

History of Alaska's Fish and Game Board Process

The State of Alaska constitution is unique, in that it contains an article that exclusively addresses the management of natural resources within state lands and waters. Article VIII of the Alaska Constitution is the result of historic achievement in which the State of Alaska established the chief principle that all resources should be managed under a public trust doctrine for the citizens of Alaska. Under section two of Article VIII, the Alaska "Legislature shall provide for the utilization, development, and conservation of all natural resources belonging to the state, including land and waters, for the maximum benefit of the people." From the humble beginnings of statehood, the Alaskan people desired a transparent regulation process for natural resources management in the State of Alaska.

Under the Alaska Constitution, the Board of Fish and Game was founded in 1959 to provide for public discussion on the state's fish and wildlife management. The mission of the Fish and Game Board was for the conservation and development of the fisheries and game resources of the State. This was accomplished through the promulgation of regulations affecting utilization and development of Alaska's fish and game resources. Under the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the board conducts one public meeting annually. Board members are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the legislature to four-year terms. The appointed members shall be residents of the state and shall be appointed without regard to political affiliation or geographical location of residence. The Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game serves as an ex-officio secretary of the board and to cast tie breaking votes during deadlock. The boards possess regulatory powers as set forth by their respective statutes, but the boards do not have administrative, budgeting or fiscal powers, which were reserved to the Governor and Alaska State Legislature.

The Board of Fish and Game established a system of local Fish and Game Advisory Committees around the state to provide a local forum for the collection and expression of regional opinions on fish and game issues. The advisory committees provide the Board of Fish and Game with recommendations for regulatory changes and resource allocations while allowing a public platform for transparent discussions. The board reviews the proposals submitted by the advisory committees and can adopt or reject the proposal. The board must provide the advisory committees reason for the rejection of a proposal.

In 1975, the Alaska State Legislature split the Board of Fish and Game into two separate boards: the Board of Game and the Board of Fisheries to reduce the regulatory load while providing for more effective public meetings and discussions. The Board of Fisheries and the Board of Game currently consists of seven member appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Alaska Legislature to three-year terms.

Today, the Board of Game and the Board of Fisheries utilizes a three-year meeting cycle in which proposed regulations are considered on a five region-based schedule. The boards review technical information provided by Alaska Department of Fish and Game, comments from the general public, and testimony from resource user groups and the 84 local advisory committees. The Alaska Department of Law reviews adopted regulations from the boards. The Alaska Attorney General then submits the new regulations to the Lieutenant Governor who files the regulations which are implemented by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and managed according to state regulations.