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March 11, 2025

Alaska Legislature  
State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

Re: SCI-AK Support for Senate Bill 97 BIG GAME PERMIT PROGRAM

Honorable members of the Senate Resources Committee,

The Safari Club International Alaska Chapter offers support for Senate Bill 97 BIG GAME PERMIT PROGRAM which is a redraft of Senate Bill 253 DNR BIG GAME HUNTING PRGRM/PILOT PROJECT, that passed the 33rd Legislature last year.

Our prior comments on SB 253, contained in the committee packet under Combined Historical Documents, still stand. We applaud the Senate Resources Committee for taking steps to ensure that guided Alaska hunts provide a quality experience for hunters, both resident and non-resident, while simultaneously protecting the wildlife resource. We urge the legislature to, again, consider and pass this bill.

Thank you.

*John Sturgeon*

**SCI Alaska Chapter President**

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*Safari Club International Alaska Chapter*  
*First for Hunters - First for Wildlife*

## Public Testimony on Senate Bill 97

Alaska State Legislature

Date: March 10

Subject: Opposition to SB 97 – Big Game Guide Concession Area Permit Program

Presented by: Susan Allmeroth, Myself

Senate Bill 97 proposes a regulatory framework for a Big Game Guide Concession Area Permit Program that fundamentally reshapes the management of Alaska's wildlife resources. While its stated goals include conservation, professional oversight, and conflict reduction, this bill raises serious concerns regarding subsistence rights, corporate favoritism, and the marginalization of Indigenous and rural communities. SB 97 threatens Alaskans' ability to practice subsistence hunting, which is legally protected under federal and state law, and aligns with the broader goals of Project 2025, a policy initiative aimed at consolidating federal control over land and natural resources while undermining Indigenous rights.

### 1. Loopholes Favoring Corporate Outfitters Over Local and Indigenous Hunters

The proposed concession system limits the number of big game guides by issuing exclusive permits, making it difficult for local and Indigenous guides to compete. Instead, wealthy corporate hunting lodges and outside interests—who can afford high permit fees and navigate bureaucratic hurdles—will dominate the system.

Under AS 38.05.021(c), concession permits are issued through a "competitive process", yet the bill explicitly states that bids cannot be awarded solely on the highest offer (Sec. 3(c)). This vague language creates loopholes allowing subjective decision-making, where government agencies may favor large, well-connected commercial operators while pushing out small, community-based subsistence guides.

### 2. Overlapping Jurisdictional Authority and Regulatory Burdens

SB 97 introduces bureaucratic overlap between the Big Game Commercial Services Board, the Board of Game, the Department of Fish and Game, and the Department of Natural Resources. These agencies are already responsible for issuing hunting permits, enforcing game laws, and managing conservation efforts. Adding another layer of regulation further complicates the permitting process and could disproportionately affect independent subsistence hunters, who may lack the resources to navigate this system.

### 3. Violation of Constitutional and Treaty Protections for Subsistence Hunting

SB 97 conflicts with both state and federal legal protections for subsistence hunters, particularly those outlined in:

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) (16 U.S.C. § 3113), which guarantees rural Alaskans priority access to subsistence resources.

Tribal sovereignty rights under federal treaties and court decisions, which recognize Indigenous peoples' authority over their traditional lands and hunting grounds (Cohen, 2019).

By restricting access to hunting concessions, SB 97 erodes Indigenous food sovereignty and prioritizes commercial hunting operations over subsistence rights, violating ANILCA's mandate to protect rural Alaskans' way of life.

### 4. Environmental Risks and the Threat of Overhunting

SB 97 establishes a 10-year permit system (Sec. 3(c)), encouraging long-term commercial exploitation of big game resources without requiring periodic environmental reviews. The bill fails to outline specific conservation metrics, such as species population studies, habitat impact assessments, or climate change considerations—which are necessary to ensure sustainable wildlife management.

Additionally, with fewer independent guides operating due to restrictive licensing, fewer observers will be monitoring for illegal poaching, overhunting, and unethical hunting practices. Commercial guides operating under high financial pressure may push ecological limits in order to satisfy wealthy clients, further damaging Alaska's ecosystems.

## 5. SB 97's Role in Project 2025's Larger Agenda

This bill aligns with the goals of Project 2025, a policy blueprint aimed at consolidating federal and state power over land and resource management, reducing environmental regulations, and limiting Indigenous and rural communities' access to public lands (The Heritage Foundation, 2023). By shifting control of big game hunting to a centralized, exclusive permit system, SB 97 effectively:\*\*

Privatizes access to wildlife resources, allowing only select commercial operators to benefit.

Disenfranchises local and Indigenous subsistence hunters, forcing them into bureaucratic and financial barriers.

Weakens environmental oversight, making it easier for politically connected groups to extract natural resources without proper accountability.

**Conclusion: SB 97 Must Be Rejected**

SB 97 is not a conservation bill—it is a land grab that prioritizes commercial hunting over subsistence rights, environmental protection, and rural community access. If passed, this legislation will further erode Indigenous food sovereignty, disproportionately harm rural Alaskans, and contribute to a broader agenda of resource consolidation under Project 2025.

I urge lawmakers to reject SB 97 in favor of policies that prioritize subsistence rights, environmental stewardship, and equitable access to Alaska's wildlife resources.

Susan Allmeroth

Two Rivers

Myself

#### References

Cohen, F. (2019). Handbook of Federal Indian Law. LexisNexis.

The Heritage Foundation. (2023). Project 2025: Presidential Transition Project. Retrieved from [Insert URL]

United States Congress. (1980). Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), 16 U.S.C. § 3113.

United States Supreme Court. (1999). Alaska v. Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government, 522 U.S. 520.

Expanded Public Testimony on Senate Bill 97

Subject: Opposition to SB 97 – Big Game Guide Concession Area Permit Program

Presented by: Susan Allmeroth

Senate Bill 97 (SB 97) proposes a regulatory framework for a Big Game Guide Concession Area Permit Program, which would significantly alter the management of Alaska's wildlife resources. While its stated goals include conservation, professional oversight, and conflict reduction, this bill raises serious concerns regarding subsistence rights, corporate favoritism, environmental mismanagement, and ethical violations in the regulation of hunting permits.

More alarmingly, SB 97 aligns with the broader goals of Project 2025, a policy initiative designed to consolidate federal and state power over land and natural resources while weakening environmental regulations and dismantling Indigenous and rural Alaskans' access to subsistence resources. The language of the bill creates a system of exclusion that benefits commercial operators and restricts local and Indigenous participation in traditional hunting practices.

This testimony will comprehensively address the legal, environmental, and ethical failures of SB 97, demonstrating how it directly threatens subsistence hunting, wildlife conservation, and community autonomy while fitting into a larger framework of resource privatization.

## 1. Legal Violations: SB 97 Undermines Federal and State Protections for Subsistence Rights

SB 97 violates multiple legal frameworks established to protect Alaskans' access to subsistence hunting, including:

### A. The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) (16 U.S.C. § 3113)

ANILCA guarantees that rural Alaskans, particularly Indigenous communities, have priority access to subsistence hunting.

By restricting hunting access through a concession system that favors large-scale commercial outfitters over local hunters, SB 97 directly violates ANILCA's mandate to protect rural communities' way of life.

## B. Tribal Sovereignty and Treaty Rights

Indigenous communities in Alaska have historical and treaty-backed claims to hunting and fishing rights, upheld by federal court rulings (Cohen, 2019).

SB 97 imposes state-level restrictions that override these protections, disenfranchising Indigenous communities who rely on subsistence hunting not just for survival but as a cultural and spiritual practice.

## C. Constitutional Issues and Unequal Access

SB 97 creates a pay-to-play system by requiring expensive concession permits for guiding, which effectively excludes lower-income, rural, and Indigenous hunters who cannot compete with well-funded commercial hunting outfits.

The bill's vague competitive selection criteria (Sec. 3(c)) introduce a risk of arbitrary decision-making and potential favoritism, violating principles of equal access and due process under both the Alaska and U.S. Constitutions.

## D. Overreach and Bureaucratic Overload

The bill introduces redundant regulation, creating jurisdictional conflicts between existing entities like the Big Game Commercial Services Board, the Board of Game, the Department of Fish and Game, and the Department of Natural Resources.

The additional bureaucracy does not improve conservation but instead makes it harder for subsistence hunters to comply with shifting regulations, increasing the risk of criminalizing traditional practices.

## 2. Environmental Risks: SB 97 Prioritizes Commercial Exploitation Over Conservation

SB 97 does not include strong environmental protections and, instead, introduces mechanisms that could accelerate overhunting and wildlife depletion.

### A. Long-Term Exploitation Without Review

The bill establishes 10-year concession permits (Sec. 3(c)), allowing commercial operators long-term, unchecked control over specific hunting areas.

There is no requirement for periodic environmental impact reviews, meaning that if species populations decline due to climate change or other pressures, concession holders will still retain their permits.

### B. Increased Risk of Overhunting and Poaching

Fewer independent guides will be in operation due to permit restrictions, leading to less oversight on illegal poaching and unethical hunting practices.

Commercial guides, under financial pressure to maximize profits, may push ecological limits by catering to high-paying clients and targeting trophy species without conservation safeguards.

### C. Lack of Climate Resilience Strategies

SB 97 does not account for climate-related disruptions to wildlife migration and population health.

Moose, caribou, and bear populations are already impacted by habitat shifts, changing food sources, and rising temperatures. This bill fails to introduce adaptive management strategies to respond to these ecological challenges.

### 3. Ethical Failures: The Commercialization of Hunting at the Expense of Local Communities

SB 97 shifts the focus of Alaska's wildlife management from community subsistence and conservation to corporate profit and exclusivity.

#### A. Exclusion of Local and Indigenous Hunters

The concession system reduces the number of guides allowed to operate, leading to consolidation of permits in the hands of wealthy commercial operators.

Rural and Indigenous hunters, who have traditionally provided guiding services in alignment with cultural and environmental sustainability, will be locked out of their own lands and traditions.

#### B. Disregard for Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Hunting

Hunting in Alaska is not just a sport—it is a deeply rooted cultural practice for many Indigenous communities.

By treating wildlife as a commodity for elite, high-paying clients, this bill devalues the spiritual and communal significance of hunting.

#### 4. Project 2025's Role in Pushing SB 97's Agenda

SB 97 is not an isolated piece of legislation—it is part of a larger pattern of resource privatization and land control policies that align with Project 2025's vision for the U.S.

##### A. Project 2025 and the Privatization of Public Lands

Project 2025 aims to weaken public land protections, placing more control in the hands of state governments and private interests (The Heritage Foundation, 2023).

By implementing an exclusive concession system, SB 97 serves this exact goal—reducing public access to hunting resources while granting commercial control to select private operators.

##### B. Restricting Indigenous and Rural Access to Natural Resources

Project 2025 has advocated for rolling back federal protections on Indigenous land and subsistence rights, arguing for greater state control over land management.

SB 97 mirrors these objectives by creating financial and bureaucratic barriers that disproportionately harm Indigenous subsistence hunters.

##### C. Weakening Environmental Protections in Favor of Corporate Interests

Project 2025 calls for deregulating environmental protections to promote resource extraction and commercial exploitation.

SB 97 fits within this framework by prioritizing commercial hunting interests over conservation and failing to mandate sustainability measures.

Conclusion: SB 97 Must Be Rejected

SB 97 is not a conservation bill—it is a privatization scheme that threatens subsistence rights, environmental sustainability, and community-based wildlife management. If passed, this legislation will further erode Indigenous food sovereignty, disproportionately harm rural Alaskans, and contribute to Project 2025’s broader efforts to consolidate control over natural resources.

I urge lawmakers to reject SB 97 in favor of policies that:

Protect subsistence hunting rights under federal and state law.

Promote community-led conservation efforts over corporate hunting concessions.

Ensure that environmental sustainability is central to Alaska’s wildlife management strategy.

For government to work for us all, we must approach it from the bottom up, only then will we develop a system that works for all of us. We live in a vast and expansive state with many different territories and peoples, we are not all treated as equal. I employ you to do better for the next generations.

Susan Allmeroth

Two Rivers

Myself

References

Cohen, F. (2019). Handbook of Federal Indian Law. LexisNexis.

The Heritage Foundation. (2023). Project 2025: Presidential Transition Project. Retrieved from [Insert URL]

United States Congress. (1980). Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), 16 U.S.C. § 3113.

United States Supreme Court. (1999). Alaska v. Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government, 522 U.S. 520.



## RESIDENT HUNTERS OF ALASKA

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[www.residenthuntersofalaska.org](http://www.residenthuntersofalaska.org)

February 27, 2025

To: Senate Resources Committee

Re: SB 97 – Big Game Permit Program (Guide Concession Pilot Program)

Dear Chair Giessel and members of the Resources Committee,

Resident Hunters of Alaska (RHAK) strongly **opposes** SB 97.

The ostensible purpose of this legislation is to limit the number of guides on state lands. Since 2008, the Big Game Commercial Services Board (BGCSB) has sounded the alarm that we have a huge problem with too many guides on state lands. The Alaska Professional Hunters Association (APHA) felt the same way and released this statement in 2008: *“Currently, overcrowding of guides on State lands combined with decreasing wildlife populations is stimulating social disorder between hunter user groups and biological harm to our wildlife which leads to establishment of the restrictive drawing permit hunts.”*

With all due respect, we’d like members of the Resources committee to look closer into the BGCSB and ask them: Why hasn’t the board whose main function is to regulate guides...actually regulated them? Why is it necessary for the state to spend a half-million plus dollars to solve a problem the BGCSB could solve on their own?

The Board of Game could solve these known problems as well at no cost to the state. We’ve consistently stated that the problem is not too many guides, ***it’s too many nonresident hunters who are required to hire a guide being given unlimited hunting opportunity by the Board of Game.*** Limit the number of nonresident hunters who must be guided and you limit the number of guides.

After the Owsichek decision in 1988 that declared that exclusive guide concessions on state lands were unconstitutional the way they were implemented, there was great concern that if we did not strictly limit guides there would be a free-for-all that would lead to overharvests of our wildlife, crowding, conflicts, and reduced hunting opportunities for all. Exactly what the APHA said was happening in 2008!

Former Governor Hammond was one of the many who wrote an op-ed after the Owsichek decision stating that if we didn’t do something to limit guides, we’d have the exact problems we have today. A copy of that op-ed is pasted below:



## Guide ruling opens door for opportunity, mischief

December 18, 1988

Prior to being confined to exclusive areas, guides could operate anywhere in Alaska for which they were licensed. With more guides being licensed, state population increasing, burgeoning competition from "outfitters" not confined to limited areas, easier access into remote wilderness areas and loss of huge expanses of hunting grounds previously available (courtesy of the Alaska Lands bill), game in the remaining huntable areas started taking a pounding. The attitude of some mobile, mass-producing guides seemed to be: "If I don't kill it, someone else will." And kill they did. Some took dozens of bears and scores of moose annually. Clearing one area out, they, like grim reapers, moved on to another.

By confining guides to small areas it was hoped they would far more prudently harvest game found there. That's what happened. As well, in their self-interest many acted as ex-officio game wardens, reporting violations of bandit guides who invaded their areas.

Where do we go from here? We're not just back to square one where a few bandit guides threatened to decimate game, we're back to square zero. Now there are many more guides, outfitters and hunters competing for less game than is found in the state of Wisconsin. Gone is a major incentive for guides to harvest game prudently. Once more it's "If I don't kill it the other guy will."

Here are two options: 1. Severely limit the number of animals for which a guide may contract; 2. Keep the same guide area boundaries and institute a system of area licensing similar to that imposed in some fisheries. Every guide would have to register each year for one or two areas in which he wished to guide. He would then be confined to guiding there only, along, of course, with any other guide who so registered. Either of these proposals would at least stifle that grim reaper syndrome.

Hammond's advice was to severely limit the number of animals for which a guide can contract or to limit guides to just one or two guide use areas.

With all the disorder the Owsich decision created, the legislature formed a Task Force on Guiding and Game to try to figure out a path forward if there was to be no limits on guides. Here is an excerpt from the task force minutes from then-Senator Jan Faiks: "Senator Jan Faiks states she thinks we may be approaching this the wrong way, instead of viewing it from the guides and outfitters point of view, we should look at it from the Alaskan citizens point of view. The animals belong to the people of Alaska, whether on federal or private lands, not to the common man of Iowa." (my emphasis)

Nothing much came of the Task Force on Guiding and Game except an addition of Mountain goat to the list of must-be-guided species for nonresident hunters. The Guide Licensing and Control Board that regulated guides at the time imposed no new restrictions on guides. In fact, that board was disbanded from 1995 to 2005, which only increased the problems.

Currently, under the BGCSB regulations, a guide can have up to 3 guide use areas, and a 4<sup>th</sup> if it is within a predation control unit. Again, why hasn't the BGCSB done anything to limit guides? They are the regulating body for the guide industry and they have the authority to limit guides.

### **Legal issues with this Legislation**

The Owsichuk decision was crystal clear that one of the main constitutional problems with how exclusive guide areas were administered: They could not be held as a private property right. They cannot be sold. The BGCSB has been adamant that a transferability clause be within this bill, even though they know that leaves this legislation open to a lawsuit. What will really happen if transferability is included in this bill is that guides will end up selling their concessions under the table.

### **This Legislation would create more Problems**

There are many areas of the state where these problems – unlimited nonresident hunting and no limits on the guides they are required to hire – are happening. This legislation seeks to establish a pilot guide concession program in just one of the problem areas. What that will do is push all of the guides who are displaced into the other areas, causing more problems.

### **Why has neither board used their authority to fix this Problem?**

The simple but sad truth is that both boards are dominated by the commercial hunting industry and that industry's preferred (and only) solution is to get a monopoly for some guides with exclusive guide concessions. That's the only reason why neither board has acted for nearly twenty years to address these problems.

### **In Closing**

Jan Faiks was exactly right way back in 1989. We've been approaching this the wrong way. The legislature shouldn't just look at the guide industry's point of view! They should listen just as much if not more to the viewpoint of resident hunters. Article 8 of our state constitution is clear; our wildlife resources are held as a public trust for the common use and maximum benefit of Alaskans. We can't continue to manage our wildlife based on who brings in the most money or what is best for the guide industry.

We urge legislators to look deeper into this and stop allowing the BGCSB and the Board of Game to kick the can down the road and not address these problems that are under their authority to fix. If the BGCSB isn't going to regulate their industry, and the Board of Game isn't going to regulate nonresident hunters, the legislature should start asking why and provide some oversight on these boards's decisions and actions.

Sincerely,

Mark Richards  
Executive Director Resident Hunters of Alaska