



unapologetically **FOR ALASKAN RESIDENTS**

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April 2, 2019

To: Senate Resources Committee

Re: Senate Bill 87, "An Act relating to the taking of big game by nonresidents; and providing for an effective date."

Dear Chairman Birch and members of the Senate Resources Committee,

Resident Hunters of Alaska strongly **supports** Senate Bill 87.

This legislation helps to ensure that when wildlife populations are diminished or there are conservation or other concerns that lead to restrictions or reductions in resident hunting opportunities, such as seasons or bag limits, that nonresident hunters bear the brunt of those restrictions or reductions.

That sounds like something that should have always been in place, but the legislature can't foresee the effects of every word in every statute passed long ago. We fully understand that the reason the legislature granted the Board of Game (Board) broad authority over all wildlife allocation decisions is because they are an experienced and knowledgeable body set up to better understand the complexities of hunting and wildlife management issues than is the legislature. But still, the legislature has the authority to oversee and make changes if and when it is deemed necessary. This is one of those times.

The existing statute AS 16.05.256 essentially tells the Board that whenever they need to restrict resident big game hunting opportunities, they "may" then put nonresident hunters on a draw permit system to limit the nonresident opportunity.

This doesn't require the Board to limit nonresident hunters after restricting resident hunting opportunity and over the years has led to decisions that we don't believe conform to our state constitution or the intent of the legislature. This is why we support the change from "may" to "shall" in the statute, to require the Board to place the burden of any restrictions or reductions in resident hunting opportunity, for any big game species, on nonresident hunters.

An example:

The Central Arctic Caribou herd is an identified Intensive Management (IM) prey population whose highest and best use is to provide food for Alaskans. This is the last remaining general season caribou hunt along the road system, off the haul road in Unit 26B. In 2016 the herd dramatically declined from ~50,000 animals to ~22,000 animals, falling below the IM population objective, and the Department of Fish & Game asked for reduced seasons and bag limits for all hunters. The board ended up severely reducing seasons and bag limits for both residents and nonresidents without having nonresident hunters bear the full brunt of those

restrictions, and now nonresident caribou hunters take the majority of the harvest in Unit 26B of the declining Central Arctic Caribou Herd.

We may hear from a Board of Game representative that this was a mistake; they didn't intend for this end result, and that they will "fix" it at the next meeting in cycle for this region. The legislature should not get involved, let them fix it. But here's the facts: The Board made their final decision with eyes wide open based on a Department of Fish & Game projection that this would lead to 43 percent of the Central Arctic Caribou herd harvest going to nonresident hunters. The Department was off on the low side by 12 points, as it led to nonresident hunters now taking 55% of the harvest. But the Board never should have even allowed for a 43 percent nonresident harvest after taking away so much opportunity for residents to put meat in their freezers. That is what this legislation addresses. And this is but one example among many of these kind of decisions being made by the Board.

On page 7 of what is known as the "Handy Dandy" – the ever-growing hunting regulation booklet – is a statement long thought by Alaskans to be how things worked. It reads: *"Nonresidents are allowed to hunt when there is enough game to allow everyone to participate. When there isn't enough game, nonresident hunters are restricted or eliminated first. If more restrictions are necessary, seasons and bag limits may be reduced or eliminated for some residents."*

The funny thing about that statement; it's nowhere in statute and it isn't how the Board of Game makes decisions. It's an unfulfilled promise by the state, right there in writing. Which again is the reason we need this legislation; to require the board to adhere to these common-sense provisions that say, hey, if and when you need to restrict resident hunters, when you reduce their opportunities for conservation or other concerns, you better make sure the brunt of any restrictions fall on the nonresident component.

In closing, this legislation is very narrow and does not in any way affect the Board's overall authority on allocation decisions. The Board will still be allowed to offer unlimited nonresident sheep hunting opportunity in areas of the interior and allow nonresident guided hunters to continue to take 60-80 percent of the sheep. The Board will still be allowed to allocate 40 percent of Kodiak brown bear tags to nonresident guided hunters. Moose draw permit hunts where nonresident hunters receive 50 percent of the allocation will still be on the books.

This is a small step to finally ensure the Board does the right and proper thing when seasons or bag limits for any wildlife population need to be reduced: Limit the nonresident component first to make nonresident hunters bear the brunt of lost opportunity to residents.

Sincerely,
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