

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE

March 14, 2012

3:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Bert Stedman

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator Cathy Giessel

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 123

"An Act establishing May 10 of each year as Alaska Mining Day."

- MOVED SB 123 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 181

"An Act approving an interim classification by the commissioner of natural resources closing certain land within the Glacier Creek and Winner Creek drainages to new mineral entry; amending the mineral entry closure in sec. 2, ch. 8, SLA 2003, for certain land within the Glacier Creek and Winner Creek drainages; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED SB 181 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 159

"An Act establishing the Susitna State Forest; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 205

"An Act establishing the Alaska Chinook research and restoration endowment fund and relating to grants from the fund."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 123

SHORT TITLE: ALASKA MINING DAY

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) GIESSEL

04/08/11	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/08/11	(S)	RES
03/12/12	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/12/12	(S)	Heard & Held
03/12/12	(S)	MINUTE(RES)
03/14/12	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 159

SHORT TITLE: SUSITNA STATE FOREST

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) MENARD

01/17/12	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/17/12	(S)	RES, FIN
03/12/12	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/12/12	(S)	Heard & Held
03/12/12	(S)	MINUTE(RES)
03/14/12	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 181

SHORT TITLE: CLOSING CERTAIN LAND TO MINERAL ENTRY

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) GIESSEL

01/27/12	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/27/12	(S)	RES
01/27/12	(S)	RES RPT RECD W/CS AWAIT TRANSMITTAL NXT
01/27/12	(S)	RES RPT CS #DP #DNP #NR #AM
03/12/12	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/12/12	(S)	Heard & Held
03/12/12	(S)	MINUTE(RES)
03/14/12	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 205

SHORT TITLE: CHINOOK RESEARCH & RESTORATION ENDOWMENT

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) OLSON

02/21/12	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
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02/21/12 (S) RES, FIN
03/12/12 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/12/12 (S) Heard & Held
03/12/12 (S) MINUTE(RES)
03/14/12 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

MIKE SATRIE, Executive Director
Council of Alaska Producers
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Absolutely supported SB 123.

CHRIS BIRCH
Anchorage Municipal Assembly
Member, Board of Alaska Miners Association-Anchorage
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 123.

SENATOR LINDA MENARD
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 159.

MIKE ROVITO
Chief of staff for Senator Menard
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions on SB 123.

NICK STEEN, member
Ruffed Grouse Society-Southcentral Chapter
MatSu, AK

POSITION STATEMENT Supported SB 159.

CARL PORTMAN, Deputy Director
Resource Development Council (RDC)
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 159.

THOR STACY
Alaska Professional Hunters Association
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT Supported SB 159.

CHRIS MAISCH, State Forester
Director, Division of Forestry

Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 159.

DAVE SCOTT

Staff to Senator Donald Olson
Alaska State Legislature

POSITION STATEMENT Answered questions about SB 205 for the sponsor.

TIM SMITH, President

Norton Sound Bering Strait Regional Aquaculture Association
Nome, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 205.

ART NELSON

Policy and Outreach Director
Bering Sea Fishermen's' Association
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 205.

REBECCAS ROBBINS-GISCLAIR

Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 205.

CASIE STOCKDALE

Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP)
Bethel, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 205.

LORETTA BULLARD, President

Kawerak Inc.
Nome, AK

POSITION STATEMENT Supported SB 205.

ERIC VOLK, Fisheries Scientist

Division of Commercial Fisheries
Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions about SB 205 for the department.

JERRY MCCUNE, lobbyist

Cordova Fishermen United
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 205.

ROBIN SAMUELSON, President and CEO
Bristol Bay Development Corporation (BBEDC)
Dillingham, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Wholeheartedly supported SB 205.

JOE FAITH, representing himself
Dillingham, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Strongly supported SB 205.

FRANK WOODS
Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA)
Dillingham, AK

POSITION STATEMENT Supported SB 205.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:31:42 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 Stevens, McGuire, French, Wielechowski, Co-Chair Paskvan and Co-Chair Wagoner.

SB 123-ALASKA MINING DAY

[3:32:34 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR WAGONER announced consideration of SB 123 [version 27-LS0792\M was before the committee].

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN moved to report SB 123, version \M, from committee to the next committee of referral with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

CO-CHAIR WAGONER objected for public testimony. He asked Senator Giessel if she had anything to add.

SENATOR GIESSEL, sponsor of SB 123, answered no.

[3:34:17 PM](#)

MIKE SATRIE, Executive Director, Council of Alaska Producers (CAP), Juneau, AK, said he absolutely supported SB 123. He said CAP supports it not just because it recognizes the important role mining has in the economy, but also the long and varied history of the many individuals who have been involved in the mining industry and mining as a way to develop infrastructure and settlement throughout the state.

He related that the first evidence of mining goes back to the jade and copper that was traded throughout Alaska and the Pacific Northwest through the original inhabitants. And the various gold rushes brought huge immigrations of western settlers to the state, but as people came, so did the infrastructure. This bill talks about the Alaska Railroad; and in Juneau, the lights in the committee room are partially powered by the hydroelectric facilities at Annex Creek and Salmon Creek that were built to service the AJ and other mines. The water in this building that people drink also comes from the Salmon Creek reservoir. The capitol building has the pick axe and shovel motif, the gold of the sourdoughs dreams is in the state song on legislative coffee cups and the seal of the State of Alaska has a smelter at the back.

He concluded saying that today, mom and pop placer mines up to some of the larger mines that get featured on various TV specials are still working as well as the dredging operations in Nome. Modern-day mining operations produce the metals that are used in every-day life by people around the world, and so Alaska will continue to be a very strong piece of the economy.

[3:36:55 PM](#)

CHRIS BIRCH, Anchorage Municipal Assembly, said he is also on the Board of Alaska Miners Association-Anchorage, and he supports SB 123. South Anchorage has one of the only operating mines at Crow Creek. It's a good program and a good opportunity for appropriate recognition.

CO-CHAIR WAGONER closed the public hearing and removed his objection. Finding no further objections, he announced that SB 123 moved from the Senate Resources Standing Committee.

[3:38:11 PM](#)

At ease from 3:38 to 3:41 p.m.

SB 181-CLOSING CERTAIN LAND TO MINERAL ENTRY

[3:41:01 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR WAGONER announced SB 181 to be up for consideration.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN moved to bring SB 181, version 27-LS1257\M, before the committee for discussion purposes.

CO-CHAIR WAGONER objected for discussion purposes and asked the sponsor if she had any comments.

SENATOR GIESSEL, sponsor of SB 181, said she had no further comments.

CO-CHAIR WAGONER, finding no public testimony, removed his objection.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN moved to report SB 181 from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note. There were no objections and SB 181 moved from the Senate Resources Standing Committee.

[3:42:45 PM](#)

At ease 3:42 to 3:44 p.m.

SB 159-SUSITNA STATE FOREST

[3:44:47 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR WAGONER announced SB 159 to be up for consideration [SB 159, 27-LS1179\M was before the committee].

[3:45:01 PM](#)

SENATOR LINDA MENARD, sponsor of SB 159, introduced her chief of staff and said they were working on a committee substitute (CS) that would address two items. First, it will exempt the private inholdings that lie within the proposed forest boundaries and secondly, it will address intent language that Senator Stedman spoke to during Monday's meeting.

MIKE ROVITO, chief of staff for Senator Menard, said he had no testimony and was ready for public testimony.

CO-CHAIR WAGONER found no further testimony off net.

[3:46:26 PM](#)

NICK STEEN, member, Ruffed Grouse Society-Southcentral Chapter, MatSu, AK, supported SB 159, but proposed modifying the boundaries to include all unencumbered state lands draining into Cook Inlet between Beluga Lake and the southern boundaries of the Denali National and State Parks. He explained that currently the bill is comprised of 14 non-contiguous parcels of land and keeping this land in state ownership under the forest designation is important to guaranteeing continued space for recreational use of ever expanding population centers in Southcentral and for wildlife, and to retain the character of the land most people came to Alaska to experience.

He said a state forest is the least restrictive land designation that can be managed for everyone's benefit with the exception of those wishing to see land transferred to private ownership. As the population of Southcentral increases, the recreational demand can no longer be met if land is continued being released into private ownership.

MR. STEEN said numerous land disposal programs throughout the area have been considered and much of the waterfront land with easy access points has already been ceded to private ownership. These private inholdings will make access for timber extraction difficult.

He stated that interspersing additional transfers of land to private ownership within the land designated for forest management makes no sense at all. Under the recently enacted Susitna Matanuska Area Plan (SMAP) some of the areas that he is requesting to be designated as a state forest are slated for land disposal for cabin sites or agriculture.

Transfer of land into private ownership as envisioned by the drafters of our state constitution is laudable, Mr. Steen stated, but as Governor Hammond said, it is the ultimate lock up. Private ownership denies public use of the specific parcel that frequently controls access to adjacent public lands, and a NIMBY attitude influences management of public lands within view of that parcel. This NIMBY attitude impacts the state's ability to manage timber resources, wildlife resources, and mining activities. Those who drafted the constitution didn't ever envision the population growth that Alaska has recently experienced. A forest designation for this entire area, even though it is not all productive timber land, will provide uniform management guidelines throughout the area.

Multiple land designations lead to conflicting land use regulations. A forestry designation is the least controlling land use pattern possible and will afford future generations the greatest opportunity to experience Alaska. The forest designation can be modified in the future to accommodate changes in needs. Returning private land to public ownership is difficult, time consuming and cost prohibitive.

In summary, Mr. Steen said, this is the last remaining large parcel of state land in Southcentral that can be set aside for public use and enjoyment. Effective management of timber resources enhances wildlife populations, creates an industry utilizing a renewable resource that improves the economic basis

of the community while supporting the demand for recreational areas to hunt, trap, fish, snow machine, hike and otherwise enjoy the great out-of-doors.

3:50:55 PM

CARL PORTMAN, Deputy Director, Resource Development Council (RDC), Anchorage, AK, supported SB 159. He said the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) currently manages 9.5 million acres of forest land in the Matanuska and Susitna Valleys. Of this land, timber management is allowed on approximately 2.1 million acres. The remaining land is designated for other uses including land sales, recreation, water uses and fish and wildlife habitat. Over 3.1 million acres is protected in legislatively designated state parks, refuges and public use areas.

Establishment of the forest would insure that some land would remain available for long term forest management. It would allow the Division of Forestry to more actively manage the lands and vegetation to promote a variety of forest ages, which in turn would maximize the sustainable supply of timber from state timber base and provide for more diverse and healthy habitats for wildlife. In addition, active management would also help reduce wildfire risk. The Division of Forestry would manage the state forest for a long-term supply of timber to local processors and retain land in state ownership for other multiple uses. An enhanced long-term timber supply would help support the forest products industry, provide fuel for sustainable biomass energy projects and create new jobs.

It would also benefit the recreational sector as the state intends to develop access to new state forests and encourage a broad range of multiple uses. Those multiple uses would include an annual timber harvest and provide important economic opportunities to local communities, businesses and residents. It is important to keep in mind, Mr. Portman said, that SB 159 would establish a new state forest from state lands presently designated for forest management. The Susitna State Forest would be managed consistent with the management intent under the current Susitna Matanuska and the Southeast Susitna area plan. Alaska's Forest Practices Act would also apply to management activities on the forest and is designed to protect both fish habitat and water quality.

MR. PORTMAN summarized that RDC supports SB 159 and believes the proposed state forest will be of much benefit to the local economy creating and sustaining much needed jobs in the forest products industry while providing many other opportunities.

[3:53:46 PM](#)

THOR STACY, Alaska Professional Hunters Association, Juneau, AK, supported SB 159. He said for an industry that relies on fore-sighted management practices for renewable resources on public land they see the advantages of the intent and the concept of this bill, specifically the potential for habitat improvement. And in general, they support the concept of renewable resource use and development in conservation on public lands. He said their members rely on this access for opportunity and viability.

[3:55:22 PM](#)

MR. STACY said he hoped their "constructive concerns" could be worked out in the management plan for state forests as it has in the past. He asked for some ability to work access in terms of timing to hunting seasons with any kind of timber development or infrastructure that would be commercial in nature and outreach to members that use the game management unit in question, mostly Unit 16.

The other concern his organization has was just the ability for there to be interagency communication in the subsets of DNR to make sure that hunting opportunities are retained along with other multiple uses.

CO-CHAIR WAGONER asked him to tell the committee where he came from to testify.

MR. STACY said he came from Juneau.

CO-CHAIR WAGONER commented that he was from Wiseman, way up North.

MR. STACY remarked that the forests up in that area are "pretty diminutive in stature."

CO-CHAIR WAGONER found no further testimony and closed the public hearing. He set SB 159 aside.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN said Mr. Steen from Ruffed grouse Society was talking about adding some land to this forest and he wanted to know if Mr. Maisch had any comment on that.

[3:57:48 PM](#)

CHRIS MAISCH, State Forester, and Director of the Division of Forestry, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Juneau, AK, responded that Mr. Steen was encouraging the size of the state

forest to be increased because all the lands that were classified for forestry purposes under the area plan are proposed to be in the state forest. That area planning process had a lot of public input and interagency coordination and has identified other state lands for other purposes: habitat for wildlife, agricultural purposes, settlement, and a number of others. To acquire additional land for the state forest, the division would have to negotiate with other state agencies that have the lands designated in other ways for higher and better use. It wouldn't be impossible to make changes, but it has been already vetted strongly and this is the package they came up with.

CO-CHAIR WAGONER said he would hold SB 159 in committee.

SB 205-CHINOOK RESEARCH & RESTORATION ENDOWMENT

[3:59:30 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR WAGONER announced SB 205 to be up for consideration [CSSB 205(RES), labeled 27-LS1312\D, was before the committee].

[4:00:02 PM](#)

DAVE SCOTT, staff to Senator Donald Olson, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor of SB 205, said he was available for questions.

[4:01:17 PM](#)

TIM SMITH, President, Norton Sound Bering Strait Regional Aquaculture Association, Nome, AK, supported SB 205. He said something is really wrong with King salmon statewide and particularly in western Alaska. In Norton Sound, the Pilgrim River had 44 fish; last year was the same. For all practical purposes that run is extinct. Another King salmon run on Boston Creek is also going extinct. The problem is they don't know why; there is a lot of speculation and a lot of possible factors, but they won't know why until research efforts are stepped up. This bill is a good way to do it. He closed saying it would be "a darned shame" if we lose our Chinook runs anywhere. He started commercial fishing on the Yukon River in 1975 and he never believed it would come to this.

[4:04:03 PM](#)

ART NELSON, Policy and Outreach Director, Bering Sea Fishermen's' Association, Anchorage, AK, supported SB 205. He said this organization has worked to develop sustainable Bering Sea and western Alaska fishery resources. He also was chair of the Steering Committee, Arctic Yukon Kuskokwim (AYK) Sustainable

Salmon Initiative, a collaborative research effort involving a number of organizations including the Association of Village Council Presidents, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Kawerak Inc., Alaska Department of Fish and Game, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bering Sea Fishermen's Association. He had also served about six years on the Alaska Board of Fisheries.

MR. NELSON said a dramatic shift has been seen in the abundance of Chinook salmon; many rivers in western Alaska, particularly the Unakleet, the Yukon/Kuskokwim and Nushigak Rivers, in addition have suffered prolonged declines and in more recent years, rivers in Upper Cook Inlet and Copper River are seeing declining returns. It's especially troubling that many of these rivers are not even meeting their escapement goals and have significant restrictions to subsistence and failure to meet subsistence needs.

He said weak returns also exacerbate the allocative tensions between sport, commercial and personal use user groups, and those tensions are already high when the runs are healthy. He said establishing a program to effectively understand and address the causes of the declines of Chinook salmon will require multi-disciplinary and multi-year research across the full salmon lifecycle, especially in the marine environment where Chinook spend 80 to 90 percent of their life history and complete 90 percent of their growth. Effective research across the full lifecycle requires long-term stable funding sources such as the one under consideration today.

MR. NELSON said over the past 10 years, the AYK Sustainable Salmon Initiative has funded a number of important research projects including developing a research action plan for AYK Chinook salmon. The purpose is to identify which variables or processes are the most likely causative factors in recent declines and to produce a detail set or research priorities in targeting the key drivers of Chinook abundance. This will be accomplished by establishing a panel of fisheries scientists to review and synthesize the information available from all published sources and directly from the salmon managers. Drawing on that synthesis, the panel will identify key variables and processes that are affecting Chinook abundance including:

- when during their life history is any variable being operative
- hypotheses about the processes involved
- the potential strength of their effect of abundance

-the potential to be affected by management actions

The panel would develop detailed recommendations for future research.

[4:07:47 PM](#)

MR. NELSON said another project they have been involved with is escapement goals and evaluation of escapement goals to assure sustainable fisheries. When this project is completed the panel will offer advice on the most appropriate research approaches and management efforts. The panel will consider the range of approaches and analytical framework such as:

- what are the best methods for dealing with data limited situations
- what methods exist for determining escapement goals
- which are the best to use in different drainage systems
- what is the best model for establishing escapement goals in subsistence dominated fisheries (especially for the Arctic Yukon Kuskokwim area)

[4:08:24 PM](#)

He said there are a number of other examples of endowment funded research programs in Alaska and each has extensive involvement by state agencies, staff and scientists. The sustained endowment-based funding from these has enabled organizations to undertake high quality long-term interdisciplinary research programs, but this one is ideal, because it's focused on such an important fish to Alaska. It's the state fish and it's the least numerous of the five species, but the most highly prized by a lot of Alaskans.

MR. NELSON thanked Senator Olson and Representative Herron and their staffs and co-sponsors for creating SB 205.

[4:09:53 PM](#)

REBECCAS ROBBINS-GISCLAIR, Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA), Anchorage, AK, supported SB 205. She said YRDFA is an association of commercial and subsistence fishermen and women on the Yukon River with a mission of promoting healthy wild fisheries and cultures on the Yukon River.

She said that salmon are a critical resource in western Alaska where it serves as a primary source of food and the commercial fisheries are one of the only means of income. Chinook salmon in particular are an essential part of the culture, diet and

economy in that region. The Chinook salmon are declining rapidly on the Yukon River and nobody is sure what the reasons are. Escapement goals to Canada haven't been met since 2007 despite some pretty dramatic restrictions on subsistence harvest. Subsistence needs as specified by the Board of Fisheries for amounts necessary for subsistence haven't been met since 2008 and it's like they will not have been met in 2011 when numbers come in.

MS. ROBBINS-GISCLAIR said commercial fishing for King salmon has been pretty much eliminated; commercial Chum salmon fisheries have also been restricted to protect the King salmon that are in the river at the same time. Even when escape goals have been met, the subsequent returns from the escapements have been poor. These declines have had a dramatic effect on Yukon River communities. Very little information is available about what is causing it or how to plan for future run sizes. Chinook are a long-lived species and it's critical to have a dedicated and consistent source of funding for Chinook salmon research, so its lifecycle can be studied. This type of research needs to be well coordinated and funded over an extended period.

She explained that some federal funds were allocated to research this issue, but there were still gaps in the data.

4:14:30 PM

CASIE STOCKDALE, Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), Bethel, AK, supported SB 205. She said she is also a biologist and that AVCP is a recognized tribal organization and non-profit Alaska regional corporation representing 56 member indigenous villages in Western Alaska. She thanked the sponsors of SB 205 saying the Chinook stocks in the Yukon and Kuskokwim drainages and the Chinook stocks throughout the AYK region are in a serious state of decline. Currently, on both rivers the productivity for Chinook is at or below one recruit per spawner, meaning that the population can barely replace itself even with no harvest. These sharp declines have prompted widespread restrictions and closures of subsistence and small scale commercial fisheries each year, causing nutritional, economic and cultural disaster for those who depend on the returns of these salmon stocks.

In response, she said that AVCP recently hosted a special convention to identify ways to conserve Chinook and how to incorporate tribes in their management. The executive board passed Resolution 12-03-03 expressing full support for HB 332, establishment of the Alaska Chinook Salmon Research and

Restoration Endowment Fund. AVCP also strongly supports SB 205 as there is an urgent need to create stable, long-term diversified sources of funding to implement high-quality research and restoration programs to address the causes of the declines of the Chinook salmon.

[4:17:34 PM](#)

LORETTA BULLARD, President, Kawerak Inc., Nome, AK, supported SB 205. She said Kawerak is the regional tribal nonprofit association for the Bergin Straits region. They have seen huge decline's in Chinook returns in northern Norton Sound as well as southern Norton Sound. In 2011, only 44 Chinook returned to the Pilgrim River and in 2003 when they first started counting there, the Chinook run was 1,016. On the North River close to Unakleet, which is very dependent on Chinook for both subsistence and personal fisheries as well as Chinook commercial fishery, their runs have gone from 1,452 in 2003 down to 864. The Chinook runs in 2003 on the Koniaq by Ilum, the longest-running counting tower in the Bering straits region managed by the ADF&G, were at 744 and last year it had gone down to 57 fish. They question whether or not these stocks can even biologically sustain themselves.

Their concerns have been brought to their regional fish biologists who say these are naturally occurring declines and nothing can be done. But they are very concerned about it and support this project so the declines can be addressed. Because of the extremely poor returns, they sought to have a Chinook and Chum disaster declared by the U.S. Department of Commerce for the stocks in Norton Sound two years ago, but weren't successful because while the Chinook return was way down in southern Norton Sound (that doesn't have a commercial fishery), the commercial fishermen in southern Norton Sound were able to offset their economic losses by fishing other stock. Therefore, no economic disaster occurred, so therefore a disaster was not declared. In northern Norton Sound, the commercial fisheries had been closed for so long that an economic disaster declaration was not possible, since a disaster is determined by the decline over the previous five years of average fishing income. Ms. Bullard stated this is not an income issue; their stocks are so depressed that they wonder if they will survive. Yet, there doesn't seem to be a sense of urgency in terms of addressing it.

She feared the situation is worse than it appears, because on the Pilgrim where stocks have gone from over 1,000 fish annually down to 44 last summer, there is no escapement goal and that means there is no escapement goal to worry about meeting.

[4:22:52 PM](#)

At ease from 4:22 to 4:25 p.m.

[4:25:01 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR WAGONER called the meeting back to order at 4:25 p.m.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said he supported the bill, but asked ADF&G if this program should be limited to just Chinook salmon. The MatSu Valley has had low salmon returns for a number of years and a Cook Inlet Salmon Task Force was assembled to figure it out. Other areas of the state experience low returns, too.

[4:26:52 PM](#)

ERIC VOLK, Fisheries Scientist, Division of Commercial Fisheries, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Anchorage, AK, responded that there is ample room for funding for all salmon species in Alaska and they all have substantial knowledge gaps and could be managed better. He said, however, that Chinook salmon represent an area of special concern.

[4:28:03 PM](#)

JERRY MCCUNE, lobbyist, Cordova Fishermen United, Juneau, AK, supported SB 205. He said doing research in some areas would help gathering more information about other species, because sometimes the streams are right next to each other. He said it's tough enough for the department to get funding to just do some of the research they do now, but Alaska has the last abundance of wild Chinook in the world. Most of the stocks in Washington and Oregon are hatchery stocks.

MR. MCCUNE said he understood the distrust of ADF&G in some areas, but someone has to be in charge. If he was on the board today from Southcentral, the first thing he would want to do is have the department write a report to get a baseline on what the gaps in information are from each area and where the Chinook are.

[4:29:56 PM](#)

ROBIN SAMUELSON, President and CEO, Bristol Bay Development Corporation (BBEDC), Dillingham, AK, wholeheartedly supported SB 205. He said BBEDC represents 17 villages within the Bristol Bay region and they have had problems with their Chinook salmon for the last 30 years, and things are getting worse. The first time was when the Japanese high seas drift fleet annihilated the Chinook in western Alaska by taking 275,000 in one year. From there they went into a 20-year rebuilding mode. The rebuilding

mode was working, but then the offshore trawl fishery was happening and they again noticed a decline in the salmon stocks.

He remarked that the Nushigak, the biggest river in Bristol Bay, has not been making escapement for the last few years. It hasn't had a commercial salmon season and restrictions have been placed on sports fishermen; fortunately subsistence hasn't been restricted. However, in Togiak, Naknek, Quijak, Egegik, Ugashik and Port Heiden it's a whole different story. Their stocks are so small now that they might not come back. This money would allow them to set up enhancement projects to get the runs back over time.

MR. SAMUELSON related that just two or three years ago, a Chinook cap was placed on the trawl fisheries in the Bering Sea thanks to the State of Alaska, but this bill is one of the major pieces of legislation that will save Chinook salmon whether it's in Southeast, Cook Inlet, Bristol Bay, or Norton Sound.

[4:32:28 PM](#)

JOE FAITH, representing himself, Dillingham, AK, strongly supported SB 205. King salmon help define Alaska to the rest of the world, he said. They are important to subsistence, which has important nourishment, economic and cultural values. Last year he chose not subsistence fish for Kings on the Nushigak, because of his concern. Kings are also important to commercial fishing in Bristol Bay where he has direct-marketed Kings for \$5/lb. Another direct marketer told him that she did it for \$10/lb., but last year there was no commercial King season. The concern for Kings also affected Red salmon fishing on the Nushigak, because ADF&G put restrictions on those to meet King salmon escapement.

[4:33:51 PM](#)

FRANK WOODS, Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA), Dillingham, AK, supported SB 205. He said the Alaska Chinook Salmon Research and Restoration Endowment Fund would enhance research from beginning to end. A lot more people are needed to be involved in the processes of salmon management, habitat and research.

MR. WOODS related that BBNA represents 31 Bristol Bay tribes and they have much in common with other regions' stocks of concern. He asked them to remove section 4(b)(1) in section 37.14.685 of SB 205 [page 6, lines 19-20] that says you have to be listed by the ADF&G as a "stock of concern" in order to be considered for the grant process, because some of these rivers have such small

Chinook returns that their numbers aren't even listed. He also asked them to eliminate "(4) declined significantly from historic yield levels" as a qualification for a grant.

[4:37:35 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR WAGONER, finding no further testifiers, closed the public hearing.

SENATOR STEVENS asked Mr. Scott to comment on Mr. Woods thoughts on the criteria for grants on page 6.

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MR. SCOTT responded that the sponsor would consider them; they are not digging in their heels.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked what he thought about extending the fund to salmon stocks across the state.

MR. SCOTT replied that the sponsor wouldn't support doing that, not because other salmon stocks don't need that research, but because King stocks require special attention.

CO-CHAIR WAGONER said in looking at items (1) through (4) on page 6, he understood Mr. Wood's concern about the runs that have gone so far down that they are below the criteria, and thought that language could be taken care of easily.

SENATOR FRENCH noted that those items were a series of "ors" and meant that it doesn't matter if it's not a stock of concern, as long as it has declined significantly from historic yield levels.

CO-CHAIR WAGONER said he would hold SB 205 in committee.

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CO-CHAIR WAGONER adjourned the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting at 4:41 p.m.