

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

May 1, 2002
3:42 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator John Torgerson, Chair
Senator Gary Wilken, Vice Chair
Senator Robin Taylor
Senator Ben Stevens
Senator Kim Elton
Senator Georgianna Lincoln

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Rick Halford

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

Confirmation Hearings

Board of Game
Bruce Baker
Caleb Pungowiyi
Michelle Sparck
George Matz
J. Dana Pruhs

WITNESS REGISTER

Mr. Carl Rosier, Vice President
Alaska Outdoor Council
POB 73902
Fairbanks AK 99707

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported Mr. Pruhs' nomination. No comment on others.

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 02-24, SIDE A
Number 001

CHAIRMAN JOHN TORGERSON called the Senate Resources Committee meeting to order at 3:42 p.m. and announced the committee would take up the Board of Game confirmation hearings. He asked Mr. Bruce Baker, the first nominee, how many years he was appointed

for.

MR. BRUCE BAKER said he has been an Alaskan resident for over 30 years and most of his career has been dedicated to managing habitats that are essential for sustainable game populations. He retired from ADF&G 10 years ago and is now a natural resource consultant on subjects that don't come before the Board of Game. He was with ADF&G for 11 years and, before that, served as a natural resource policy specialist under Governor Jay Hammond. He is an active hunter and recognizes trapping as a legitimate use of game. He has the time to dedicate to board responsibilities and to help the public participate in the Board's decisionmaking process.

CHAIRMAN TORGERSON asked again how long his appointment is for.

MR. BAKER replied three years.

SENATOR TAYLOR asked if he would reverse the current Board policy of elk extermination in Southeast Alaska.

MR. BAKER said he didn't know the Board had made that decision.

SENATOR TAYLOR said the Board made it last year in October or November. It provided that a person could kill any elk, regardless of sex or age, with a regular hunting license, any place in Southeast Alaska except on Ellen (ph) and Zarembo Islands. He stated, "It is a policy of extermination that we don't have in any other specie in the state."

MR. BAKER said he is familiar with the situation. He remarked the way he would vote on a proposal now would probably not help the legal defensibility of any future Board decision on a proposal, but he would be open minded about it from the standpoint of a board member.

SENATOR TAYLOR asked how he would implement the intensive game management policies that were set by this legislature.

MR. BAKER replied that his understanding of the regulations is that in implementing the policy in Title 16, the Board must consider eight criteria when establishing population and harvest objectives for each big game prey population identified and that would be done in a way that is consistent with maintaining near maximum sustainable yields. One of the criteria, for example, is the cost feasibility and potential effectiveness of possible management actions. He added:

I am prepared to work as a board member to apply those and other criteria that are in the Intensive Management Act and associated regulations in as an objective a manner as I can and one of the things that's very convenient about the whole board process is that all proposals come - not all - some are statewide and some are region wide, but most of the ones that are detailed come in on a game management unit or a game management subunit basis and some of these issues are hard for all of us including you folks to get our arms around and are very controversial. To me the best way to deal with sticky issues is to break them down into manageable pieces and I think the game management unit or the subunit affords a very good opportunity to be just that. I am prepared to work with other board members, advisory committees and the public at large in implementing intensive management just as I am other provisions of the statutes that have to do with predator control.

SENATOR ELTON asked, in regard to intensive game management and predator control, Mr. Baker's thoughts on communicating across some of the barriers raised over predator control between user groups and elements of government, and between the political people, policy people, biologists, etc. in different parts of Alaska.

MR. BAKER said he would start at the user level and he believes there is a lot of opportunity for board members to help user groups work together. He used the example of the Fairbanks meeting in March on Unit 19. The Board of Game and ADF&G work with whoever is governor at the time. His understanding after talking with the Department of Law is that the Board has the authority to promulgate regulations on seasons and bag limits and methods and means. It also has the authority to authorize the department to do certain things such as predator control. The Board does not have the authority to place fiscal commitments upon the department or administratively direct it to do something. He noted, "There's always going to be that legal separation in authorities and responsibilities between... the Board and the Administration." This doesn't mean there can't be good communication between the two and ADF&G does a tremendous job of providing biological information to the Board.

SENATOR WILKEN thanked him for coming by his office for a visit two months ago and said he was impressed. He asked if Mr. Baker had been able to have the conversation with the Alaska Outdoor Council (AOC) that they talked about and whether the AOC would support his nomination.

MR. BAKER said he talked with AOC and they generally either support an appointee, decide not to oppose an appointee or oppose an appointee. He is keeping communications open with them when it seems appropriate to do so.

SENATOR LINCOLN said she comes from an area that's very dependent upon trapping and she received a request that he not be confirmed because he is a hunter and is opposed to the use of the foot-hold trap. She asked him to respond.

MR. BAKER replied that he is supportive of trapping methods that, in a perfect world, would meet three criteria: they are economical; efficient; and dispatch an animal as quickly as possible. But, it's not a perfect world. Trapping conditions vary with the species, the trap set, the weather, how soon you can get back out to the line, etc. He feels trappers are at least concerned about their public image as the rest of us are. Most of them would welcome the opportunity to try out a new method if it met those three criteria.

SENATOR LINCOLN asked if it is fair to say that he is not opposed to foot-hold traps.

MR. BAKER replied that he is not opposed to them. If there were a better way, he would look at it.

SENATOR LINCOLN commented that there are two letters of opposition in her folder. The other one asked her not to appoint him, but it was from Maryland and she is ignoring that one.

CHAIRMAN TORGERSON thanked Mr. Baker for testifying and said they would next hear from Caleb Pungowiyi who was calling in from Kotzebue.

MR. CALEB PUNGOWIYI said he grew up hunting and trapping in Alaska. He truly believes in balancing the uses of game.

CHAIRMAN TORGERSON asked how long he was appointed to serve.

MR. PUNGOWIYI replied that he was appointed for three years.

SENATOR LINCOLN said she had known Caleb for many years and can honestly say that he is one of the most honest, beautiful people that she has ever known and he'll be an asset to the Board and Alaska.

CHAIRMAN TORGERSON thanked him for his testimony and said they

would talk to Michelle Sparck next.

MS. MICHELLE SPARCK said she lives and works in Bethel and was born in Anchorage. She attended college outside of Alaska, but has spent all of professional life working on various Alaska issues, mostly natural resource issues related to public domain.

CHAIRMAN TORGERSON thanked her for joining the committee this afternoon and said they would hear from George Matz next. He asked Mr. Matz if his term was for three years.

MR. MATZ replied that he lives in Anchorage and was appointed last May for three years, of which he has served about a year already. The reasons he thinks he is qualified to serve on the Board of Game are:

Alaska's wildlife is very important to me as it is for most Alaskans. I am very interested in all aspects of wildlife whether that be hunting, wildlife observation or just reading about the activities or the science of wildlife management. I believe in living close to the land. My wife and I are avid consumptive users. I hunt fish, dig clams and pick berries. As a citizen, I feel obligated to contribute to the better management of publicly owned natural resources. I have lived in three regions of the state over my 26 years of residency in Alaska and have traveled throughout most of the state and am familiar with the diverse natural and cultural resources of this state. I have a variety of academic and work experience that brings a new perspective to the Board. In the private sector, I have been involved in the marketing of scientific instrumentation and know how to put together a plan and carry it out. In the public sector, I have been involved in the development of state budgets and policy-making. In the non-profit sector, I have worked with the public on a number of wildlife conservation issues. In short, I don't fit into any of typical stereotypes. My diversity of experience gives me the background that is needed to understand the needs and desires of different user groups. My approach is to reach consensus with most user groups rather than to represent any particular point of view.

Four years ago he saw the need to provide the residents of Anchorage and the Kenai Peninsula with better information regarding the status of brown bears on the Kenai Peninsula. Consequently, he created a Kenai Brown Bear festival and brought

together a number of experts for the event, which was a success, and was held again the next year in Anchorage. He had information from the Bear Forum to hand out to the committee.

When he was appointed to the Board of Game, he was asked to form and head up an advisory committee to consider sea duck issues in the Kachemak Bay area. He asked eight local residents to serve on the committee, each representing a different user group. The committee just finished its fourth meeting and, despite the diversity of views, was able to reach complete consensus on each recommendation.

CHAIRMAN TORGERSON commented that he was not a big fan of the brown bear takeover forums, the reason being there was no biological reason for it. He remarked:

The bear population was up; the numbers were not down. There's not a lot of hunting allowed - this is on the Kenai Peninsula. They have a certain number of incidental kills of about 30 or 40 a year or something like that. The spin-off of that was that we now have to go through ADF&G and they tried to make an endangered species out of the brown bear the same thing they did with the wolf down in Southeastern - saying that the Kenai Peninsula specie was its own specie and endangered because they didn't interbreed with the rest of the state, which it took a lot of money to prove wrong...

He said this has just thrown another hurdle in front of the logging and other industries down there before they can get permits. When a five-mile pipeline was put in recently by an oil company, instead of letting them run it through the trees, they made them run it down in the swamp because they were afraid it would disturb some habitat for a brown bear.

SENATOR WILKEN asked Mr. Matz when he was employed by OMB.

MR. MATZ replied that he started in 1979 and worked through 1986.

SENATOR WILKEN asked whom he was a legislative aide for.

MR. MATZ replied Joe Josephson and Vic Fischer.

SENATOR WILKEN asked what years he worked for them.

MR. MATZ replied that it was 1976 - 1979.

SENATOR LINCOLN said Mr. Matz was quoted in another e-mail to

say, "According to ADF&G survey's, wildlife viewers are willing to pay on average about \$309 - \$417 each to see wolves, which is about the price that the trapper would get for a pelt." She asked if that was a true quote.

MR. MATZ replied that it was from a letter to another board member about the buffer zone near Denali Park. He said he sometimes looks at things from an economic standpoint. The value of wildlife viewing was much greater for the Toklat pack than it was in terms of the loss to trapping, because the buffer zone allowed trapping but not trapping of wolves. That amounted to one trapper in the area. On the other hand, several thousand people saw that wolf pack and he thought that value was worth a lot more.

SENATOR LINCOLN said the concern in her area is the belief that it is the wolf that reduces the population of moose, which is food for the table. It has nothing to do with the value of taking a picture of the wolf. She is glad that he clarified that it was just for the Toklat pack and asked his position on predator control.

MR. MATZ replied that it is a management tool. There are situations where it makes sense, but it's complicated to work it out. It has to be based on good science. He thought the Toklat wolves have a high value because so many people see them. You couldn't assign the same value to another pack 100 miles away because it doesn't have the same viewing value.

SENATOR LINCOLN asked, if it had a high viewing value, whether he would place a higher value on viewing than having meat on the table.

MR. MATZ said he wouldn't put viewing over eating, but he wouldn't combine them like that.

SENATOR LINCOLN said good science is needed, but some things have been absolutely studied to death. She asked him to describe good science.

MR. MATZ replied that in terms of predator control, good science falls on both sides of the fence:

You have to be specific to the situation. Science doesn't come up with any magic answers. I think what science does is essentially limits the options in terms of having options that are more likely to work.

He said you set goals and use them to set up the type of science and field work you need and then test to whether or not you are achieving that.

CHAIRMAN TORGERSON thanked Mr. Matz for joining the committee and announced Mr. Dana Pruhs was next. He asked how many months he had left to serve.

MR. DANA PRUHS replied that he has 11 months left. He said he was born in Fairbanks and has lived in Anchorage since 1985. His resume listed his jobs and he has always been a consumptive user and values the state's natural resources and the opportunity to influence how they're managed.

SENATOR ELTON said he wanted to comment, like Senator Lincoln did on Mr. Pungowiyi, on Mr. Bruce Baker who is also a very honest person and impressed him with his endeavors on behalf of the people in Southeast Alaska on the management of brown bears on the ABC Islands.

SENATOR LINCOLN asked Mr. Pruhs, in the short time he had been there, whether he wanted to be reappointed to the Board of Game.

MR. PRUHS replied:

Absolutely. I've been there almost a year and it's still a tremendous learning curve. I think it takes a couple years for a board member to go through the cycles and actually be able to get a handle on all the issues...

CHAIRMAN TORGERSON said he would entertain a motion to forward the names on to the Senate.

SENATOR WILKEN asked Carl Rosier, who he saw in the audience, if the AOC had decided on this group of nominees as far as an endorsement.

MR. CARL ROSIER, Vice President, AOC, said the vote at the annual meeting was in support of Mr. Pruhs and no comment on the others.

SENATOR WILKEN moved to forward the names of Bruce Baker, Caleb Pungowiyi, Michelle Sparck, George Matz and J. Dana Pruhs to the full Senate for consideration. There were no objections and the names were forwarded.

There being no further business to come before the committee CHAIRMAN TORGERSON adjourned the meeting at 4:25 p.m.