

HB 321 – Invited Testimony
House Resources Committee
March 31, 2026

Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Commissioner Doug Vincent-Lang

The boundary corrections within this bill are similar to a 2018 Governor’s bill with new additions for land acquired since then. Correcting these errors and adding new land parcels for these special areas is supported by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

The bill changes the name of special areas from “state game refuges,” “state game sanctuaries,” and “critical habitat areas” to be more consistent and only uses the terms “wildlife refuge” or “wildlife sanctuary.” The bill combines the exiting purpose of state game refuges, sanctuaries, and critical habitat areas, including the protection and preservation of fish and wildlife populations and restricting any incompatible uses. However, ADF&G is concerned about how the statutorily defined purpose statements are morphed into the new designations. For example, will existing state game refuges now be treated as critical habitat areas?

The Committee Substitute clarifies the “Katmai area” closed to bear hunting referenced in the original version of the bill refers to “Kamishak Bay area.” While the bill closes areas that have long been closed, ADF&G believes that decisions regarding bear hunting most appropriately lie with the Alaska Board of Game.

The bill sponsor clarified that the provision related to regulating discharge of firearms provides ADF&G with permissive authority to close limited areas around access sites to firearms. The department is neutral on this but notes this authority could be helpful to limit target shooting near access sites to these special areas.

The bill would prohibit the use of personal watercraft in Kachemak Bay. The decision to allow the use of jet skis by ADF&G was upheld by the Alaska Supreme Court. The department is opposed to this provision.

Changes to terminology (i.e. state game refuge vs. wildlife refuge) will result in nominal costs (\$45,300) to update signs, including staff travel. Costs are outlined in the fiscal note attached to the bill.