

ALASKA

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APHA Position on SB190

Alaska's Hunting Guide Industry has always been and continues to be, a rural economy. In 2012 alone, 13 million dollars of wages and another 12 million dollars of spending occurred in rural Alaska in direct support of the Hunting Guide Industry. These jobs are of great importance to rural Alaskan communities with limited economic opportunities. One of the most important positions in a guide camp is what has always been referred to as a "packer." Virtually every Registered and Master Guide in Alaska got their start as a "packer" or "apprentice" guide. "Packers" carry moose, sheep, caribou, bears and clients gear on their backs. Like wolf pups, "packers" trail loyally behind a competent guide learning to size and identify trophy animals, skin, field dress and salvage meat and hides, handle clients in stressful situations involving firearms and cook hot, satisfying meals in mostly primitive conditions. While "packers" are present with clients, they are not burdened with the stress or responsibility of meeting their expectations, nor should they be. A "packers" job, is to lend a strong back and to watch and learn.

Guiding is hard, sometimes dangerous, work that requires "on the job training" in the field. Salvaging animals from the field in an edible condition under difficult circumstances is often too much for one guide. A good way to insure that 100% of the animals harvested are correctly handled is to have plenty of help in camp. None of this hard work should be done for free. The APHA supports SB190 because it allows guides to do what they have always done; hire "packers" to share the burden of salvaging our valuable animals. Alaska's Guide Industry relies on "packers," and they shouldn't be forced work without pay.

SB190 comes before the legislature as a necessary measure to immediately fix an unintended problem. AS 08.54.790 (9) defines guiding. In order to receive compensation for any of the activities listed in this definition, a person must be licensed. "Packer" or "apprentices" are not licensed, virtually by definition. In fact, by regulation, in order to become a licensed Assistant Guide, a person must spend time in a guide camp. This regulation was intended to essentially require a person to "pack" before getting licensed in an effort to codify long-standing industry practice and tradition. In a nutshell, the industry felt strongly enough that a person isn't ready to guide until he has been a packer and participated in guided hunts without pressure or responsibility. The APHA agrees that "packing" is the preferred first step in becoming a guide.

Unfortunately, “packing” and following along on a guided hunt while getting paid, is illegal without a license.

The need for SB190 became clearly apparent during the December 2012 Big Game Commercial Services Board (BGCSB) meeting. Public Safety was asked, on the record, if “packing” required a license, the answer was yes. After that meeting the APHA immediately began looking for solutions to a problem that most guides never knew existed, some still don’t. On one hand, it was hard to understand why hiring “packers,” something all guides do, was illegal. Guides immediately realized that in order to get through the 2013 season, they would have to break the law. Three solutions were considered by the BGCSB. One: create an on-demand license for packers, similar to a “crewman’s license” on commercial fishing vessels. Two: create an exemption for duties and activities carried out by “packers.” Three: change the definition of guiding. The BGCSB and Public Safety chose to support **option two** and the APHA strongly concurs with this decision.

The APHA sees the goal of SB190 as: describing in statute what is already being done, no more, no less. There is no problem for the public or the profession with the employment of “packers” as laborers/apprentices, it is just that their employment violates AS 08.54. The APHA believes that SB190 should describe and legalize un-licensed “packing” and “on the job guide training,” for compensation. **The APHA wants to be clear that this should not be an effort to empower un-licensed persons to work as “quasi-guides” or an effort to undercut professional standards.** SB190 in its current version, simply describes what has always been done by guide camp labor, and apprentice guides since out of state hunters began hiring guides to accompany them in Alaska’s wilderness. Exempting these duties made the most sense, from a practical standpoint. A new license would have been problematic in rural Alaska where on the spot hiring might be the difference between edible moose meat that doesn’t get lost to a bear or needless waste. Changing the definitions of guiding would have opened the Pandora’s box of illegal guiding. SB190 is clear and well written and because the duties associated with learning to guide are tied to being “physically present” with an appropriately licensed guide, we see this as the solution. Please pass SB190, the guide industry can’t do its job without “packers!”

Sincerely,

Wayne Kubat *March 9th, 2014*
Wayne Kubat

Master Guide 147 and APHA Board Member