

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 26, 2007

1:03 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Carl Gatto, Co-Chair
Representative Craig Johnson, Co-Chair
Representative Vic Kohring
Representative Bob Roses
Representative Paul Seaton
Representative Peggy Wilson
Representative Bryce Edgmon
Representative David Guttenberg
Representative Scott Kawasaki

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS

Big Game Commercial Services Board

Leif Wilson - Tok
Richard Rohrer - Kodiak

- CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

Board of Game

Bob Bell - Anchorage
Ben Grussendorf - Sitka

- CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to report

WITNESS REGISTER

LEIF WILSON, Appointee
to the Big Game Commercial Services Board

Tok, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Big Game Commercial Services Board.

BOB BELL, Appointee
to the Board of Game
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Game.

BEN GRUSSENDORF, Appointee
to the Board of Game
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Board of Game.

RICHARD ROHRER, Appointee
to the Big Game Commercial Services Board
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke as an appointee to the Big Game Commercial Services Board.

ACTION NARRATIVE

CO-CHAIR CRAIG JOHNSON called the House Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at [1:03:11 PM](#). Representatives Johnson, Gatto, Roses, Wilson, Seaton, and Kohring were present at the call to order. Representatives Guttenberg, Edgmon, and Kawasaki arrived as the meeting was in progress.

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS:
Big Game Commercial Services Board

[1:03:19 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR JOHNSON announced that the first order of business would be the confirmation hearing for the Big Game Commercial Services Board.

[1:03:35 PM](#)

LEIF WILSON, Appointee to the Big Game Commercial Services Board, stated that he has served on this board for the last year and two months. He is honored that Governor Palin has decided to re-appoint him. He said that he feels the board is having a positive effect on raising the standards and improving the industry, and that it will continue to do so. Most of the problems facing the industry do not have easy solutions and they often involve people's livelihoods.

MR. WILSON stated that he is the president and director of operations for Forty Mile Air, a commuter air taxi that holds big game transporter license number six. He is an airplane and power plant mechanic, and is an airline transport pilot. He is a lifelong resident of Alaska and has hunted, trapped, and fished throughout his life. He spent 14 seasons as a deckhand on a gillnetter in Bristol Bay. He said that for the last 10 years he has served as a member of the Upper Tanana/Forty-Mile Fish & Game Advisory Committee. He has been involved with the transportation of hunters for the past 23 years. He is very familiar with the guiding industry because his father was a guide in Alaska during his childhood. Mr. Wilson said that he has flown for several different guides throughout the years.

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REPRESENTATIVE GUTTENBERG inquired whether a perceived conflict of interest might be seen due to Mr. Wilson's being in the air flying and guiding business and being on this commission.

MR. WILSON explained that when transporting hunters, his business is operating under its transporter license and must comply with all of the associated regulations and must have a "135 air taxi certificate". He remarked that it gets down to having a limited resource and that one of the biggest problems is conflicts between user groups and the types of access that people have. There is, and will be, conflicts between guides, transporters, guides that use horses, and guides who use airplanes, and with residents who are out on their four-wheelers; therefore he cannot say that there are no conflicts between people who use airplanes and people who do not. He stated that he chooses to transport his hunters by air because it is a low-impact way to get people out to uncrowded areas. He acknowledged that there is some conflict amongst other groups and his group, but that those conflicts will be there no matter who it is.

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REPRESENTATIVE WILSON reminisced about the four years she lived in Tok and the time that she flew over the Tok River with Leif. She thanked him for doing a good job at what he does.

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CO-CHAIR GATTO noted that Mr. Wilson's application is dated 3/15/06 and asked if it is typical for an application to take a year to come before the legislature.

MR. WILSON explained that he was originally appointed a little over a year ago by then-Governor Murkowski. He was appointed late and only served a portion of a term. Therefore, he surmised, it is his original application that is probably before the committee.

CO-CHAIR GATTO inquired whether there is anything that Mr. Wilson would like to add to his application.

MR. WILSON said that the only thing he would add is the experience he has gained by being on the board for the last 14 months.

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CO-CHAIR JOHNSON asked Mr. Wilson to state why he would like to be re-appointed.

MR. WILSON responded that he is thankful the legislature reinstated the board because it is necessary and people are needed to make a difference and do some good.

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CO-CHAIR GATTO inquired as to whether Mr. Wilson, his children, or employees have had any past violations of fish and game laws.

MR. WILSON stated that he did not, and that he did not know of any violations by his family members or employees.

Board of Game

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CO-CHAIR JOHNSON determined that the second nominee for the Big Game Commercial Services Board was not yet on the teleconference line. He then announced that the second order of business would be the confirmation hearing for the Board of Game.

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CO-CHAIR JOHNSON declared a conflict of interest because Bob Bell, a Board of Game appointee, is a constituent who

contributed to his election campaign. He requested that he be excluded from voting.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON noted that the committee does not vote on confirmations, it only reviews the qualifications of the appointees and forwards the names of qualified applicants to a joint [floor session].

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON declared that she personally knows two of the appointees.

REPRESENTATIVE ROSES stated that he also knows Mr. Bell.

[1:14:22 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR JOHNSON asked Mr. Bell to state why he would like to be appointed.

BOB BELL, Appointee to the Board of Game, stated that he has been hunting in Alaska for 37 years. The main reason, he said, is that he sees a lot of things happening for which something could be done and that the Board of Game is the best vehicle to do that. He said that he could help make things better and that he would bring the perspective of a "wildlife user".

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CO-CHAIR GATTO asked whether the four individuals listed as references on page 2 of Mr. Bell's November 2006 application would still be current.

MR. BELL stated yes.

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REPRESENTATIVE SEATON inquired whether the term "user" means that Mr. Bell is a hunter or a guide.

MR. BELL responded that he has never been a guide for any commercial activity as far as fish and game is concerned, so his experience is as a user. For example, he has a moose camp in Unit 16B that he and his friends set up twenty years ago. He said that this unit is now closed to moose hunting because of predation by both humans and animals; therefore he sees the impacts of policies that did not protect the moose quickly enough. "That is the kind of thing that I think I can bring to the board," he said, "... we should have done something about

this sooner." In response to further questions from Representative Seaton, Mr. Bell stated that he was a trapper as a kid in Washington, but never in Alaska. He confirmed that his use of wildlife is as a sport hunter.

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REPRESENTATIVE GUTTENBERG directed attention to Mr. Bell's application where it states that he is a strong advocate for predator control. If science indicates that problems are due to habitat or disease and not predators, will you stand behind the science, he asked.

MR. BELL answered yes, that he is an engineer and so he tends to side with science. He said that he thinks predator control is a good tool that can be used to manage game populations properly. This is done by studying the population to determine what needs to be done. If predator control is not the right tool, then it should not be used. He noted that there are 208 proposals coming before the board next week and the field work for several proposals shows that in some areas the moose have eaten the willows down to the point where there is not enough to recover. For example, he said, this is happening on the lower Yukon River where the [moose] population is jumping by 27 percent a year, so predator control would not be warranted there.

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REPRESENTATIVE GUTTENBERG requested Mr. Bell's opinion on expanding the boundaries of the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary, an issue that is before the Board of Game.

MR. BELL explained that his knowledge of the McNeil River situation is what he has read in the newspaper, a couple of short discussions with board chairman Ron Somerville, and a brief discussion with the governor. He stated that he has not had the opportunity to sit down with Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) staff to go into the details. He said that he knows there is considerable controversy on the issue, both in the Lower 48 and Alaska. The biology must be reviewed to determine what is best for the population and the political realities must also be looked at. He said that these two things will drive the board's decision.

[1:22:27 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ROSES inquired whether he heard correctly that there are 208 proposals before the Board of Game.

MR. BELL stated yes.

[1:23:02 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON presented a hypothetical example in the McNeil River area where biologists determine that bear populations are declining and should not be hunted. He asked Mr. Bell whether his user philosophy would over-ride the biologists' recommendations.

MR. BELL replied that he would tend to follow what the biologists are suggesting. As a user of fish and game, he wants to make sure these populations are sustainable, and this cannot be done if the science is not followed. He said that when the "take" is too high, neither the [wildlife] population nor the users are helped. He said that he will listen very carefully to what ADF&G has to say.

[1:25:04 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR JOHNSON addressed the next Board of Game appointee, Ben Grussendorf, and asked him to state why he would like to be appointed.

BEN GRUSSENDORF, Appointee to the Board of Game, responded that this is something he has always been interested in. He grew up in northern Minnesota and has spent 40 years in Alaska. Even when he was in the legislative body, people with questions about wildlife and birds would come to him. He said he would like to believe that the people he works for understand that he has spent a lot of time in the field, that he is knowledgeable about wildlife and wildlife issues, and that in deliberations he is thoughtful and fair. When he is in doubt on making a decision dealing with wildlife management, he said, he will always give the benefit of the doubt to the beating heart of the critter that is being talked about. If he is going to err in making a decision, he hopes it is on the side of conservation because he does not mind people being upset with him for a season or two, but he certainly does not want them to be angry for 10 years or more by a decision that has caused a problem with a game population.

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CO-CHAIR GATTO stated that the trouble with predator control is that it is picking which heart to deal with and therefore he was puzzled by Mr. Grussendorf's statement.

MR. GRUSSENDORF responded that when he is "in doubt" and unsure, he will give the benefit of that doubt to the beating heart of the animal being discussed. He said that sometimes there is not a doubt; for instance there are five predator controlled areas in the state where there was not much doubt. He noted that he did have concern with Unit 16B for awhile, but that biological information was later received as to which predator was doing what between the wolves, black bears, and brown bears. If he is given the data, then he does not have any doubts.

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CO-CHAIR GATTO said that he is still unsure what Mr. Grussendorf means because there is a wolf beating heart and a calf beating heart and the two are in competition with each other.

MR. GRUSSENDORF, using moose as an example, explained that a decision is made by first determining how many moose are in an area, the carrying capacity of the habitat, the cow-to-calf ratio, and the bull-to-cow ratio and whether they are breeding bulls. Then, you make your decision. A situation was discussed earlier where a 27 percent increase in the moose population is causing habitat problems - you would take a different view of predator activity then, as well as the human harvest. Every situation is different with the beating of given hearts in different game management areas.

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REPRESENTATIVE WILSON commented that this takes a lot of time, especially for people who enjoy being outside, and that she appreciates their willingness and sacrifice to serve.

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CO-CHAIR JOHNSON closed the Board of Game confirmation hearing.

Big Game Commercial Services Board

[1:31:36 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR JOHNSON announced the committee's return to the first order of business, the confirmation hearing for the Big Game

Commercial Services Board. He asked appointee Richard Rohrer to state why he would like to serve on the board.

RICHARD ROHRER, Appointee to the Big Game Commercial Services Board, stated that he is a master guide and has made a living in the guide industry since coming to Alaska in 1965. He said that he has served for two years since the board's reinstatement and that the board is working very well together. It has been a positive experience, he remarked, and that is why he is willing to serve another term.

1:32:40 PM

CO-CHAIR GATTO noted that Mr. Rohrer's application is dated July 2005 and was submitted to the previous governor. He asked if another application was submitted.

MR. ROHRER stated that he did not submit another application and that nothing has changed since his first application, so he has no new information. In response to a further question from Co-Chair Gatto, he confirmed that neither he, his family, nor his employees have had any fish and game violations, charges, convictions, or accusations. He assured the committee that there is nothing in his record that will bring embarrassment to the legislature or to the governor.

1:34:18 PM

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON moved that the nominations of Leif Wilson and Richard Rohrer, appointees to the Big Game Commercial Services Board, and the nominations of Bob Bell and Ben Grussendorf, appointees to the Board of Game, be forwarded for consideration by a joint floor session. There being no objection, the confirmations were advanced.

1:35:18 PM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Resources Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 1:35 p.m.