

ALASKA

PROFESSIONAL HUNTER ASSOCIATION, INC.

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February 12, 2016

Representative Louise Stutes
State Capitol Room 416
Juneau AK, 99801

RE: HB254

Dear Rep. Stutes,

The Alaska Professional Hunters Association (APHA) would like to thank you for sponsoring HB254 and lend our strong support to re-authorizing the Big Game Commercial Services Board (BGCSB). APHA is Alaska's only organization advocating for Alaska's historic hunting guide industry. Founded in 1971, APHA has approximately 135 professional members, representing more than 40% of Alaska's guide businesses. As a professional organization we advocate for high ethical and professional standards within our industry. APHA recognizes the Alaska's big game resources we rely on are held in the public trust and our access to those resources is a privilege that comes with stewardship responsibilities. The BGCSB is the central public institution that keeps our profession vital and our relationship with the general public sustainable and healthy in an ever changing, complex world.

APHA recognizes that the BGCSB is facing significant challenges with its current deficit. This challenge is partly due to the previous sunset of the BGCSB several years ago, and partly due to the complexities and differences in our program versus other professional licensing boards. As an association we have worked as closely as possible with the Division, the Board, and our members to get clear communication and understanding of the scope of the challenges facing our program and our industry. The APHA understands that licensees must pay for the cost of licensure and our board functions, therefore we have supported the two most recent rounds of fee increases. During the last two years, as the division, legislature, board and legislative budget and audit have held hearings and meetings on our deficit we have closely monitored the various findings and proposed solutions. While the discussions have been enlightening and helped us understand how we got to where we currently are, one theme has come across loud and clear; it is up to the licensees to pay the bill and move on. APHA members and leadership accept their responsibilities while at the same time insisting that having our board is essential for our future.

Alaska's guide industry is a net positive to the State coffers and contributes essential new dollars to the Alaskan economy, especially in rural Alaska. Alaska's active registered hunting guides are overwhelmingly Alaska residents (89%, McDowell 2014). Close to 50% of the total \$78 million total economic activity is directed to rural areas in Alaska. (McDowell 2014). These numbers and this relationship between Alaska ownership and Alaska's game resources are essential to keep in mind when considering re-authorizing the BGCSB. Without high licensing standards and the vocational/apprentice path to professional licensure that the BGCSB administers and oversees, this healthy economic relationship could be lost. We urge the legislature to keep in mind that while our board is running a deficit the Division of Wildlife (ADF&G) is a huge beneficiary of hunting license

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and tag fees from our clients and that these revenue streams are matched by federal dollars 3 to 1. The BGCSB is running a deficit to the Division of Corporations and Professional Licensing but the industry that it serves helps provide close to 80% of the Division of Wildlife's budget. The direct and indirect benefits to the State, economy and general public far outweigh the deficit to the licensing program.

Big game is a cornerstone of Alaskan culture. Game is a source of subsistence and food security; while providing immeasurable enjoyment when viewed. Game is a major attraction for domestic and global travelers alike. Wildlife and Alaska are synonymous. Alaska's reputation and attractiveness as a global destination requires that we have world-class game management and responsible programs where commercial take of wildlife is allowed. Guiding hunters may be the oldest value added tour in Alaska but it is essential that the industry and profession continually update its standards to maintain its place in the future. Without the BGCSB it would be impossible for the industry to stay current and responsive to the general public and the industry.

Guiding hunters in Alaska's vast wilderness requires a diverse and impressive set of skills. Wilderness travel, first aid, meat handling, charging bears, raging river and flying are the associations that come to mind when one thinks about an "Alaskan hunting guide." APHA is working hard to maintain these positive associations and we need our BGCSB to continue this process. APHA is a seasoned organization that has advocated for Alaska's guide industry through many challenging and difficult times in Alaska's history. We respectfully offer our strong support for the Big Game Commercial Services Board as an institution that is essential for the future of our industry.

Sincerely,

Sam Rohrer
President, APHA