

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES**

February 3, 2011

5:02 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Steve Thompson, Chair
Representative Alan Austerman
Representative Bob Herron
Representative Scott Kawasaki
Representative Bob Miller

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Craig Johnson, Vice Chair
Representative Lance Pruitt

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW(S): DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME (ADF&G) - DIVISION OF
SPORT FISH

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

CHARLES MR. SWANTON, Director
Division of Sport Fish
Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of the Division of
Sport Fish, for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

ACTION NARRATIVE

[5:02:18 PM](#)

CHAIR STEVE THOMPSON called the House Special Committee on
Fisheries meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. Present at the call to
order were Representatives Thompson, Austerman, Herron,
Kawasaki, and Miller.

**OVERVIEW(S): DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME (ADF&G) - DIVISION OF
SPORT FISH**

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CHAIR THOMPSON announced that the only order of business would be an overview from the Division of Sport Fish of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

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CHARLES SWANTON, Director, Division of Sport Fish, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), began the division overview by paraphrasing from the committee handout entitled "Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Sport Fish FY12 Division Overview," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The mission of the Division of Sport Fish is to protect and improve the state's recreational fisheries resources. Services provided are founded on this mission, and addressed in the following seven core services:

Fishery Management: The division ensures the sustained use of Alaska's recreational fisheries while optimizing social and economic benefits.

Fishery Research: The division promotes excellence in fisheries research.

Fisheries Enhancement: The division diversifies recreational fishing opportunities via supplemental production of hatchery-reared fish.

Angler Access: The division protects and improves public access, motorized and otherwise, to recreational fisheries resources.

Information and Education Services: The division informs and educates the public about recreational fishing with an emphasis on exceptional customer service.

Fish Habitat: The division conserves habitat to sustain recreational fisheries resources.

Workforce Support: The division provides exceptional support to our workforce to attain the division's vision and goals.

The division measures success in meeting its mission by assessing the outcome of "sustain recreational fishing opportunities while optimizing social and economic benefits" using the following targets:

Target 1: Sell 450,000 sport fishing licenses annually.

Target 2: Maintain 2.5 million angler days of recreational fishing effort annually.

Target 3: Maintain a positive trend in sport fishing trip-related expenditures.

Target 4: Maintain at least 75 percent of anglers satisfied with their sport fishing experience.

Challenges that currently impact the division's ability to achieve its mission include:

Maintaining existing hatchery production while constructing new hatchery facilities, and identifying and securing hatchery operational funds;

Sustaining wild fish stocks by employing stock assessment research and managing sport fishery harvests according to the Sustainable Salmon Fisheries Management Policy (5 AAC 39.222; Salmon Escapement Goal Policy (5 AAC 39.223); and the Policy For the Management of Sustainable Wild Trout Fisheries (5 AAC 75.222);

Continuing to refine and improve accuracy of Fish and Game and Dingell-Johnson fund projections while balancing increased project and operational costs;

Improving resident angler satisfaction, diversity of fishing opportunities and modernize harvest data collection methods;

Ensuring public access and minimizing impacts to recreational users as lands are conveyed or restricted by federal subsistence regulations; and

Improving current and/or developing new approaches to better inform and educate the public about sport fishing opportunities and regulations, and division programs and activities related to sport fishing.

The total FY12 Governor's Request for the division's RDU is \$48,389,500, representing a decrease from FY11 Management Plan of (\$858,500).

The division has one component, Sport Fisheries. The division employs 231 permanent full time positions and 204 permanent part time positions.

The division maintains a headquarters office in Juneau; regional offices in Anchorage, Douglas, and Fairbanks; and 22 management area offices, including Sitka, Ketchikan, Yakutat, Haines, Craig/Klawock, Petersburg, Palmer, Soldotna, Homer, Kodiak, Dillingham, Cordova, King Salmon, Seward, Bethel, Delta Junction, Tok, Nome, and Glennallen.

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MR. SWANTON continued to the third page of the handout to explain the pie chart indicating the funding sources. The division, as a results delivery unit (RDU), has nine sources of funding. He pointed out the two primarily funding sources as: 40 percent federal government garnered from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fish excise tax; and 28 percent state fish and game fund, generated from license sales. A smattering of other sources includes 12 percent from the general fund. Additionally, the FY12 Capital Budget includes a line dedicated to Sport Fish Recreational Boating Access, for roughly \$3 million; \$2,250,000 federal receipts and \$750,000 fish and game funds. He explained this is necessary because, as part of the federal program for the pass through funding, the division is mandated to spend 15 percent of federal receipts on boater access projects such as boat ramps, restrooms, parking lots, and related services.

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REPRESENTATIVE MILLER requested a definition that distinguishes the Division of Sport Fish from the other departmental divisions.

MR. SWANTON responded that recreational sport fishing is separated from other pursuits by the act of being recreational. It could be for consumptive use or not, but essentially encompasses the activity pursued by the purchaser of a license; and for which the generated revenues are used to conserve and manage the resource. The specific license is the distinguishing factor; however, youth under the age of 16 and elders over the age of 60 do not require sport fishing licenses.

REPRESENTATIVE AUSTERMAN offered that there are some overlapping areas such as subsistence and personal use fisheries that could cause some confusion. He opined that it may be in the eye of the beholder in some situations, and offered some examples of areas that he believes to be negotiable. Additionally, a charter boat operator considers the activity to be a sport however, he argued, it could be considered to be a commercial business. Further, he provided a brief historical overview of the fifty years of evolution of the department since statehood.

CHAIR THOMPSON noted that the division is charged with the conservation of fish habitat, and asked what action is taken against invasive weeds.

MR. SWANTON responded that invasive weed situations are a new occurrence in the state. The divisions of Sport Fish and Habitat have involved staff to address the concern, and he offered to provide further information to the committee.

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CHAIR THOMPSON asked about the delay in the development of a fish hatchery in the Fairbanks area.

MR. SWANTON indicated that design issues have been a holdup on the project. It is being worked through, and rainbow trout eggs should be delivered sometime in the coming spring. The project is one year behind schedule. To a follow up question, he said that the design build agreement calls for a replacement of the filtration system, which is not working to specifications.

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REPRESENTATIVE MILLER inquired what species will be developed in the hatchery, once it is on-line, and the destination of the stocks.

MR. SWANTON indicated that the primary species will be rainbow trout, and in the future Arctic char, Arctic grayling, lake trout, King salmon, and coho salmon. The fish will all be released in fresh water locations. The variety of species will allow a diversity of opportunities for stock success when they are released. Additionally, seasonal fishing will be enhanced including ice fishing; a popular sport in areas such as Birch Lake [approximately 65 miles southeast of Fairbanks].

CHAIR THOMPSON asked why King salmon were not captured from the Chena River and reared in the hatchery for re-release to supplement the runs via the Chena, through the Tanana, and into the Yukon rivers.

MR. SWANTON responded that the facility was built for recreational angling enhancement. The department has a policy for stocking of hatchery reared fish "over the top" of wild stocks. He explained naturalized exploitation rates and the effects of that practice on wild versus enhanced stock. Management of combined natural and enhanced stocks is difficult and complex. Additionally, the competition of the fish to survive in the wild is an issue.

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REPRESENTATIVE AUSTERMAN asked whether the division assumes the management of halibut that are inside the three mile shore limit, and pointed out that the licensing and regulation is held by the department.

MR. SWANTON answered that halibut are governed under an international treaty, and bag limits are set in concert with the state board of fisheries.

REPRESENTATIVE AUSTERMAN explained his understanding that the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) sets the quota for the commercial and sport catch of halibut in the Pacific coastal region. The biomass fluctuates and affects both fisheries dramatically. He reported that recently the North Pacific Council took action to restrict halibut charter fishing to permitted captains only. He cautioned that this may produce a heated response from charter fishermen.

MR. SWANTON agreed.

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CHAIR THOMPSON referred to the targets listed on page one of the handout, and asked for a breakout of Target 2, and how many of the 2.5 million angler days represent resident versus non-resident.

MR. SWANTON said the information will be provided to the committee.

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CHAIR THOMPSON, referring to the same page, read "[sustain recreational fishing opportunities while] optimizing social and economic benefits" and asked for examples of the economic benefits.

MR. SWANTON pointed out that the data in use is from 2007, which reported the economic activity generated by the sport fishing industry to be estimated at \$1.4 billion statewide. The figure can be expected to fluctuate year to year, as well as by region. He opined that a decrease might be anticipated due to the recent halibut restrictions. Fishermen specifically targeting halibut may choose to cancel planned trips to Alaska and all sectors of the economy are affected; licensing, housing, tax receipts, food sales.

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CHAIR THOMPSON returned to page 2 of the handout addressing the listed challenge of modernization of the harvest data collection methods, and asked what steps the division is taking in this area.

MR. SWANTON explained that the log book program for fresh and saltwater efforts is a primary example. The log book pages have been kept by hand in the past, containing data that was considered questionable. The division has begun to implement a log sheet that can be scanned and which provides data availability within a week of receipt. During the last ten years, anglers have received a 46 page survey, which has now been downsized to about half the length. Additionally, point of sale license information is being explored, which would also allow personal use fishermen to record their data.

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REPRESENTATIVE AUSTERMAN noted the number of division employees and asked whether the numbers provided reflect FY11 or FY12 statistics.

MR. SWANTON answered that the numbers would be the same, varying by no more than one or two.

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REPRESENTATIVE AUSTERMAN raised an issued from the Mat-Su valley and the impact that the Northern Pike have had on the silver salmon stocks. He asked if the division is addressing this concern.

MR. SWANTON explained that pike in the Susitna Valley have been reported as a problem, in certain drainages, and the division has instituted sampling techniques to research the situation; eradication will not occur, but reduction of pike populations may. The division is going at the problem whole heartedly, he said.

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REPRESENTATIVE MILLER requested information regarding targeted species, by region.

MR. SWANTON will provide the specific information.

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CHAIR THOMPSON asked what the state is doing to ensuring public access for the personal use fisheries in the Copper River area, and whether there is a pending land purchase, or swap, to alleviate the conflict.

MR. SWANTON explained that the area of Chitna presents a unique situation due to the land ownership and the availability of safe access sites. He stated that he is not aware of a land swap possibility, however, that would improve access. Boat launching is also very restrictive. The division would only have authority to expend funds, which is limited regarding the personal use fishery.

CHAIR THOMPSON noted that dip netting areas on the Kenai are receiving additional pressure due to people traveling from the Chitna region.

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REPRESENTATIVE AUSTERMAN commented that a historical view of the fishery developments in the state would be helpful to the committee, by explaining the dynamics of the various fisheries and the demands on the individual stocks.

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CHAIR THOMPSON thanked the presenter and announced the next meeting.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 5:54 p.m.