

COMMENTS OF DOUG VINCENT-LANG

Senator Giessel, members of the committee. My name is Doug Vincent-Lang. Thank you for hearing my testimony this afternoon on HB 137.

Let me begin by saying I support an adequately Department. This said, I have several serious concerns with the bill under discussion today. First and foremost is a lack of accountability in the bill towards ensuring that payees of the increased fees will benefit from the increased revenues to the Department by the fee increases in the bill. There has not been any significant outreach with representative user groups to determine their priorities on how these increased revenues would be spent to benefit fishers, hunters and trappers. For this reason, I suggest you not move this bill at this time, rather ask the Department to develop a detailed 5-year spending plan in consult with the users who are will be paying the increased fees. I expect this will take a minimum of two to three weeks to schedule and complete.

I also ask this committee to closely examine the question of what an adequately funded department is in light of the Department's reluctance to defend their right to manage on federal lands. If they are willing to cede authority over 2/3 of our state one has to question whether increased revenues are needed. This failure to defend state right to manage was highlighted by the state's failure to oppose the proposed USFWS regulations at the recent Anchorage hearing despite being in attendance. These regulations are opposed by a broad coalition of users who will be expected to pay increased fees expecting the department to manage resources for their benefit.

I also ask that you reduce the general fee hunting increases in this bill and replace them with an Intensive Management Surcharge that can only be used to fund Board of Game approved projects under the state's Intensive Management statute. To ensure that surcharge fees are only used intensive management I request creation of a subaccount within the Fish and Game Fund modelled after sport fish hatchery surcharge that specifies that deposited surcharge fees be only used to fund intensive management of game populations as set out under AS 16.05.255(e). These projects have a proven track record in benefiting hunters. They are also at risk to to reduced general fund allocations. I also suggest that this surcharge have a 10 year sunset to allow a review of the program.

I also suggest that you recommend to the finance committee that they use CIP budgets to direct spending rather than increasing operational budgets where the agency has too much discretion and flexibility to adjust priorities and expenditures within broad missions and goals, some of which are not programs supported by the hunting community.

Finally, I was closely involved in the establishment of the sport fish hatchery surcharge. The Department and the bill sponsor, Senator Seekins, made a commitment to anglers and user groups that this surcharge would go away when the bonds were paid off. To keep this surcharge and remove the language dedicating the collected fees to hatchery bond repayment breaks a promise and commitment made to anglers. If the legislature wishes to turn the

surcharge into general license fee increase they should make it clear that this is their intention and rename the surcharge. Otherwise future bond surcharges will be viewed with skepticism, rightly so. An alternative may be to rename the surcharge to a hatchery operations surcharge, keep current dedication language in the fish and game fund but amend it to allow use for hatchery operations.

To close, while I support an adequately funded Department, I urge you to assess what is adequate and to provide greater accountability before moving this bill forward. Thank you again for allowing me to comment.