

To the Attention of: Senator John Coghill  
Representative Mia Costello

Date: March 15, 2014

From: Al Gilliam Master Guide 185  
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Regarding: Support of Senate Bill 160 – Guide Concession Bill

Although I am very much in support of all of the usual reasons that the Guide Concession Program should quickly move forward into law, rather than reiterate that same mantra in this letter, I offer mention of the following distinct perspective, after 23-years of hunt guiding in the Haines, Alaska area.

When there is an excess of guides competing within the same game management areas, the conflicts that naturally arise manifest themselves in a variety of ways which contribute to a great deal of negativity that is sometimes passed on to visiting hunting clients. Additional input related to suspected illegal activity between competing guides is often passed to Wildlife Troopers. That situation soon saturates the sensibilities of Troopers with overload, yet they have little time or financial resources to investigate the supposed ethics violations or alleged crimes.

Additionally, although they may have the best of intentions, Alaska Wildlife Troopers have limited manpower and almost no financial resources to support serious in-depth investigations regarding their own suspected violations of commercial hunt guiding operations. As an example, the Haines area sometimes goes months or even a year or longer with no Wildlife Trooper even posted there.

I have personally witnessed a related situation that took place over a period in excess of 20 years at Haines, and it only recently culminated with felony convictions for two long-time local hunting guides. One of the guides had a previously checkered history of additional serious violations ranging from illegal guiding operations to an FAA suspension of his pilot license for multiple counts of harassment and reckless endangerment of a competing guide and his clients with his airplane.

If the State had instigated a Guide Concession Program over twenty years ago (when they first had the opportunity) any guides with a previous record of dubious activity would have been weeded out of the ranks by the application process. A GCP will also have the capacity to be self-policing because renewal of the concession permit is solely dependent on maintaining a good record. With that said, I suspect that some, but not all, registered guides and assistant guides who presently oppose creating a GCP may already have a history of violations which may possibly prevent them from being awarded a Guiding Concession in the future.

In the related situation that I am the most familiar with at Haines, at least two very expensive investigations jointly conducted by Alaska Wildlife Troopers and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service took place during the last twenty years; both investigations involved the same two hunting guides. The last

investigation, code named "Operation Bruin" involved three years of field investigations which terminated in November of 2011; followed by over two additional years of on-going litigation which finally resulted in recent felony convictions for two local Haines registered guides. One of the men still faces additional state charges.

A properly executed GCP will, in advance, cull out many individuals such as those prosecuted as a result of Operation Bruin; which ultimately cost the State of Alaska and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service a huge amount of money and time. Those same funds could have been better directed to upgrading equipment for law enforcement personnel, or hiring much needed additional wildlife officers.

As representatives of Alaska and stewards of the land and wildlife, we must also consider the welfare and expectations of our visiting hunters from around the world. Those hunters should expect to have the ability to enjoy Alaska while fairly hunting abundant game in a friendly and non-threatening environment; which has most certainly not been the case at Haines. Other areas of State lands have suffered similar problems, which are directly related to the State's present form of free-for-all management of the guiding industry.

Another negative aspect of the current state policy is that it inadvertently directs non-resident hunters to seek guided hunting experiences on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, other federally managed lands and Native Corporations, which all strictly limit the numbers of commercial guiding operations. Additionally, many non-resident hunters choose to spend their money in Canada where guides have had exclusive guide-owned concessions for many years. In those better managed locations, the visiting hunter can usually be assured he or she will have a more rewarding experience than hunting on over-crowded state land. Additionally, those better managed lands will often generate more income for the guide, which is then passed on to the local communities where the guides spend their money.

In support of my position, as an attachment, I am including a news-release from Karen L. Loeffler, United States Attorney, District of Alaska, regarding the recent convictions of two long-time, local Haines, Alaska hunting guides.

Respectfully,

Al Gilliam

Master Guide License # 185

CC: Senator Bert Stedman  
Senator Click Bishop  
Senator Lesil McGuire  
Senator Anna Fairclough  
Senator Hollis French  
Senator Fred Dyson

Representative Jonathan Kreis-Tompkins