

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 18, 2013  
1:02 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Eric Feige, Co-Chair  
Representative Dan Saddler, Co-Chair  
Representative Mike Hawker  
Representative Kurt Olson  
Representative Paul Seaton  
Representative Peggy Wilson  
Representative Geran Tarr  
Representative Chris Tuck

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Craig Johnson

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Representative Andrew Josephson

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

OVERVIEW(S): ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

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

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided a PowerPoint overview of the  
Alaska Department of Fish & Game.

JEFF REGNART, Director  
Division of Commercial Fisheries (DCF)  
Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As part of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game overview, provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Division of Commercial Fisheries and on chinook salmon abundance and productivity.

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

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As part of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game overview, provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Division of Sport Fish.

DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Director  
Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC)  
Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As part of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game overview, provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Division of Wildlife Conservation.

RANDY BATES, Director  
Division of Habitat  
Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As part of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game overview, provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Division of Habitat.

HAZEL NELSON, Director  
Division of Subsistence  
Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As part of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game overview provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Division of Subsistence.

## **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1:02:49 PM](#)

**CO-CHAIR DAN SADDLER** called the House Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. Representatives Tuck, Hawker, P. Wilson, Olson, Tarr, Seaton, Feige, and Saddler were present at the call to order. Representative Josephson was also present.

**OVERVIEW(S): Alaska Department of Fish & Game**

1:03:23 PM

CO-CHAIR SADDLER announced that the only order of business would be an overview of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game.

1:03:55 PM

CORA CAMPBELL, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), began by noting that the department's mission is based upon the Alaska State Constitution (Article 8) and Title 16 of the Alaska Statutes [slide 2]. She explained that ADF&G has six core services [slide 3], the first being harvest management, which provides the opportunity to utilize fish and wildlife resources and which is measured by evaluating the commercial harvest, license sales, user success, and other metrics. Another core service is stock assessment, which is measured by whether escapement goals are being met and whether wildlife surveys are being performed. A core service important to the department is customer service, she continued, which is met by having programs for angling skills, wildlife education, wildlife management, and providing information to the public. Public involvement is a core service that makes sure the public has the information needed to participate in the Board of Fisheries and the Board of Game regulatory processes, as well as providing outreach and information to the public to involve Alaskans in the department's management decisions.

1:06:27 PM

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL pointed out that state sovereignty is a core service on which ADF&G focuses. She said this service is implemented by the department participating in federal land management plans, supporting the Department of Law when it has lawsuits related to sovereignty for fish and wildlife management, and representing the state in arenas such as the federal subsistence board and Endangered Species Act decisions. Habitat protection, she continued, is a core service that the department measures by making sure developers are in compliance with the permits that have been issued by the Division of Habitat.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL drew attention to the responsibilities of the commissioner's office listed on slide 4, pointing out that the commissioner participates in a large number of boards and

commissions. Of note, she said, is the state's representation on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, the federal body responsible for management of fisheries from 3-200 miles [offshore], and the Pacific Salmon Commission, the body that negotiates and implements the Pacific Salmon Treaty and whose harvest agreements affect Southeast Alaska and the Yukon [River].

[1:07:57 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL stated that ADF&G has three large management divisions (slide 5): Commercial Fisheries, Sport Fish, and Wildlife Conservation. The Division of Subsistence is not a management division, she explained, but rather a research division responsible for collecting information about customary and traditional use of Alaska's wildlife resources, with subsistence fisheries and hunts managed by the relevant management divisions. The Division of Habitat is primarily a permitting division, she continued, and in addition to its Division of Administrative Services, ADF&G has the Boards Support Section that supports the Board of Fisheries and the Board of Game regulatory process. Attached to the department administratively are the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission and the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, for which the department provides administrative support.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL displayed a map of permanent regional and area office locations [slide 6] and noted that the map does not include the locations of summer field camps or weir projects.

[1:09:21 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL pointed out that the department's three large management divisions make up the bulk of staff positions [slide 7]. She added that ADF&G has nearly as many seasonal employees as full-time employees because much of the department's work is field work during the field season rather than year round.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL noted that the bulk of the department's [Fiscal Year 2014] budget goes to the three larger management divisions [slide 8]. The department's major funding sources are the general fund, federal funds, and the fish and game fund.

[1:10:15 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL outlined ADF&G's major accomplishments in 2012 [slide 9], saying that improvements to salmon research included completion of a major genetic identification program for stock in Western Alaska that is informing fisheries management decisions that the Board of Fisheries is making this cycle. Improvements were made to the chinook program and coho programs in Southeast Alaska, as well as to projects in Upper Cook Inlet. The department's intensive management programs, ongoing in a number of game management units and aimed at increasing the numbers of caribou or moose available for hunting, have resulted in elevated harvest levels and herd rebound.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL stated that when she first became commissioner, the Division of Subsistence was faced with the big challenge of 25-year-old data or no data for communities. The department therefore increased the division's resources and found opportunities for cooperation when there are development projects or proposed road projects. Subsistence data is now key to those types of projects moving through the permitting process, with the double benefit of facilitating permitting while updating the data bases for regulatory decisions that the boards of fisheries and game need to make.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL related that ADF&G has been doing its part in the governor's permitting initiative by examining its permitting through the Division of Habitat. A need was identified for habitat staff to be more involved early when projects are being proposed, and additional resources were secured for this division in anticipation of an increased workload as some larger development projects come on line.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL announced that the William Jack Hernandez Sport Fish Hatchery in Anchorage and the Ruth Burnett Sport Fish Hatchery in Fairbanks are now online, working well, and producing fish. Stocking has increased and is now back to the historic level prior to when the heat was lost at the "Elmendorf hatchery" and fishermen have expressed pleasure at being able to fish the stocked waters.

[1:13:32 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL reviewed the issues and challenges before the department [slide 10]. She said chinook salmon abundance and productivity was a very serious concern this management season. Restrictions had to be implemented that were very tough on Alaskans who rely on chinook salmon for subsistence,

economics, sport fisheries, or personal use. The department has responded with a large initiative to improve its chinook salmon research programs, which is a major item in ADF&G's capital budget this year. The department has been looking for ways to increase fishing and other economic opportunities, she continued. For example, the department is looking for places where an investment by the state can lead to a big economic return for communities. Closely related to this is incremental reductions in ADF&G's funding for salmon research as a result of inflationary pressures over time. In turn, this leads to a weir in the water for two months now running only four to six weeks, which means not getting the full picture of what is going on with salmon stocks. That will be addressed this year by putting more resources toward the department's salmon research project and restoring some projects to full strength so as to get a full picture throughout the run.

[1:16:14 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL, continuing her discussion of issues and challenges [slide 10], said the department has staff dedicated to responding to the major concerns of state sovereignty and endangered species. The department was pleased, she related, with the recent court decision that removed the critical habitat designation for polar bears. In agreement with the department's point of view, the court determined that the baseline science was not there for listing polar bears over such a large [area] and that more research needs to be done. Looking at endangered species across the board, she continued, more and more petitions and listings are being seen. A particular concern is that - for the first time - abundant and stable species are being listed because of speculation about future impacts of climate change. Therefore the department will have to continue dedicating a lot of resources towards this challenge.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL reported the need for modernizing the department's licensing system which issues about 700,000 licenses per year using paper. She said resources have been put into scoping what it would take to develop a modern system for sport fish and hunting licenses, as well as permits. Online reporting is also being researched so that people would not have to manually send in their reports.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL provided the names and phone numbers for herself, the department's deputy commissioner, and the legislative liaison [slide 11].

1:19:15 PM

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL, responding to Representative Tarr and Co-Chair Saddler, agreed to provide their offices with further information regarding state sovereignty and endangered species issues, including information about current listings, areas of concern, and work the state has done to fund research on species that will likely be subject to future listing discussion.

1:20:04 PM

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL, responding to Representative Seaton, said the department currently does not have a permitting backlog. She added that Randy Bates, director of the Division of Habitat, will be providing information about the average time it takes for issuing each type of permit. The department has set goals for itself about how timely it wants to be with permits and - so far - has been able to keep within those goals and not be an impediment to the people needing permits.

1:21:01 PM

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL, responding to Co-Chair Saddler, offered her belief that ADF&G has not considered the possibility of potential synergy between its permitting and licensing systems since they are separate data bases. She deferred to Mr. Bates for answering whether the Division of Habitat's permitting system is on paper or online and whether that system has any needs.

1:22:05 PM

JEFF REGNART, Director, Division of Commercial Fisheries (DCF), Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), noted that the division's mission is to manage, protect, rehabilitate, enhance, and develop the fisheries and aquatic plant resources in the interest of the state's economy [slide 13].

MR. REGNART said primary responsibilities of DCF include [slide 14]: management of commercial, personal use, and subsistence fisheries within state waters; management of shellfish and some groundfish fisheries, some of which go beyond the 3-mile state limit and so management is through agreements with the federal government; conducting research on Alaska's aquatic resources; planning and permitting the state's salmon hatcheries and mariculture activities; participating in negotiations under the

Pacific Salmon Treaty and Alaska-Yukon Treaty; and coordinating with federal and international fisheries management agencies.

1:23:43 PM

MR. REGNART provided an organizational overview [slide 15], noting that DCF has more seasonal staff [439] than permanent staff [311] because of the work it does seasonally. He said the division has a budget of \$72 million, is divided into 5 regions, has 84 seasonal offices and 20 permanent offices, and it also has [6] large research vessels from which work is conducted.

MR. REGNART discussed the division's core services [slide 16], stating that harvest management is a key service done every year. The core service of stock assessment and applied research is the underpinning for harvest management, and other core services are aquaculture permitting and information services and public participation.

1:24:54 PM

MR. REGNART addressed the seafood industry's economic impact on the state [slide 17], pointing out that Alaska is one of the largest commercial fishery economies in the world. In 2011, total landings were just under \$2 billion, with Alaska accounting for 95 percent of all salmon landings in the U.S. In 2010, he said, there were about 37,000 permit holders and crew, and another 21,000 people were involved in the seafood processing industry. Since 2002, the ex-vessel value of salmon has risen annually and is back to its more historical levels for value to the state [slide 18].

1:25:47 PM

MR. REGNART reviewed the division's 2012 highlights [slide 19]. He noted that chinook salmon abundance and productivity has been a challenge for both the department and the users, and that a research initiative is being undertaken this legislative session. He said DCF looks at increased fishing and economic opportunities, especially when designing increments and looking at new projects to bring to bear. For example, funding was received for rockfish studies in Southeast Alaska that has allowed some additional opportunity, and spot shrimp management money has opened the door to a different way of managing, which the division hopes will provide more opportunity and increase the economic benefit. The division has received additional dollars for extending some of the programs mentioned by

Commissioner Campbell, he continued, such as the reduced ability to enumerate fish because of inflation. This coming year the division is looking for additional help through the budget, which would allow the division to count longer by counting on both shoulders of the season on a variety of fisheries, which is where the increased economic benefit will come from, especially for salmon and herring. He reported that a project has been put together by the state, private non-profit (PNP) hatcheries, and processors to research interactions between wild and hatchery salmon, the first large-scale research effort in this regard.

[1:28:08 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK asked whether the salmon runs coming into Cook Inlet over the past two years are related to destruction of the Japanese fishing fleets by the [March 2011 tsunami off the Pacific coast of Japan].

MR. REGNART replied that 30 years ago there was definitely a concerted high seas effort; however, through the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act ("Magnuson-Stevens Act") and the 200-mile limit, many of the fisheries that would have an effect on Alaska-bound salmon either no longer exist or are stringently monitored. Excepting occasional high seas drift netting, he continued, the division does not think there were unknown fisheries. While there have been rumors within the industry, the division has been unable to substantiate a correlation between loss of the [Japanese] commercial fishing fleet and what is being seen in Alaska. Responding further, he said his best guess, at this point, is that it is more of a coincidence.

[1:29:45 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK, noting that he has seen articles about radioactive debris in the ocean from the tsunami, inquired whether any program will be put in place to test Alaska fish for radioactivity.

MR. REGNART responded that the division has been working with the federal government on these aspects and the division's primary role in this has been identifying the debris from the tsunami when it comes ashore in Alaska. The division has many people in the field who can report debris when it is spotted so that it can be cleaned up to [prevent contamination]. He said he is unaware of contamination in any of Alaska's fisheries from that outfall. The federal government is the lead agency on

this, he said, and the division has not found any reports of contamination. The division does not have a testing program within state waters and has no reason at this point to believe it is necessary.

[1:31:13 PM](#)

MR. REGNART, responding to Co-Chair Feige, said he would describe Alaska's mariculture industry as being stable and potentially on the uptick. Much work is involved with bringing some of those products to market, he explained, but through efforts of the legislature, ADF&G, and governor's office some of the regulatory hurdles have been cleared and the red tape less than it was 10 years ago. He offered his understanding that the recent poor economy has sometimes made it difficult to procure financing for this type of work.

[1:33:11 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FEIGE requested Mr. Regnart to let the committee know if there are ways it could help with the mariculture industry. He asked what the difference is between mariculture and aquaculture.

MR. REGNART explained that mariculture is geoducks, littleneck clams, and oysters, while aquaculture is the salmonids, which, he confirmed in further response, are little salmon.

[1:34:17 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FEIGE noted that hatcheries are expensive, can only be put in specific spots, and must have a source of continuous fresh water. He inquired whether DCF has looked at other methods that could be used for places in the state where salmon stocks are threatened.

MR. REGNART confirmed the division has been looking at this and said today's chinook presentation will discuss an enhancement piece for which a report is being prepared that will speak to other things that can be done, such as in-stream incubator boxes and egg misting. He reported that over the last few years the division has been cooperating with some of the users in Norton Sound in this regard, and more of this will be seen in the next few years.

[1:36:17 PM](#)

MR. REGNART, responding to Representative P. Wilson, noted that the [Ruth Burnett Sport Fish Hatchery] in Fairbanks is for sport fish stocking programs so questions about the hatchery should go to the director of the Division of Sport Fish.

[1:36:51 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON inquired whether DCF's staffing levels were the same in fiscal years 2013 and 2014. He understood that staff in Central Alaska received high pay increases, and asked what effect that has had on positions available to do the work.

MR. REGNART replied that the number of permanent staff was 314 in Fiscal Year 2013 and is 311 in Fiscal Year 2014, but he did not know whether that was due to a vacancy the division has been unable to fill. Seasonal positions are very similar to the past and staffing levels have been pretty static for the last three or four years. He said he was unaware of any swings that would be described as significant. In remote areas of the state, he said, there is a cost of living allowance (COLA) due to the cost differential, and some of those have increased significantly which has increased the base salary for those areas. However, this has allowed DCF to more successfully hire people in places like Nome or Bethel where it has been difficult in part because of the cost of living. He stressed the importance of having the people managing the resources to be living in the communities.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON requested that the other division managers also answer this question about salary increases without his having to re-ask it. He offered his understanding that the salary increases were in the Central Region, not remote areas.

[1:39:50 PM](#)

CHARLES SWANTON, Director, Division of Sport Fish (DSF), Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), said the division's mission is to protect and improve Alaska's recreational fisheries resources for the people of the state [slide 22]. One of six divisions within ADF&G, the DSF has 415 authorized positions, of which about 222 are permanent full-time positions. The permanent positions are broken into two components: sport fish with 190 positions and sport fish hatcheries with 22 positions. The rest of the positions are permanent seasonal positions. The budget is about \$50 million. Headquarters are in Juneau and the three regional offices are located in Douglas, Anchorage, and Fairbanks; 22 management areas are represented from Ketchikan to Nome.

1:41:12 PM

MR. SWANTON reviewed the division's core functions [slide 23], noting that the core function of fisheries management includes both resident species as well as salmon and some marine species such as ling cod. Fisheries research and stock assessment provide support for DSF's fisheries management activities, such as evaluating bag limits and population assessments. Fisheries enhancement is the division's fish hatchery program, with one new hatchery in Fairbanks and one in Anchorage, which produce both resident and anadromous species. There are both boater and non-boater angler access programs. For the boater access program, matching funds are used for improving boat launch development around the state. The division also provides information and education services to the public. Regarding habitat, the division is in charge of the anadromous waters catalog as well as water flows. He said that workforce support includes overall administration as well as supervision of staff.

1:42:31 PM

MR. SWANTON provided highlights of the division [slide 24]. Regarding chinook salmon abundance and productivity, he explained that active management of king salmon sport fisheries is straight forward when abundance is average or above average, but that over the last four years low runs have taxed the division's stock assessment capabilities and staff. Last year the legislature provided DSF with an increment for improving the chinook salmon coded wire tag program in Southeast Alaska, primarily in the Taku and Stikine rivers. The funding also allowed for the coding of additional coho salmon and improved estimates at harvest estimates will start next year for the marked cohos.

MR. SWANTON, in regard to improvements to stock assessment, said that in 2008 the division initiated a review and forward looking stock assessment project for the Kenai River king salmon, the largest and most prominent sport fishery in Alaska. Last year the division received a capital appropriation of \$1.8 million and went to work on making technical improvements to this program. An escapement goal for king salmon, the first phase of this effort, was presented to the Board of Fisheries' Cook Inlet Task Force on Monday of this week, and the board will review the late Kenai River management plan in March. Additional improvements will be forthcoming, he continued, specifically the moving of the sonar site enumeration above tidal influence,

which was identified by external experts as being one of the impediments for accurate assessment of that stock.

MR. SWANTON noted that DSF also received an increment to move the Little Susitna River weir, which was completed last fall. Coho were enumerated at the new site which is closer to tidewater, thereby allowing information that is more germane to timely management decisions. This spring the division will begin counting chinook salmon at that new site. Weirs were installed for the first time on the Lewis and Theodore rivers using grant funds to count chinook salmon. He said DSF is improving estimates of king salmon on the Nushagak River, one of Alaska's larger king salmon producing systems, by working cooperatively with the Division of Commercial Fisheries.

[1:45:37 PM](#)

MR. SWANTON, responding to Co-Chair Saddler, stated that the Theodore River is located on the west side of Cook Inlet. Continuing his discussion of division highlights [slide 24], Mr. Swanton stated that, in terms of operational costs and fund sources, it is no secret that license sales and federal excise taxes have decreased over the last several years, part of that being a function of the [poor] economy. He said DSF has struggled with that, but is on a pathway toward stability and once the economy starts to improve so will license sales.

[1:46:06 PM](#)

MR. SWANTON, in regard to invasive species [slide 24], noted that DSF used an increment from the legislature to successfully suppress [northern] pike in Alexander Creek. He pointed out that he uses the term suppression because he does not believe the division will ever be successful at eradicating the infestation of pike that is in Alexander Creek. Successful eradication of pike, he added, has been done in and around the Kenai Peninsula as well as in and around Anchorage on a number of lakes. The division continues its pike eradication efforts using a prioritized list. Pike seem to mysteriously end up in a lot of impounded water bodies. Pike are voracious and affect the division's stocked waters programs, so efforts are to get rid of them and reintroduce resident species out of the division's hatchery program to provide sport fishing opportunity.

[1:47:22 PM](#)

MR. SWANTON complimented Representative P. Wilson for her efforts against the invasive species, *Didemnum vexillum* ("Dvex"), which was found in Whiting Harbor outside of Sitka. He reported that the division used an increment received from the legislature last year to complete a comprehensive survey and mapping of Whiting Harbor and no Dvex was found outside of the area that it was thought to be in. The division is working with other entities to determine what eradication technique would be best applied and what permits would be needed and is moving towards having a request for proposals ("RFP"). An eradication project may possibly be put in the water this coming fall. Regarding the invasive [waterweed], elodea, he reported that DSF has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), in which DNR has primacy for eradication efforts.

[1:49:35 PM](#)

MR. SWANTON said DSF continues to grapple with the operating costs of its sport fish hatchery facilities [slide 24]. While saying that the division believes its struggles with the facilities have stabilized, he quipped that assistance could be used in Fairbanks to provide a cheap source of natural gas. Fish are now being produced at the facilities at the levels of baseline 2004 and many comments have been received for the improved ice fishing opportunities in Southcentral and Interior.

[1:50:43 PM](#)

MR. SWANTON highlighted DSF's effort to provide some "how to" videos. The video about how to do set-lining for burbot in Interior and Southcentral Alaska has received positive comments, he said. Another video is about a deep water release mechanism to reduce mortality for rockfish, a species subject to barotrauma. In the queue is a video on personal use fishing, which will be primarily focused on the Chitina dipnet fishery on the Copper River and how to process the catch.

MR. SWANTON lastly expressed his pride in the Kenai River king salmon stock assessment and escapement goal development, which has included both his division and the Division of Commercial Fisheries.

CO-CHAIR SADDLER commented that the committee will always be glad to hear about efforts being undertaken to encourage king salmon sport fishing.

1:52:18 PM

MR. SWANTON, responding to Representative Seaton, explained that unsubstantiated or untested assumptions in science are very dangerous roads, so to assess escapement [on the Kenai River] the division will concurrently run its sonar at the present site while testing the new sonar site upriver at mile 14. He added that the division has also been ground truthing its sonar escapement estimates with an independent estimate using mark-recapture.

1:54:15 PM

REPRESENTATIVE OLSON noted that there are historical records for chinook salmon runs in 17 drainages. He inquired whether DSF has historical records for chinook runs on the Kenai River and offered his belief that no historical data could be found for three drainages on the Kenai River.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON added that an annual report is not being done even though it is required, so no annual numbers are available to the public. Without annual numbers the public cannot weigh-in on whether the reported numbers verify or conflict with what people are seeing in their fisheries.

MR. SWANTON allowed DSF has been backlogged, but said this has been his priority and the division has put out 55 reports thus far and 11 more are in the queue. The escapement goal report for the Kenai River is still in peer review draft, but has been published on the World Wide Web and is available to the public. For the late run on the Kenai, the report has all the escapements back to the 1980s and these have been corrected for using the sonar the division has today.

1:57:01 PM

MR. SWANTON, responding to Co-Chair Feige, confirmed that halibut stocks have seen a downturn with harvest levels being adjusted accordingly. He said the available biomass is parsed out based upon North Pacific Fisheries Management Council allocation schemes. The sport fishery, specifically the charter sector, must adjust to this period of lower productivity. The recreational sector has been allowed to retain the bag limits on halibut. With long-lived marine species, he explained, productivity does not bounce back overnight.

[1:58:48 PM](#)

MR. SWANTON, responding to Representative Tarr, said this year's budget does not include an increment for additional pike suppression. He offered his belief that current budgets on this species are sufficient to allow the division to do work, the main one being Alexander Creek.

MR. SWANTON, again responding to Representative Tarr, said that most of the drop in fishing license sales has occurred with non-resident sales. Qualifying that he did not have a number in front of him, he estimated that the drop has been 18-20 percent over the last four years.

[1:59:55 PM](#)

MR. SWANTON, responding to Representative Tuck, stated that discussions about a bounty on pike always seem to surface. Some of the bounty systems tried in the past have been unsuccessful for a variety of reasons, he said; however, he offered to "entertain whatever needs to be entertained moving forward".

[2:00:36 PM](#)

MR. SWANTON, responding to Co-Chair Saddler, agreed to next week provide the committee with the Kenai River chinook run information in summary format as far back as possible and as complete as possible.

[2:00:58 PM](#)

MR. SWANTON, responding to Representative Seaton, stated there has been no request by ADF&G to eliminate the importation into Alaska of elodea as an aquarium plant. He suggested that DNR be asked about this.

[2:02:21 PM](#)

MR. REGNART, Director, Division of Commercial Fisheries (DCF), returned to the witness stand to provide a PowerPoint presentation on chinook salmon abundance and productivity, which is a major initiative for the department this year [slide 28]. He advised that chinook salmon abundance has been low all around the state for the last four or five years. Since 2007, there has been a low state of productivity, and the last comparable level of low production was in the 1970s. Although chinook

trends vary over time, this low level is disruptive to the fisheries and the state's economy.

MR. REGNART said in-season restrictions and management actions, including closures to all user groups, have led to widespread economic and social hardships [slide 29]. General theories have been developed to explain variations in chinook salmon abundance, but scientists do not have a complete understanding of the mechanisms behind the poor runs.

[2:04:07 PM](#)

MR. REGNART, responding to Co-Chair Feige about whether the department has data prior to 1973, said information from commercial fish tickets became reliable in the 1970s, but the department has trend information back to statehood and beyond. For example, there were periods of low productivity in the late 1960s that rebounded in the mid-to-late 1970s. In response to Co-Chair Saddler, he confirmed that the bar graph on slide 28 shows deviations from an average run.

MR. REGNART, continuing his presentation, observed that the importance of chinook salmon to the economic and social health of Alaskans is indicative of the level of concern demonstrated by the users, and by the management actions that were taken by the department across the state [slide 30]. There were very severe restrictions and some closures that affected commercial, sport, and subsistence users. In July 2012, Governor Parnell requested federal fishery disaster determination for the chinook fishery on the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers in response to depressed chinook runs in 2011 and 2012 [slide 31]. There followed a request for federal disaster declaration for Cook Inlet including the east side commercial set net fishery, northern district set net fishery, and inriver sport fisheries on the Kenai [River] and streams within north Cook Inlet. On September 12, 2012, the U. S. Department of Commerce granted the requests which gave Congress the authority to appropriate funds for fishery disaster relief under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Subsequently, ADF&G was asked by the governor to develop research, management, and enhancement strategies that would allow a sustainable harvest during periods of low production [slide 32]. Subsequently, with input from federal agencies and nongovernmental organizations, the department prepared a Chinook Salmon Gap Analysis last summer. The analysis sought to gather information from the public by means of a public Chinook Salmon Science Symposium attended by 350-400 stakeholders and user

group officials. The information from this symposium resulted in the first draft of a long-term Chinook Salmon Research Plan.

[2:08:59 PM](#)

MR. REGNART explained that within the plan the department identified 12 chinook salmon indicator stocks to track statewide abundance and productivity trends [slides 33-34]. The stocks are from the Southeast, Southcentral, Kodiak, Alaska Peninsula, Bristol Bay, and Arctic Yukon-Kuskokwim areas of the state. In addition, the indicator stocks were selected to include large and small systems with a variety of environmental conditions, a diverse life history, and migratory characteristics to ensure a good representation from across the state. In order for the research effort to result in predicted value and allow for refined management, the department believes these efforts need to improve upon existing information to greater understand what is happening to chinook statewide. In addition to the research on stock-specific and fishery-based projects, the department recommends collecting local and traditional knowledge studies, information on the marine environment, and life history studies. This information will allow fisheries' scientists and managers to better understand the factors that influence the shifts in abundance of chinook salmon.

[2:10:42 PM](#)

MR. REGNART turned to the Fiscal Year 2014 capital budget request of \$10 million, explaining that it is the first component of a five-year, \$30 million proposal, and includes adult and juvenile assessment work on the twelve indicator stocks, research on genetics and biometrics on applicable stocks, and local and traditional knowledge studies [slide 35]. Returning attention to the symposium, he noted that its purpose was to better understand the research needed on the chinook abundance decreases [slide 36]. However, there was considerable discussion of near-term management actions; for example, whether the department, in concert with the Board of Fisheries, can ease the hardship experienced by users. At the symposium comments were also taken from hatchery personnel, and there was staff evaluations of management and discussion of enhancement opportunities for chinook salmon.

[2:12:26 PM](#)

MR. REGNART pointed out that the department's management actions have included an effort to preserve some of the sustainable

fishing opportunities for chinook salmon and provide additional access to other species. There is also concern about additional pre- or in-season actions that the department could take by fishery, or by area, within its existing authority. The department continues to work with the Board of Fisheries on these issues.

[2:13:06 PM](#)

MR. REGNART provided examples of types of aforementioned management efforts, such as the Upper Cook Inlet Task Force which was established by the Board of Fisheries in October 2012, to identify a set of recommendations for adjustments to the Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan. This task force will also consider management strategies that would allow for continued exploitation of abundant sockeye runs in times of low chinook abundance. He said, "That definitely is something that we need assistance with, through that management plan, both from the users and then eventually from the Board of Fish[eries] itself." These options will be discussed at the upcoming regulatory meeting in March 2013. He also noted that the department has worked for several seasons to provide additional management opportunities to exploit chum salmon on the Yukon River. Typically, there can be over one million surplus chums and at the same time a low number of chinook, thus the implementation of management changes such as fishing in different areas, and allowing fish wheels - in certain parts of the Yukon River - that release chinook live and catch chums.

[2:15:23 PM](#)

MR. REGNART, responding to Representative Tarr, deferred to Commissioner Campbell to provide an update on the funding of the federal disaster declaration.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL responded that efforts were made by the [Alaska Congressional] Delegation to secure funding as part of the relief package for Hurricane Sandy. However, disaster funding for Alaska was not included in that relief package, and the delegation will attempt to secure relief funds in the next appropriate legislative vehicle.

[2:16:30 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR SADDLER asked whether disaster funding under the Magnuson-Stevens Act would address damage to sport fishing.

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL advised the petition for disaster declaration was made under the Magnuson-Stevens Act because that is the statute used and it is specific to the management of commercial fisheries and to a commercial fishery failure. However, the governor's request for a disaster declaration included impacts to sport fisheries and to subsistence users. There is some precedent for providing relief funds to user groups other than commercial under this statute; for example, sport fish interests were included in the Pacific Northwest chinook disaster, and relief for subsistence users was included in previous declarations for the Yukon River. The department hopes that the funding will be used to compensate and to provide relief for all of the affected user groups.

[2:18:27 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON noted that the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative (AYK SSI) report looked at research targeted at aiding management. He surmised the data presented here is baseline data, and asked whether the research plan in Cook Inlet targets specific theories and solutions, or if the department is looking only at baseline data.

MR. REGNART agreed there are distinct differences between the two approaches. Because the state needs to understand how to manage and to predict chinook runs, its approach will be project-based and will try to answer the fundamental questions about overall adult and juvenile production and mortality. This information is needed when the state is proposing action to regulatory agencies. Mr. Regnart acknowledged that the AYK SSI effort provided data for the gap analysis and is a collaborative effort with the department. However, AYK SSI data formulates questions that will be answered by its consultants.

[2:21:19 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON expressed his concern about the research and pointed out that AYK SSI research was done by outside and local consultants in a very timely manner. On the other hand, the state has possibly lost 20 percent of its habitat in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley to pike, and the research may be targeted on our escapement goals and look at the constrained productive habitat. He asked, "Is the research that we're proposing here being, going to generate back to ... adjusting the escapement goals to the current habitat instead of what used to be available for chinook so that we actually get ... ability

to manage the resource that we have in this low productive environment?"

MR. REGNART replied, "That's exactly what we're after, is what you just described ... to understand some of the fundamental things that are occurring in chinook life history and its total, including if there are changes in habitat and then we can bring ... that in to how we manage these species, and that of course starts with escapement goals ...." He observed that with new and additional information on chinook, the goals will be more robust and create a more accurate forecast. This will lead to more stable and economical fisheries that are more predictable.

[2:24:24 PM](#)

DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Director, Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC), Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), informed the committee that the mission of the Division of Wildlife Conservation is to conserve and enhance Alaska's wildlife populations and provide for a wide range of public uses and benefits [slide 39]. Excepting fish and aquatic plants, the division is responsible for the management of Alaska's wildlife resources, including big game, waterfowl, small game, and nongame. Organizationally, DWC is 1 of 6 divisions within ADF&G, with 330 authorized positions along with the recent addition of personnel for intensive management, Endangered Species Act (ESA) support, and a small game biologist [slide 40]. The division has five regions: Douglas, Southcentral, Central & Southwest, Interior, and Northwest.

MR. VINCENT-LANG said DWC's core services include surveys and inventories of big game, which are population estimates and age-sex ratios, recruitment rates in populations of big game, and habitat inventories [slide 41]. The division also compiles harvest assessments, performs wildlife research with a multi-year focus, performs radio telemetry work, looks for wildlife diseases, performs intensive management with Endangered Species Act (ESA) oversight, manages 32 special areas totaling 3.2 million acres, and provides hunter education and outreach programs for youth, school-based programs, bear awareness programs, and shooting safety programs. There is also a wildlife diversity program that looks at other populations such as waterfowl, small game, and nongame. The division also maintains a wildlife viewing program.

MR. VINCENT-LANG returned to the core service of intensive management [slide 42], noting that it was established in statute

and is focused on increasing harvest populations of ungulates across the state in cases where the populations are not meeting harvest goal objectives. The program is guided by a protocol that ensures these are science-based programs based on three parts: a feasibility assessment that looks at the intensive management program subject to review by the Board of Game (BOG), operational planning, and regulations. Intensive management includes both habitat and the ability to manage predators on the landscape over 15 percent of state land at any given time. Each intensive management area has a specific plan, and each plan includes a requirement for a periodic assessment of success. In addition, each area contains specific objectives and measures related to the target ungulate population and the predator population; in no case does a plan affect the long-term sustainability of the predator population. Although the plans are reviewed by the Board of Game the decision to implement a plan remains with the department due to its responsibility for long-term conservation in the state. There are 16 intensive management areas across the state [slide 43].

[2:30:11 PM](#)

MR. VINCENT-LANG called attention to Unit 9D, Southern Alaska Peninsula (SAP), and cited the management of the caribou herd there as an example of the effectiveness of a responsible predator management program [slide 44]. The SAP caribou herd once numbered in the thousands but had dwindled to about six hundred animals. In 2007, the herd produced four hundred calves, but by fall only two calves were still alive [slide 45]. The division determined the loss of the calves was not due to changes in habitat or poor environmental conditions, but due to predation by wolves. Hunting in the area was closed, which caused significant hardship to local users, and an intensive management program was approved by the Board of Game. After the removal of less than fifty wolves over three years, the calf recruitment increased and the herd size increased by 50 percent between 2008 and 2010 [slide 46]. The herd again provides subsistence hunting opportunities in the Southwest Alaska Peninsula.

MR. VINCENT-LANG turned to habitat management, noting that DWC is actively managing habitat with the goal to manage for abundance and increased opportunity [slide 47]. At this time there are programs on the Kenai Peninsula and in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. The division is also working with the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry, to include wildlife consideration into their wildfire management

programs; for example, DOF may develop firebreaks on the Kenai Peninsula that - after a fire - would provide moose habitat.

MR. VINCENT-LANG said his division has the lead on federal and state Endangered Species Act (ESA) issues by providing comments on proposed federal ESA actions, especially on the increasing number of proposed ESA listings that are based on speculation into the future, rather than on species that are currently in decline [slide 48]. He stressed that the state wants to do everything possible to prevent the extinction of a species, but DWC does not believe a species such as ice seals should be given the same consideration as a species that is threatened in the next 5 to 10 years. The state is currently facing a wide range of ESA petitions, covering species from corals and sharks, to seabirds and marine mammals, and DWC coordinates comments and provides support to the state's legal challenges, such as the listing of the polar bear as a threatened species under the ESA, polar bear critical habitat, Cook Inlet critical habitat for beluga whales, and the Steller sea lion opinion. The division also participates in national efforts to reform the ESA.

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MR. VINCENT-LANG described DWC's recent accomplishments which include additional successes with intensive management implementation, and said the state is slowly building ungulate populations to meet the demands of hunters [slide 49]. In fact, the intensive management protocol won a major national award from the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies as "cutting edge science to support wildlife management." Programs also include increased baseline stock assessments of big game populations, such as work on the Kenai Peninsula to better understand moose, wolf, and bear populations, and attention to losses in the Unit 26B muskoxen from bear predation. Three bears that had been taking calves were killed. Successful intervention into the Porcupine and Fortymile caribou herds kept the herds from cautionary restriction. He noted that the state won the challenge to the ESA polar bear case, and that the division served as the chair of the Pacific Flyway Council and represented the council on the national level. In addition, DWC has implemented a new research policy to ensure that its research is scientifically sound, and a new geographic information systems (GIS) program focused on caribou migrations on the North Slope. Hunter heritage and recruitment is also a focus, and is supported by the hiring of a small game biologist to explore hunting opportunities across the state.

MR. VINCENT-LANG cautioned that the state is facing federal intrusions into state management authorities that are affecting hunting and fishing [slide 50]. The U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, seeks to use its compendium process to restrict hunting across national parks and preserves, based on value decisions, not conservation decisions, and there are attempts to manage the landscape which intrude on the state's right to manage this land. Furthermore, wilderness designations are a constant challenge across Alaska. He advised that federal ESA listings "[will] only get worse" and as Alaska's population increases there will be increased demands to meet. The governor has made clear that he supports more resource development and the division must inform those decisions to ensure that resource development occurs in an environmentally responsible manner. Remaining challenges at this time are urban wildlife conflicts in Anchorage, Juneau, and Fairbanks. Finally, hunter recruitment and wildlife heritage is of major importance.

[2:38:52 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HAWKER asked about plans for mitigating human and large wildlife interaction.

MR. VINCENT-LANG responded that he has asked his staff to study the number of bears and the prey base on Anchorage's Hillside area. The Anchorage Bowl is part of the intensive management program for moose, and he surmised that if that area was excluded there would be less moose and less bears. Other parts of the solution are education and the removal of problem bears.

[2:40:11 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE OLSON asked for the director's opinion of the proposed increase from 75 feet to 200 feet in the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOTPF) cutback on the Sterling Highway.

MR. VINCENT-LANG reported that hundreds of moose are killed annually on the highways, which endangers public safety. However, clearing highways involves wildlife considerations, road-shading, corner visibility, and a wide variety of other issues. The division is interested in advising DOTPF on the wildlife aspect of road-clearing; in fact, a Memorandum of Understanding between DWC and DOTPF will be signed so that the division can advise during the process of road maintenance and design issues.

2:41:35 PM

CO-CHAIR FEIGE offered his appreciation of DWC's efforts regarding federal intrusion and its successful challenge of the polar bear designation.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON requested Mr. Vincent-Lang to forward to members a copy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's draft rule to allow the reintroduction of wood bison on state land.

2:43:47 PM

RANDY BATES, Director, Division of Habitat, Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), informed the committee that the Division of Habitat has a rich and valuable history in Alaska and has been functioning effectively within ADF&G since 2008 [slide 53]. The division's experienced staff is located around the state in regional offices in Fairbanks, Anchorage, Juneau, Soldotna, Douglas, Craig, Palmer, and in the State Pipeline Coordinator's Office [slide 54]. The staff consists of 47 full-time, 3 part-time, and 7 non-permanent employees. Responding to Representative Seaton's earlier question, he said there have been no increases in staff in the Southcentral region, nor have there been increases in salary for division staff located in the Anchorage, Palmer, or Kenai areas.

MR. BATES read the Division of Habitat's mission statement: To protect Alaska's valuable fish and wildlife resources and their habitats as Alaska's population and economy continue to expand [slide 55]. He said the division's statutory authorities are AS 16.05.841 for fish passage, AS 16.05.871 for fish habitat, and AS 16.20 for legislatively designated special areas, such as State Game Refuges, critical habitat areas, and wildlife sanctuaries [slide 56].

MR. BATES explained that the Division of Habitat's top priority core services includes Title 16 permitting for resident fish passage, anadromous habitat, and legislatively designated areas, along with managing the anadromous waters catalog and atlas [slide 57]. Other priorities include agency reviews of the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (FRPA) and participation on the state's large project permitting team within DNR. The division also conducts special area planning and research to assist the department in making sound permitting decisions. In Fiscal Year 2012, the division conducted 4,940 permit reviews [slide 58]. Review times averaged 7.1 days for a

Fish Habitat Permit, and approximately 10 days for a Special Area Permit. He pointed out that 99.7 percent of all developers are in compliance with issued Fish Habitat and Special Area Permits, which indicates the efficiency of the division.

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MR. BATES highlighted two projects. The first was an old contaminated reserve pit within the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge called the Ivan River Reserve Pit [slide 59]. The owner of the pad, Chevron, worked closely with the Division of Habitat to clean up contaminated soils from old drill cuttings. Chevron and the division completed the project in four months using 54,000 man hours to remove 10,500 cubic yards of waste material and bring in 8,500 cubic yards of clean gravel. Division staff employed their knowledge of construction activities and affected wildlife, and worked with Chevron to complete the project.

MR. BATES discussed the second project - the Northern Rail Extension Project on the Tanana River [slide 60]. The Tanana River Bridge is being built as part of the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARR) Northern Rail extension. A temporary riprap causeway and pile-supported trusses are allowing for construction of 20 bridge piers for the 3,300 foot-long bimodal rail and military road bridge. Habitat staff worked with other ADF&G divisions, ARR, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, and private consultants and engineers to facilitate winter construction of the project. He pointed out that the construction methods, timing, and monitoring are all designed to ensure the protection of anadromous fish and their habitats, while keeping the project on schedule.

2:51:50 PM

HAZEL NELSON, Director, Division of Subsistence, Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), informed the committee that the mission of the Division of Subsistence is to quantify, evaluate, and report information about customary and traditional uses of Alaska's fish and wildlife uses [slides 63-64]. She explained most of the division's work is accomplished by anthropologists, who speak a language a little bit different from that of biologists. Her division learns from the communities it studies because there is no need to translate the experiences gleaned into a biological standpoint. Further, in many communities local liaisons can collect information through the social fabric of friends and family in the local and nearby regions. Ms. Nelson said her team works hard to ensure that the

information gathered is accurate, and uses different types and lengths of surveys depending on the type of research being done.

2:55:40 PM

MS. NELSON relayed one of the commissioner's goals is to ensure that ADF&G works with DNR and DOTPF to help those departments fulfill their requirements on research for large development projects [slides 65-67]. The division has completed work that would have otherwise required the hiring of third-party anthropological companies. Working with DNR and DOTPF also enables the Division of Subsistence to capture research so that the Board of Fisheries and the Board of Game can meet state statutes applicable to Alaska Native subsistence. She said the division's research also builds "long-term bridges with communities for public involvement because when we go into a community we're in it for the long-term; they need to be able to trust that what we're doing with their information is maintained confidentially and it's combined with other ... households so that one household knows they're not just being targeted .... I can't express how valuable that is to the Department of Fish and Game ... for the research and data that ... we need to manage for subsistence needs around the state." Ms. Nelson called attention to the amount of research her division completed for the wildlife and fisheries divisions recently. This research was associated with large development projects such as The Alaska Pipeline Project. She said that, unlike biologists, her division works from January on into April because the subsistence users are home during those months.

MS. NELSON turned to the division's challenges, pointing out that the community liaisons must be thoroughly trained by her small staff so that they can provide the most accurate data [slide 68]. Incomplete surveys and those that are not filled out properly cannot be used. Another challenge is when board meetings are scheduled back-to-back. In response to Representative Seaton, she noted that her division has added staff in the Fairbanks, Bethel, and Douglas offices.

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CO-CHAIR FEIGE asked whether the division has a long-term plan for systematically collecting data throughout the state.

MS. NELSON said there is a two-pronged approach. The longer term plan has been to do research projects out of the Bethel office in hub communities such as Nome, Kotzebue, and Kodiak.

This research will identify subsistence needs in a "broad swath." The second prong uses the footprints from large development projects because once they are in place DNR and DOTPF work with the division. For example, once the Alaska Pipeline Project was underway, the division completed research in 12 communities, and for the Donlin Gold Mine project, 22 Kuskokwim River communities were covered in 3 years. The division's continued relationship with DNR and DOTPF ensure efficiencies in state government.

[3:02:27 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR SADDLER thanked the presenters.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Resources Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:02 p.m.