

March 23, 2014

Senator Cathy Giessel, Chair  
Senate Resources Committee  
120 4<sup>th</sup> St. Rm 427  
Juneau, AK 99801



Dear Senator Giessel:

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 161, an act related to the auction or raffle of Governor's Permits. Upon listening to the testimony given on this bill, along with comments made online and in other sources, it seemed prudent to provide some factual content in response for the Resource Committee's consideration.

One complaint against this legislation is that it narrows the dispensation of the associated permits to the benefit of one organization. Nothing could be further from the truth. Article II, Section 19 of the Alaska Constitution prohibits such legislation and if that were the case, this bill would have never been introduced as the legal experts that draft bills for legislators would have never allowed such language. The provisions in the bill clearly spell out the conditions under which a permit may be applied for and allocated. Any organization that meets those conditions is welcome to apply.

Another complaint involves the addition of a sheep tag to section one of the bill. Although that is true, it amounts to only .2% of the available sheep tags in the general draw pool. Furthermore, research of the state's license sales reveals that the allocation of sheep tags to non-residents has fallen 23.6% over past 10 years. Quite likely that means more permits are now available to resident hunters.

The sheep tag was added as the Etolin Island elk tags, currently in statute, solely benefit the non-profit. Also the bison tag, currently in statute, benefits only law enforcement. So, although all these permits are the property of the Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), they derived no benefits. The ADF&G and those hunter/conservationist groups supporting this bill did not want to change the status quo in existing statute, so the decision was made to add the sheep tag with idea that the money raised would benefit ADF&G.

There is also the concern related to the one sheep tag raised by Mr. Wayne Heimer regarding the State's match for Pittman-Robertson federal funds. Although the situation as described could occur depending on the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) entered into between the ADF&G and an eligible non-profit, there is also a good chance that the funds would end up in the Fish and Game fund and be available for the P-R match if the MOA was for a conservation project. In those cases where the funds went to an agreed upon education or wildlife protection project between the non-profit and the ADF&G, there may be less, or perhaps no dollars for a match depending upon the project. In those cases the Legislature would be making a policy call as to whether it is in the public's interest to lend support to education or wildlife protection programs.

It is our position, and likely the position of the Department of Public Safety Fish and Wildlife Protection Division that the fundraising from the bison permit to benefit law enforcement efforts to protect Alaska's valuable wildlife resources should continue as they have the past 15 years.

We also strongly support the provisions that allow for education projects, and we believe this is one of the factors that led the ADF&G to support this legislation. I'd like to explain why this component is important.

About 15 years ago, realizing that as numbers of hunters dwindled there would be less funding available to sustain the professional management of wildlife resources, state agencies along with many sportsmen's groups began discussing this problem. A meeting was held in Lansing, Michigan in October 1999 to discuss the problem and identify courses of action. Over the next several years, state agencies, hunter/conservationist groups and shooting sports groups met and discussed the issue. Hunter recruitment and retention became a national action item for the sporting community.

All of us in the hunting community from hunters to wildlife professionals knew that if the decline in the purchase of hunting licenses continued there would be less and less funding for wildlife management. Statistical data from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service quinquennial surveys showed an overall decline in the number of hunters over the proceeding decades. After many meetings and much discussion it was generally agreed that more and better educational efforts were needed.

Nationwide state agencies and sportsman's groups stepped up their efforts to provide education. Here in Alaska, that effort was led by the Outdoor Heritage Foundation (OHFA) which provides programs like Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) and Outdoor Youth Days in direct partnership with ADF&G. Since these efforts were started, the decline in license sales slowed, and over the last 5 years actually increased.

OHFA and ADF&G just recently conducted their Winter BOW program in Chickaloon and over 20 ladies bought their very first hunting license. The bottom line is that education works, and it is providing additional financial resources for the ADF&G. So, the real issue with HB 161 is a policy call, your policy call. Are we going to listen to the old guard and just fund conservation hoping that will somehow sustain age old traditions here in Alaska, or are we going to broaden our foundation and help support those education efforts that have proved to be effective in getting Alaskans, especially young Alaskans involved in those same traditions?

If there is anything I can do to assist you in the passage of this important bill, please do not hesitate to call on me.

Sincerely,



Eddie Grasser

SCI Vice President

Chair SCI Gov't Affairs Sub-Committee on State Affairs

cc: Senate Resources Committee Members  
Legislative Outdoor Heritage Caucus Senate Members