



BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS AND ANGLERS ALASKA CHAPTER



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To: Governor Sarah Palin
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CC: Doug Larsen, Director
Division of Wildlife Conservation
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Proposal for Hunting License and Tag Fee Increase

Alaska Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (AK BHA) believes that the #1 issue facing current and future wildlife conservation and management in Alaska is the lack of proper funding for the Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC).

Nearly all funding for DWC comes from the sale of resident and non-resident hunting licenses and tags, and matching federal Pittman-Robertson funds. Current Alaska resident hunting license fees on average are 47-97% **lower** than all the other western states, yet everything in Alaska regarding wildlife management costs much more to accomplish than those same states.

The last hunting license/tag fee increase was fifteen years ago, in 1993, when resident hunting license fees went from \$12 to \$25. Since that time the pace of inflation along with no further increases in fees has negatively impacted many aspects of Alaska wildlife management and conservation (that \$25 is now only valued at \$16.50 in today's dollars), and threatened the future of what was arguably known as one of this country's finest state Fish and Game Departments.

At a time when many seasoned long-time biologists and managers from ADFG are retiring – many of whom were among the most respected wildlife

scientists and researchers in North America – DWC simply does not have the funding to replace them, nor can we compete with the salaries offered by federal agencies. Staff levels have been cut, and we are also losing staff to other agencies that offer higher pay and/or better benefits. The fact is that the state of Alaska – which is known and respected among hunters and wildlife viewers as having some of the most prolific and diverse wild game populations in the world – can no longer carry out the science required to properly monitor and manage the state’s valuable wildlife resources.

Without the necessary scientific research and monitoring of wildlife populations biologists and managers must err on the side of caution when advising the Board of Game on prudent harvest strategies and seasons for many game species. The lack of funding for these necessary studies thus continues to decrease hunter opportunity rather than expand it, and threaten certain game populations we don’t monitor as often or as closely as we should, like the Dall sheep populations in the Chugach, Talkeetna, and Alaska ranges. Lack of funding for research and monitoring can also lead to more negative human/bear encounters in certain areas; if DWC, for example, was able to fund a much-needed brown bear population study on the Kenai Peninsula, we may find out that more bears can be hunted and harvested than we currently allow, thus permitting hunters to harvest bears that otherwise may be killed in road collisions or dangerous scenarios involving the defense of life and property that are becoming more common each year.

DWC has received some general fund monies in the recent past to assist with Intensive Management programs and monitoring, but those funds can’t be relied upon and nor are they sufficient for continued monitoring, any future Intensive Management programs DWC must undertake, and the other necessary monitoring and research and staff levels that DWC needs in order to meet its obligation to our wildlife, our habitat, and all hunters and wildlife viewers.

For the reasons listed above, AK BHA strongly supports a resident and non-resident hunting license and tag fee increase as proposed by ADFG in 2005. This increase would double the cost of a resident hunting license from \$25 to \$50. Non-resident tag fees for various game species would also go up to be more in line with what other states charge, but not to levels that would make hunting in Alaska less competitive in pricing than in other states or countries.

The actual specifics and dollar amounts of any increases can and should be discussed and debated in the legislature, but right now AK BHA feels it is imperative that a bill is introduced that is on par with what DWC believes is fair and needed to address this major funding shortfall.

AK BHA wants to stress that while we fully support a hunting license and tag fee increase, we **do not** and **will not** support any mandates attached to a funding increase bill that seek to guarantee higher game population levels, higher harvest levels, lower predator levels, higher success rates, etc. This was a major stumbling block that prevented passage of the last bill that sought to increase funding to DWC. Those kinds of attachments and mandates to a funding increase are unnecessary and unwarranted as our Intensive Management statutes already speak to those concerns.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to throwing our support behind a bill that will adequately fund DWC.

Sincerely,

Mark Richards – Co-chair Alaska Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
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