.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written input. Please have anyone with questions contact me at 907-322-2158.