



unapologetically **FOR ALASKAN RESIDENTS**

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This background on the Board of Game is from the Resident Hunters of Alaska (RHAK) March 2021 memo, to help educate members and the public at large on how Alaska's system of wildlife management works.

The Alaska Board of Game

Alaska became a state in January 1959 and a year later the first session of the Alaska legislature established the Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) to sustainably conserve and manage our fish & wildlife resources.

The Board of Fish & Game was also established in 1960, with the authority to promulgate regulations covering allocations, seasons, methods and means, bag limits etc. As the Alaska legislative history on establishing the Board of Fish & Game documents (*our emphasis*): *"The state of Alaska constitution is unique, in that it contains an article that exclusively addresses the management of natural resources within state lands and waters. Article VIII of the Alaska Constitution is the result of historic achievement in which the state of Alaska established the chief principle that **all resources should be managed under a public trust doctrine for the citizens of Alaska.** Under section two of Article VIII, the Alaska "legislature shall provide for the utilization, development, and conservation of all natural resources belonging to the state, including land and waters, **for the maximum benefit of the people.**"*¹

In 1975, the legislature split the joint board into two separate boards, creating the Board of Fisheries, and the Board of Game, and created a system of local Fish & Game Advisory Committees across the state to represent the concerns of the public and to advise the boards on local fish and game issues.

The Board of Game is a seven-member panel appointed by the Governor and confirmed by a majority of the legislature during a joint session. Members must be Alaska residents and serve staggered 3-year terms, can be reappointed and reconfirmed, and have no term limits. There are no designated seats, and per the statute (AS 16.05.221), members are appointed based on their *"interest in public affairs, good judgment, knowledge, and ability in the field of action of the board, and with a view to providing diversity of interest and points of view in the membership."* Members are appointed regardless of political affiliation or geographical residence within the state.

Alaska has five wildlife management regions, and the Board of Game holds two public regulatory meetings every year, cycling between the different regions, as well as a meeting covering Statewide regulations. For example, in 2019 the Board

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http://www.akleg.gov/basis/get_documents.asp?session=29&docid=40107#:~:text=Under%20the%20Alaska%20Constitution%20the,game%20resources%20of%20the%20state.

held meetings for the Southeast & Southcentral regions and in 2020 for Western Arctic/Western and the Interior/Eastern Arctic regions. The next cycle covers Central/Southwest region and Statewide regulations.

During these regulatory meetings, the public and Advisory Committees submit proposals to the Board for that specific region (or Statewide) on various hunting issues, be they changes to hunting seasons and bag limits, access restrictions, methods and means, allocations etc. The public can weigh in with written comments on proposals and is also given time to testify in person to the Board in favor or against certain proposals. ADF&G also submits proposals based on biological data and concerns the Department may have.

Alaska truly has the best system of public wildlife management in the country, in that we have 84 different F&G Advisory Committees set up to advise the Board on local concerns, as well as allowing any member of the public, even nonresidents, to submit a proposal and weigh in on proposals and regulations. However, that doesn't mean our system is perfect.

During the Alaska constitutional convention in the winter of 1955/56, the delegates brought in Dr. Ira Gabrielson, an expert from the lower-48, to give a presentation to the Resources Committee on wildlife management issues. Dr. Gabrielson had previously advised 26 other states on wildlife conservation and management issues and had traveled extensively in the Alaska Territory before statehood. In his presentation, he covered many topics and the entire talk is well worth a read.² One of the recommendations he made was that the creation of a fish & wildlife commission (or board), as other states had done, worked best if it was free from undue political influence, and that these types of boards or commissions worked best if they were strictly bipartisan in nature. Legislators did not heed that advice when establishing the boards and it has been a constant problem since because Governors change and so too does the makeup of the Board of Game, often along ideological/political lines and the wildlife management agenda of individual Governors. This allows a Governor to appoint a Fish & Game Commissioner who aligns with his or her agenda, and to "stack" the Board as he or she sees fit, which creates a pendulum effect in how the Board directs ADF&G to manage our game, which has led to inconsistent policies and sometimes dramatic changes in policies.

ADF&G doesn't make management decisions on things like seasons & bag limits, allocations between different user groups, access restrictions etc. The Department simply advises the Board of Game. The Department does present biological information and harvest statistics on every proposal before the Board and based on that data will oppose or support a proposal, but advice from the Department is not always followed and the Department policy is to remain neutral on all allocation proposals among different user groups. Hunters often blame ADF&G for regulations or allocations they don't agree with, not understanding that the Department is only following the direction and authority of the Board of Game. As a result, while

² <http://www.akleg.gov/pdf/billfiles/ConstitutionalConvention/Proceedings/Proceedings%20-%20Day%2037%20-%20December%2014%201955%20-%20Pages%20847-865.pdf>

ADF&G is directed to sustainably manage our wildlife, what is really “sustainable” wildlife management is completely up to the Board of Game.

Summary

The political influence that concerned Dr. Ira Gabrielson when he spoke before our constitutional convention has led to the Board of Game not being made up of a majority of members with a real diversity of interest and points of view, particularly when it comes to allocation decisions. The seven-member board only needs four votes to pass or oppose something, and too often those votes favor nonresident hunters over resident hunters. Many resident hunters view the Board of Game as the “Guide Board” because of this favoritism to the guide industry and nonresident hunters who are required to be guided for certain species.

So, the Board of Game functions and makes decisions in ways that clearly do not comport with our state constitution. It’s even more troubling with the current administration and the recent appointment by the Governor of two more guides to the Board of Game, which makes for three guides and one retired guide on the seven-member Board.

There are on average 100,000 Alaskans who purchase a hunting license and contribute more than a billion dollars to the Alaska economy annually.³ There are 1,230 licensed guides, *of which a quarter are nonresidents*.⁴ Put in context, Alaska resident guides make up less than 1% of our resident hunting population yet effectively hold 50% of Board of Game seats. Stacking the Board of Game with guides or supporters of the commercial hunting industry disenfranchises resident hunter interests and give the guide industry and nonresident hunters outsized influence over our wildlife resources and allocations.

That’s where we find ourselves today and these issues with the Board of Game are the basis of RHAK’s formation and existence..

³ [Resident Hunter Economic Impacts](#)

⁴ [Big Game Commercial Services Board, Active Guide Licensees \(download Excel file\)](#)