

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 31, 2011

3:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Joe Paskvan, Co-Chair
Senator Thomas Wagoner, Co-Chair
Senator Bill Wielechowski, Vice Chair
Senator Bert Stedman
Senator Lesil McGuire
Senator Hollis French
Senator Gary Stevens

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator Linda Menard

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW: DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES (DNR) BY CORA
CAMPBELL, COMMISSIONER

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

CORA CAMPBELL, Commissioner
Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented Department of Fish and Game
overview.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:31:55 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMAS WAGONER called the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stedman, French, McGuire, Stevens, Wielechowski, Co-Chair Paskvan and Co-Chair Wagoner.

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Overview: Department of Natural Resources (DNR) by Cora Campbell, Commissioner

CO-CHAIR WAGONER introduced Cora Campbell.

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CORA CAMPBELL, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), introduced staff in the audience. She said their mission statement is based upon the Alaska State Constitution (Article 8) and Alaska Statutes (Title 16) and is:

To protect, maintain, and improve the fish, game, and aquatic plant resources of the state, and manage their uses and development in the best interest of the economy and the well-being of the people of the state, consistent with the sustained yield principle.

The department provides six core services:

- Harvest Management: provide opportunity to utilize fish and wildlife resources
- Stock Assessment: Ensure sustainability and harvestable surplus of fish and wildlife resources
- Customer Service: Provide information to all customers
- Public Involvement: Involve the public in management of fish and wildlife resources
- State Sovereignty: Protect the state's sovereignty to manage fish and wildlife resources
- Habitat Protection: Protect important fish and wildlife habitat during permit and project review

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Commissioner's Office Responsibilities:

- North Pacific Fishery Management Council
- Pacific Fishery Management Council
- Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission
- Pacific Salmon Commission
- Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council
- Federal Subsistence Board

- Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council
- Pacific Flyway Council
- North Slope Science Initiative
- Alaska Ocean Observing System
- North Pacific Research Board
- UAF School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences Advisory Council
- Polar Bear Range States
- US-Russia Treaty on Polar Bears
- Fisheries Excellence Committee of the Rasmussen Foundation
- UA-F Sea Grant Advisory Council
- International Porcupine Caribou Research Board
- Bering Sea Fisheries Advisory Board

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CO-CHAIR WAGONER asked her to expand on the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied that the council has significantly less money than it started with, but \$125 million is remaining. She said it is in the process of soliciting and reviewing applications to create programs to expend the remaining funds in a way that would be beneficial for restoration.

CO-CHAIR WAGONER asked for an exact balance that is remaining.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL said she would provide a breakdown of the several funds that make up the balance.

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She said the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has a commissioner and three main management divisions: Commercial Fisheries, Sport Fish and Wildlife Conservation. The Division of Subsistence is primarily for research, the Division of Habitat is primarily responsible for permitting, the Division of Administrative Services and a section of Board Support. They house two independent agencies for administrative purposes: the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) and the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council. She presented a graph that described the locations of regional and area offices across the state.

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The Division of Commercial Fisheries is primarily responsible for stock assessment, research management of fishery resources that are important for commercial fisheries, as well as

management of some subsistence fisheries. This division is also for permitting aquaculture projects and provides participation and staff support to the Board of Fish process.

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The Division of Sport Fish is primarily responsible for management of sport fisheries as well as most personal use fisheries, some subsistence fisheries, in charge of diversifying and enhancing recreational opportunity and protecting public access to recreational fisheries resources. The operational funding for this division comes primarily from federal excise taxes that are matched with money from the sale of fishing license and stamps. This division is also involved in providing staffing and support for the Board of Fisheries.

The Division of Wildlife Conservation is responsible for management and assessment of the wildlife resources; it also provides a significant amount of education to increase hunter knowledge and safety. It is responsible for providing staffing and comments for the Board of Game. It also manages the state's wildlife refuges, critical habitat areas, and wildlife sanctuaries.

The Division of Subsistence is not a management division, but is primarily research, primarily charged with quantifying and reporting information to the Boards of Fisheries and Game and the department about the customary and traditional use of Alaska's resources.

The Division of Habitat has a permitting function; it reviews applications and issues permits for any activity that takes place in an anadromous water body or fish-bearing waters. It reviews development projects that are being authorized under another agencies authority to ensure compliance.

The Division of Administrative Services provides routine administrative support, coordinates development of the budget, and provides overall logistical support for the department.

The Board Support Section is charged with providing the support and coordination for the Board of Fisheries and the Board of Game process as well as for the 82 local advisory committees that meet across the state to provide local input. The Board of Fisheries typically meets about five times a year plus teleconferences; the Board of Game meets about three times a year plus teleconferences.

The two independent agencies are the CFEC, which is responsible for limiting entry into the state's commercial fisheries, and the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council.

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COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL provided a "high-level overview" of the department's budget broken out by division. Their three management divisions - Commercial Fisheries, Sport Fisheries, and Wildlife Conservation - receive most of the funding.

The three primary funding sources for the department are general funds, federal funds, and fish and game funds (revenue from license sales).

She said a significant number of staff are seasonal and perform field and technical work, but regardless, the bulk of the employees are in the three management divisions.

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COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL said she was asked to talk about some of the challenges the department faces as well as some of their goals. She said time and resources spent responding to various federal initiatives is a significant challenge. A few of those are land management activities and commenting on Endangered Species Act listings. The BLM has a new initiative on wild lands policy, another to create landscape conservation cooperatives, and one to create coastal marine spacial plans for all the nation's waters to name a few. Because all of those initiatives have significant impacts on the state's ability to manage its resources, they become involved.

Workforce development is another challenge for the department and will continue to be an area of focus. One of the department's biggest assets is its workforce. They have a number of very highly trained knowledgeable dedicated staff, but there is a pay disparity between what they can earn as biologists for the ADF&G and what they can earn in a comparable federal positions. So, they have put efforts towards recruitment and development of an intern program trying to get students interested in working for the department early on in their careers and providing professional workforce development opportunities to make sure employees have a clear career path forward within the department, should they wish to take it.

She said they have identified education and heritage type programs as a priority. She explained that the department already puts a significant amount of effort into hunter

education and outdoor-skills type programs, but they want to do more to insure that those programs are institutionalized within the department so that they don't rely on one employee who has a passion for education or who is willing to volunteer a lot of time. Those types of outdoor skills and values are important to preserve for the next generation, especially given the tendency in society as a whole away from outdoor activities.

Looking at ways to increase the economic opportunities they are providing through development of fish and wildlife resources. There are underutilized or incidental resources for the U.S., but they might be of significant value in other countries.

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SENATOR STEDMAN referred to the struggle of competing with federal salaries, and asked if any retired PERS employees come back on with the department.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL answered that a few are in non-permanent positions.

SENATOR STEDMAN said he wanted to know the job descriptions and numbers.

SENATOR FRENCH said her figures show \$62,600,000 federal dollars, and he asked if that level of support would continue. Are there threats to her mission going forward?

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied the decline of federal dollars is a concern and it will be even bigger going forward. For example, the department receives significant federal dollars for things like marine mammals research or management of the Bering Sea Aleutian Island crab fishery, which take place primarily in federal waters. Also, a lot of salmon management in Southeast Alaska is federally funded through the Pacific Salmon Commission. In some years the state has not been able to secure those funds and has had to fund things, and she believed that would continue to be an issue.

SENATOR FRENCH noted that federal funding has been 30 percent; is that what it is now?

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL said she would provide a 15-year comparison.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked the number of positions not presently filled because of the inability to attract good employees.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied they have difficulty recruiting and sometimes do "multiple recruitments" to fill positions because they are not getting a pool of applicants that is satisfactory. They rely on the National Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to help them advertise for positions and try to get the word out about the opportunities in Alaska. She said she would get the vacancy numbers for him as well as highlight the areas of recruitment difficulty.

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CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked if she is seeing a turnover, assuming the employee goes to work for the department that they stay there two or three years and then go to another opportunity. Not that they couldn't be attracted in the beginning.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied she has seen some examples of that even though she has been with the department less than two months.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked her to talk about the department's analysis of the impacts the proposed Susitna hydro and Chakachamna projects have on fish and game.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied that a lot of the preliminary work in those projects was done at a point in the past when they were being evaluated. Now that it appears there may be momentum to move forward she has asked the Division of Habitat to take a fresh look. She anticipated a significant amount of work would have to be done.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked if she expected to have an analysis relative to the governor's proposal to move forward on Susitna Hydro with a \$65 million commitment by the time the legislature is making a decision on that.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL answered that she can provide the legislature information the department has now about the distribution of salmon stocks and other fish in the relevant area that would be helpful to the legislature.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked what kind of analysis the department has done on the impacts on fish and game of the proposed Pebble Mine.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied that she has issued multiple permits for the exploration work that is going on there now. The

Division of Habitat has done the analysis necessary to issue permits and the monitoring and follow up that is necessary. They haven't done an analysis of the development phase because an application hasn't been received, and they don't have enough information to conduct a full analysis.

SENATOR STEVENS asked her to talk more about test fish receipts, which are usually a bigger portion of the budget. Is it declining? Is the department using it less?

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COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL answered she would have to look back through the years.

At ease from 3:57 - 3:58.

[3:58:32 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR WAGONER called the meeting make to order at 3:48 p.m.

SENATOR STEVENS said it appears that test fish receipts not as important as it was, but he wanted more information on what the department's intentions were in that area.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL expanded that test fisheries take place where the test fishery is integral to assessment and management of the stock. So, that will always be a part of their budget, but other fishing goes on in excess of what needs to be done strictly for stock assessment and in-season management purposes. And the department has made an effort over the past few years to try to reduce reliance on that type of fishing, because generally fishermen don't appreciate removals of fish from the available biomass. Their FY 12 budget has a couple of those fund source type change requests.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked her what the department is doing about the lack of salmon in the Mat-Su Valley drainages.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied that a number of stocks have not reached escapement goals for a number of years and have now reached the level at which they would be designated as a "stock of concern." At the Board of Fisheries upcoming meeting they will develop an action plan for protection and restoration of those stocks. Independently of that, the department has undertaken some efforts to do habitat work in the area and do significant pike removal projects to try to reduce those predators to give stocks a better chance.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked for a timeline on that.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL answered the board would develop that in the action plan for specific stocks at their meeting which is coming up in a month. The other work the department is doing is ongoing. For example, they just announced significant funding for a four-year pike removal for the Alexander Creek drainage.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said one of his constituents spent about a half hour with him on invasive species. The zebra mussel has overtaken and decimated the Great Lakes and has been steadily moving westward. They could really decimate salmon stocks in Alaska, and he asked what kind of efforts she is looking at to try and prevent that, and others, from coming into Alaska.

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COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL answered that invasive species are of great concern to the department, but they haven't presented a major issue so far here. But seeing how they have affected other areas the department has an invasive species program and a program coordinator focused on those kinds of efforts - like education about the dangers, monitoring any situation where they think an invasive species may be appearing in the state, and "trying to nip those things in the bud when we do see them."

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked what factors within the department contributed to the increase in Porcupine Caribou herd numbers.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied that the herd crosses the border into Canada and the department works cooperatively with them to manage it. Habitat factors primarily play into that population increase or decrease.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked if anything could be done to make sure the growth is sustained.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied that she would have to think about that a little bit and talk to wildlife folks.

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CO-CHAIR PASKVAN mentioned a press release about a problem with wolves on Elmendorf/Richardson becoming increasingly habituated and aggressive towards humans. It said officials would reevaluate the approach at the end of January, and he asked where that is.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied that a number of wolves in that area had become habituated and caused quite a problem in terms of aggressive behavior towards pets and humans. The department was working with the military on a joint plan to try to deal with the aggressive pack. A first step was work towards ground-based removals. Only one wolf has been taken as a result of the program, so it is probably time to reevaluate its effectiveness.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN referred to Senator Wielechowski's concern about invasive animals or plants in the Alexander Creek, and in Northern Pike that were illegally introduced in the Susitna Basin. What are their efforts to reduce Northern Pike there?

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied the department was awarded \$635,000 through Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund for that program in addition to an increment it received last year for that type of work. It's a netting eradication program, and they don't think it will be possible to completely permanently remove the pike, but they hope to reduce their numbers to a point where salmon stocks in the area have a better chance of survival.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN said in November 2010 a report addressed climate change strategy in the Arctic. He found some interesting comments on page 1 saying:

Scientific and traditional evidence is increasingly showing that climate is changing at unprecedented rates throughout the Arctic. Because a change in climate is anticipated to affect the sustainability of Alaska's fish and wildlife resources and their uses, it is of interest to the department to assess the likelihood of climate change.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked what the department is doing.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied that strategy was developed as a starting place for the department to attempt to grappling with some of effects that a changing climate could have on species, particularly on species that are heavily relied upon for subsistence, sport and commercial fisheries. They anticipate changes in the distribution of species due to a changing climate as well as potential impacts from ocean acidification. The department is doing base line research and monitoring, and developing a prioritized research plan for the species they expect to be most impacted. Some of the factors are out of their direct control, but the idea is to learn as much as possible about the species and their habitat so the department can be in

the best position to respond as the effects start to show themselves.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked if climate change is affecting Alaska's resources so dramatically, if the department has a policy to deal with the climate change, itself, on a scientific basis.

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COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied that is outside the scope of the department's mission or its expertise. They want to understand the current reality and look for mitigation measures.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked in reference to the report what kind of plan the department has - a 10 year plan or a 50-year plan perhaps - because the potential consequences are pretty startling.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied that report he has is what is available right now. They don't have a 10 or 50-year plan in terms of responding to climate change, but they do have the strategy he is referencing. The models are highly speculative, so it's difficult to predict where they may be in 10 or 50 years.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI followed up saying if water temperatures go up even by a small amount it will have huge impacts on the salmon and other wildlife. Is that her understanding? He hoped the department would be looking at long-term impacts of climate change - how it affects the subsistence lifestyle that many people live if we're going to have a salmon crash because the water temperature goes up a degree or two. "What are you doing about that?"

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COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied that the document they are discussing is a first step in trying to lay out a strategy for dealing with this. The work of the department in responding to climate change is ongoing she said. A lot species are relatively temperature sensitive, and they are trying to identify which species are likely to be affected and which are most vulnerable, and then gather data about them and prepare.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN followed up with Senator Wielechowski's concern with the "rapidly changing climate" statement on page 13. It says the challenge from the department to the legislature will be "to adapt to a future made less certain due to a more rapidly changing climate. This will necessitate an evaluation of

existing laws, regulations, and policy, and possible changes to institutional legal and policy frameworks in an adaptive manner." He was trying to figure out what the 10 or 20-year plan is, so that the legislature can respond to the department's statement.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL replied the strategy he is referring to was completed relatively recently. The next step of the work which is going on now is to conduct a fuller evaluation of the issues that strategy identified.

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CO-CHAIR WAGONER said the department should take a pro-active approach with the Susitna dam issue, because the governor is putting a great deal of emphasis on it, and he thought the legislature would also put a great deal of emphasis on it. It is a chance to not worry about predator control of pike, for instance, in a Mat Su Valley stream. If the dam is done correctly, if the department can enhance the fish stocks above the dam and the dam can control the velocity of the flow so the fish can make a passage up through Devil's Canyon, it could be a win-win situation. But he thought the department could start working it in along with the whole development of the project sooner rather than later.

He also mentioned that he has read a lot of books and articles about climate change, and some of the best experts that started with scare tactics have backed clear away from warnings about climate change.

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CO-CHAIR WAGONER thanked Ms. Campbell for coming and bringing her staff and adjourned the meeting at 4:16 p.m.