

ALASKA LEGISLATURE

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Sponsor Statement

HB 53 – Pesticide application on state land and rights-of-way

HB 53 restores a public process to state pesticide and herbicide spraying programs and creates protective buffer zones around fish habitat and drinking water sources. The bill responds to regulatory changes made in March 2013 by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) that eliminated opportunities for public comment on pesticide spraying programs, weakened public notice provisions, and removed requirements that agencies identify water bodies that could be harmed by pesticide application.

Specifically, HB 53 would require state agencies to publicly release pesticide spraying plans and hold public comment periods prior to spraying pesticides on state land, highways, or rights-of-way. It would also require a finding of no harm before pesticides could be applied within 150 feet of fish habitat or 600 feet of a drinking water source. The bill provides an exemption from public comment requirements for emergency situations in which quick application of pesticides may be justified.

Subsistence users, guides, commercial fishermen, and all Alaskans expect the fish they catch, the wild game they hunt, and the berries they pick to be free from chemical contaminants. This demands the state take a more precautionary and publicly vetted approach to pesticide management than is provided for in current regulation.

HB 53 will protect the quality and safety of fish and game and restore the right of Alaskans to have a voice in the management of state resources.