

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE

April 6, 2011

3:36 p.m.

DRAFT

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Thomas Wagoner, Co-Chair

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

KAREN POLLEY, nominee  
Big Game Commercial Services Board  
Juneau, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Nominee to the Big Game Commercial Services Board.

KELLY VREM, nominee  
Big Game Commercial Services Board  
Chugiak, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Nominee to the Big Game Commercial Services Board.

TED SPRAKER, nominee  
Board of Game  
Soldotna, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Nominee to the Board of Game.

NATHAN TURNER, nominee

Board of Game  
Nenana, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Nominee to the Board of Game.

STANLEY "STOSH" L. HOFFMAN JR., nominee  
Board of Game  
Bethel, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Nominee to the Board of Game.

NICHOLAS YURKO, nominee  
Board of Game  
Juneau, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Nominee to the Board of Game.

DICK ROHRER, representing himself  
Kodiak, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of Karen Polley and Kelly Vrem to the Big Game Commercial Services Board and Ted Spraker and Nathan Turner to the Board of Game.

MIKE CRAWFORD, Chair  
Kenai Soldotna Fish & Game Advisory Committee  
President  
Kenai Peninsula Chapter Safari Club International  
Soldotna, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of the appointment of Ted Spraker to the Board of Game.

JOSEPH SEBASTIAN, representing himself  
Petersburg AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:**

JOAN KAUTZER, representing herself  
Petersburg, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to the confirmation of Ted Spraker and Stosh Hoffman to the Board of Game.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CO-CHAIR JOE PASKVAN** called the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:36 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Wielechowski, French, Stevens, McGuire, and Paskvan. Senator Wagoner was excused and Senator Stedman arrived during the course of the meeting.

#### **CONFIRMATION HEARINGS**

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN announced the business before the committee would be to review the Governor's nominations for the Big Game Commercial Services Board and the Board of Game. He thanked the six nominees for being willing to serve and first welcomed Karen Polley.

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KAREN POLLEY, nominee, Big Game Commercial Services Board, said she was asked to serve as a public member of the board. She has been in Alaska for more than 40 years and has traveled the state extensively. She has enjoyed the resources that Alaska offers and believes it is important that big game commercial services guides and transporters manage the state's [big game] resources well and perform in a professional and ethical manner.

MS. POLLEY informed the committee that she has served on other boards and commissions and believes she would contribute to this board as a representative of the public and as an educator. Having previously served on the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, she understands the ethics and potential difficulty associated with taking a license from someone who has demonstrated unethical behavior in their profession.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked what she hopes to accomplish if confirmed.

MS. POLLEY replied that she was asked to sit on the education committee working on the testing and assessment process as well as the instructional materials for guides. Another priority is to work on good management and cooperation with other state and federal agencies.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked makes her suited to serve on this board.

MS. POLLEY offered her belief that her experience makes her a good representative of the public. She has worked in education for more than 25 years and has previously served on a variety of boards, commissions, and advisory councils; she is interested in natural resources and is a hunter and fisher. Now that she is retired, she has time to commit to public service.

SENATOR FRENCH asked if she is new appointment.

MS. POLLEY answered yes.

SENATOR FRENCH asked if she had attended any meetings of the board.

MS. POLLEY answered yes.

SENATOR FRENCH asked her impression of the meetings.

MS. POLLEY summarized the agenda of the meeting she attended as well as the discussion that took place; she acknowledged that a lot of the information was new so she expects there will be a learning process, but nothing was difficult to follow.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN thanked Ms. Polley for her commitment to serve the state. He then asked Kelly Vrem to describe why he would like to serve on the Big Game Commercial Services Board.

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KELLY VREM, nominee, Big Game Commercial Services Board, testifying via teleconference, informed the committee that he is a life-long Alaskan who became an assistant guide in 1972 and a registered guide in 1977. He's attended most of the guide regulatory meetings since 1974 in an ongoing commitment to the longevity of guiding in the state. This historical perspective provides a basis to understand how guiding got where it is today. He's been an active a member of the Alaska Professional Hunters Association since 1979, serving several terms on that board. Serving on the Big Game Commercial Services Board is a way to give back to the profession that has provided him a pleasant lifestyle, he said.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked what priorities he might want to accomplish if confirmed.

MR. VREM replied he would like to streamline the hodgepodge of overlapping regulations and statutes and he'd like to explore the idea of putting more of the statutes related to guides into regulation. He opined that the board has the time and personnel to more adequately address the existing needs of the guiding industry as well as problems it sees ahead. He acknowledged that if the board were to sunset, the regulations would revert to statute.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked what challenges and opportunities he anticipates.

MR. VREM replied resource use is oversubscribed in some parts of the state while other areas have relatively light guiding

pressure. Something needs to be done in the more heavily used areas to regulate the guiding pressure. Working together, the Department of Natural Resources and the Big Game Commercial Services Board can find a way to balance the pressure.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN thanked Mr. Vrem for appearing before the committee. He then asked Ted Spraker to tell the committee why he would like to serve on the Board of Game.

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TED SPRAKER, nominee, Board of Game, Soldotna, said he moved to Alaska in 1973 with a bachelor's degree in wildlife management and a master's degree in range management. Working for the Denver Wildlife Research Unit, he spent several months in Southeast followed by another short assignment at the Kenai Peninsula Moose Research Center. In 1974 the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) hired him as a wildlife biologist. He was subsequently promoted to assistant area biologist and then to area biologist. He's lived in Soldotna since 1978 and that's where he raised his family. After 28 years of service he retired from the ADF&G in 2002 and was first appointed to the Board of Game in 2003. Mr. Spraker noted that he has served as the Board of Game representative on the Big Game Commercial Services Board since it was reestablished in 2004.

MR. SPRAKER stated that it's been an honor and privilege to serve on the Board of Game for three terms and he looks forward to serving another term to address the challenging issues facing the state.

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MR. SPRAKER highlighted his membership in the Alaska Trappers Association, the Kenai Peninsula Safari Club International, and the NRA. In addition, he and his wife dedicate time to youth firearm safety and educational hunting programs.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN referenced page 2 of a document Mr. Spraker submitted and asked him to explain the meaning of his statement, "the needed changes to benefit wildlife population and their habitats and a variety of users across the state."

MR. SPRAKER said one of the challenges the board has to address is crowding conditions from both resident and nonresident hunters. He explained that he supports both habitat enhancement and predator management to increase populations based on sound science. The board is charged with adhering to the principle of

sustained yield by providing healthy resources for a variety of users.

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SENATOR FRENCH asked what steps were being taken to increase the moose harvest in Unit 16B.

MR. SPRAKER responded the Board of Game is actively working on that area and made several changes during the last meeting. The board implemented a baiting and snaring program for black bear about two years ago that's been fairly successful and it [recently] approved a brown bear control program in a small 900 square mile area. Acknowledging that this program is controversial, he explained that the board is trying to make the point that, unlike wolves, the ADF&G doesn't have the necessary tools to reduce the numbers of bears in heavily timbered areas. He noted that ADF&G data showed that brown bears killed 47 percent of the [moose] calves that were marked in an area and black bears killed 21 percent.

MR. SPRAKER said he's pleased to report that efforts to reduce wolf populations in Unit 16B since 2004 have been successful enough that some moose hunting restrictions have been relaxed for residents. This year there's even a limited opportunity for nonresidents to hunt in Unit 16B.

SENATOR FRENCH questioned why Unit 16B would be opened to nonresident hunters given the fairly extraordinary predator control measures he described. It seems that such measures would only be taken if there were an insufficient number of moose.

MR. SPRAKER explained that the moose populations in Unit 16B are split. One segment is allocated to a Tier II subsistence hunting and the other population is allocated for a variety of types of hunters. One issue in this area is that the bull/cow ratio is fairly high at 48/100. Another is that intensive management mandates apply in this area. When the board looked at the history of nonresident use, it found that about 30-40 bulls were taken by nonresident hunters. The data showed that an additional 100 bulls could be taken from that area so the board decided that a little nonresident hunting could be reinstated. He noted that the board took the same position in Unit 13 and instituted a limited permit hunt for nonresidents.

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CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked how many resident hunters and how many nonresident hunters he expects in that game unit.

MR. SPRAKER replied he didn't have the exact numbers, but recent hunting restrictions on the Kenai coupled with the high bull/cow ratio in Unit 16 B will probably make that area attractive to resident hunters from Kenai. ADF&G data indicates that even if 100 more bulls were taken, it will take eight years to get the bull/cow ratio down to 20/100. That's the generally accepted ratio when the density is one or two moose per square mile, which is the density in Unit 16B.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked the number of resident hunters compared to nonresident hunters.

MR. SPRAKER estimated that the historical proportion is 50 nonresident hunters to 500-800 resident hunters.

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SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked if there is a surplus of moose in Unit 16B that warrants opening the area to nonresident hunters, or if there is a lack of moose in that area and therefore a need for an intensive moose management plan.

MR. SPRAKER replied 199-227 moose are allocated to subsistence hunting and then there's a management objective of at least 240 bulls before it will be open to additional hunting, including nonresident hunting. ADF&G currently estimates that the area has more than 240 bulls available for harvest.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said he was still having difficulty understanding how there could be an overabundance of moose such that hunting would be open to nonresidents at the same time that there's a need for intensive moose management.

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MR. SPRAKER said the board is mandated to look at other parts of the intensive management program, one of which is the population objective. They're far below the population objective and that justifies the intensive management and the management of predators to continue. The decision to allow a limited number of nonresident hunters in the area is due to the high bull/cow ratio and the harvest history by nonresidents. He assured the committee that nonresident hunting in areas where there is predator control will be carefully reviewed and if there is a higher than expected harvest, he would look at reducing the number of nonresident hunters to ensure sufficient resident opportunity.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI suggested he or ADF&G follow up and explain the rationale because it still wasn't clear. He next asked Mr. Spraker what he meant and why he was so upset when the attorney general asked the Board of Game not to allow community harvest of the Nelchina caribou herd until the appeals process was finished on a case related to the legality of that hunt. Senator Wielechowski reminded Mr. Spraker that he stated that, "To know that option is taken off the table as a board member, well they can have my seat right now if that's the way this game is going to be played."

MR. SPRAKER responded he was unartful in expressing the hope that the board would be able to do its job unencumbered, but he meant no disrespect.

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SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked if in the future he intends to take advice from the attorney general or if he views that as political pressure.

MR. SPRAKER said he learned a lesson after making that statement. While his principles haven't changed, he will adhere to good advice in the future and refrain from making similar statements.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN thanked Mr. Spraker for appearing before the committee. He then asked Nathan Turner to tell the committee why he would like to serve on the Board of Game.

[4:12:24 PM](#)

NATHAN TURNER, nominee, Board of Game, said his mailing address is Nenana and for the last 22 years he's lived on the Kantishna and Nowitna rivers. Of late, he's spending more and more time in Fairbanks with his family. He explained that his lifestyle is primarily resource dependent - trapping, operating a fish wheel, some commercial fishing as well as a lot of berry picking and gardening. He's been guiding since he was about 20 and that is an important part of the family's lifecycle in the woods.

MR. TURNER said he became interested in serving on the Board of Game after several people asked him to consider serving because of his varied use of Alaska's resources. This experience gives him an understanding of the various user groups and he'd like to help Alaskans work together on some of the complex issues facing the state and find solutions that meet the needs of the most.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked what one goal he'd like to accomplish if confirmed.

MR. TURNER said he'd like to help remind Alaskans that it is possible to work together on issues. He's taken pleasure at board meetings sitting with the different user groups and helping to find compromises. He'd also like to make sure that there's a future for people in the Bush who want to live close to the land.

SENATOR FRENCH asked if this was a first time appointment or reappointment.

MR. TURNER replied this is a first appointment.

SENATOR FRENCH asked when he was first named to the board.

MR. TURNER replied it was last May and since then he's attended several meetings via teleconference and three or four in person.

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SENATOR FRENCH asked his views on intensive game management in areas like Unit 16B at the same time that nonresident hunting is allowed.

MR. TURNER said the game management issue in Unit 16B long predates his tenure on the board, but he believes the intent of the board has typically been to eliminate nonresident harvest wherever there is a program of intensive management related to predator control. He agreed with Mr. Spraker that exceptional situations allow for some [nonresident] harvest and said it hasn't been board policy to automatically shut off all nonresident harvest. He conceded that it seems contradictory to have predator control and also provide opportunity [for nonresidents] but his recollection of Unit 16B is the same as Mr. Spraker's. The very vibrant bull population provided an opportunity to restore some historical uses to the area in addition to resident uses. The board actively debated the topic and discussed potential abuses. The record makes it very clear that this will be reviewed at the next opportunity to determine whether tighter controls are necessary.

SENATOR FRENCH encouraged Mr. Spraker to bring a new set of eyes to the practices of the board and to be alert to opportunities to make things better. He urged Mr. Spraker, as a new board member, to work toward a clear rule that says that when engaging

in intensive game management the animals will be saved for the people who live and want to raise a family in Alaska.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN thanked Mr. Turner for appearing before the committee. He then asked Stanley Hoffman to tell the committee why he wants to serve on the Board of Game.

4:22:02 PM

STANLEY "STOSH" L. HOFFMAN JR., nominee, Board of Game, testifying via teleconference, said he is a lifelong Alaskan and is now living in Bethel. Currently he's working for the Yukon Kuskoquim Health Corporation, but previously was an assistant guide in Unit 19B, a subsistence fisherman, and a commercial fisherman. He said he'd like to continue to serve on the Board of Game and believes there is value to the knowledge he gained during his first three years of service.

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CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked what one goal he would like to accomplish in the next three years.

MR. HOFFMAN replied he'd like to establish a better working relationship with federal agencies. This will make it easier to implement programs for the benefit of all Alaskans and the wildlife. He cited an example of the difficulty associated with implementing a predator control program in Unit 9 south of Dillingham when over half of the land is under federal jurisdiction.

SENATOR FRENCH asked how long he had served on the Board of Game.

MR. HOFFMAN replied he was appointed to fill a vacancy in January 2009. Responding to a further question, he said the work is demanding, but he enjoys it. He feels more effective now and believes he'd be letting the people of Alaska down if he moved on after such a short tenure.

SENATOR FRENCH asked why the board shouldn't draw a bright line and say if there is going to be intensive game management, then nonresidents will not harvest game in that management unit.

MR. HOFFMAN said when he was first appointed he was adamantly opposed to nonresident hunting in that type of situation, but he became less emphatic after listening to biologists, other experts, and the public. Unit 16B has a high bull/cow ratio and

the biologists said more bulls could be taken without jeopardizing the herd.

SENATOR FRENCH asked why Alaskans shouldn't be given the opportunity to take two moose.

MR. HOFFMAN said he'd certainly listen to both sides if someone wrote a proposal to that effect. If it makes sense, he'd agree.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN thanked Mr. Hoffman for participating in the process. He then asked Nick Yurko to tell the committee why he would like to serve on the Board of Game.

[4:30:04 PM](#)

NICHOLAUS YURKO, nominee, Board of Game, said he moved to Alaska in 1970 to fulfill a dream. He recently retired from the Juneau School District and two years ago retired from the Juneau/Douglas Fish and Game Advisory Committee after serving more than 30 years. He does a lot of volunteer work and his involvement with fish and game is mostly in Southeast.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked if he would like to accomplish something specific in the next three years.

MR. YURKO replied that he would like to ensure that children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren see the wildlife and other things he's seen here in Alaska.

SENATOR FRENCH asked if he had attended meetings over the years.

MR. YURKO said yes; he'd attended meetings throughout the state.

SENATOR FRENCH asked if he ever found himself thinking that he would have voted differently than the board.

MR. YURKO answered yes.

SENATOR FRENCH asked if he'd be able to maintain that independent view once he's sitting on the board.

MR. YURKO replied that's his intention.

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SENATOR FRENCH asked why nonresidents should be allowed to hunt in an area where intensive game management is practiced.

MR. YURKO said he's still neutral on that topic because he hasn't heard enough about the entire program in Unit 16B. He asked if it was the Legislature that implemented intensive game management.

SENATOR FRENCH said it's a legal practice but the basic idea is that the Board of Game implements intensive game management when there's a need to increase a population. It seems like it would be done in areas where the population is low, and if it's done in areas where the population is not low then the practice is being misapplied. He asked Mr. Yurko to use his best judgment when he's asked to authorize intensive game management and to focus on the people in the state of Alaska when making decisions.

MR. YURKO responded the board is tasked with making sure that the people of Alaska have priority in both the resident and subsistence programs.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN thanked Mr. Yurko for appearing before the committee and then opened public testimony.

[4:38:02 PM](#)

DICK ROHRER, representing himself, Kodiak, said he's a master guide and he served two terms on the Big Game Commercial Services Board. He encouraged the committee to confirm both Karen Polley and Kelly Vrem to the Big Game Commercial Services Board and Ted Spraker and Nathan Turner to the Board of Game. Ms. Polley asked clear thoughtful questions at the December meeting and all indications are that she'll be a very good public member. Mr. Vrem is long-serving, has a good grasp of the issues, and is well respected in the industry. Mr. Turner and Mr. Spraker are both committed to the industry and Mr. Spraker has always given fair consideration to the public. He'd never met Nick Yurko and therefore couldn't comment and while he'd only met Stanley Hoffman once, he didn't see anything that would lead him to oppose the confirmation.

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SENATOR STEDMAN joined the committee.

MIKE CRAWFORD, Chair, Kenai Soldotna Fish & Game Advisory Committee, and President, Kenai Peninsula Chapter Safari Club International, stated support for the appointment of Ted Spraker to the Board of Game. He is always well prepared, looks at all viewpoints, makes himself available outside of board meetings,

has a good knowledge base on predator management issues, and understands the need for building a good record during meetings.

4:44:19 PM

JOSEPH SEBASTIAN, representing himself, Petersburg AK, said he is a commercial fisherman, homesteader and hunter speaking in opposition to the appointment of Ted Spraker to the Board of Game. His credentials and time served are impressive, but his actions have made it clear that he has lost the crucial element respect for the animals themselves, he stated. Mr. Spraker helped bring bear trapping to Alaska without sufficient data, science, and peer review - all done to make more room for moose for sport hunters. The unnecessary cruel treatment of wild game makes Mr. Spraker an unfit manager of Alaska's precious wildlife. If the state is going to engage in predator control, it has to be done so as to minimize suffering.

MR. SEBASTIAN stated opposition to the appointment of Stosh Hoffman to the Board of Game. He too is missing a critical element, and that is humility. He voted to open the buffers of Denali [National Park] to wolf trapping, which resulted in the famous Toklat pack being all but wiped out by a snow-machine trapper. In a costly blunder to the state, this unique wolf pack, which was viewed by thousands of park visitors, provided just one trapper a half dozen wolf hides.

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JOAN KAUTZER, representing herself, said she is a 31-year resident of the state who is speaking in opposition to the confirmation of Stosh Hoffman and Ted Spraker to the Board of Game. Alaska can ill afford to taint its image with the intensive management policies that Mr. Spraker and Mr. Hoffman seem so eager to impose. Mr. Hoffman cast a vote to allow trapping on the Denali National Park boundaries thereby decimating the scientifically valuable Tolkat wolf pack. During the last Board of Game meeting both Mr. Spraker and Mr. Hoffman voted to expand the controversial and inhumane bucket-snaring program in west Cook Inlet to include both brown and black bears. She opined that such unsavory policy decisions make Alaska ripe for another tourism boycott and suggested that the board needs to diversify its radical, for-profit pro-hunting perspective to represent the majority Alaskan viewpoint. Most Alaskans believe that predator control should only be employed when scientific evidence indicates it is necessary, and then in a well-documented, humane fashion and carried out by ADF&G professionals. It should never be used as a tool to maximize profits for select business interests. She urged replacing both

Mr. Spraker and Mr. Hoffman with Alaskans who take a balanced, mainstream, and conservative approach to game management.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN closed public testimony.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN moved to forward the names of the above mentioned nominees to the full body for consideration. He reminded the members that signing the reports regarding appointments to boards and commissions does not reflect individual members' approval or disapproval of the appointees, and that the nominations are merely forwarded to the full Legislature for confirmation or rejection. Finding no objection, the names were forwarded.

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There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Paskvan adjourned the Senate Resources Standing Committee at 4:54 pm.