

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

February 3, 2015

10:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Louise Stutes, Chair
Representative Neal Foster
Representative Bob Herron
Representative Craig Johnson
Representative Charisse Millett
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins
Representative Dan Ortiz

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW: ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME (ADF&G)
COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE AND DIVISIONS OF COMMERCIAL AND SPORT
FISHERIES

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

SAM COTTON, Commissioner Designee
Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview with a general
introduction on fisheries management in Alaska.

CHARLIE SWANTON, Deputy Commissioner
Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview on duties pertaining
to the Pacific Salmon Treaty and the related ADF&G goals.

THOMAS BROOKOVER, Acting Director
Division of Sport Fish

Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview on the Division of Sport Fish and basic information on duties and responsibilities.

JEFF REGNART, Director
Division of Commercial Fisheries
Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)
Anchorage, Alaska2

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of the Division of Commercial Fisheries and basic information on duties, responsibilities, organization of the division, regions, staff, and highlights and future challenges.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[10:02:20 AM](#)

CHAIR LOUISE STUTES called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. Present at the call to order were Representatives Ortiz, Herron, Kreiss-Tomkins, and Stutes. Representatives Millett, Johnson, and Foster arrived while the meeting was in progress.

OVERVIEW: ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME (ADF&G) COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE AND DIVISIONS OF COMMERCIAL AND SPORT FISHERIES

[10:02:47 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES announced that the only order of business would be an overview from the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) Commissioner's Office and Divisions of Commercial and Sport Fisheries.

[10:04:14 AM](#)

SAM COTTON, Commissioner Designee, Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), established the alignment of goals, for the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), with that of the legislature, which is to manage fish and game resources based on the sustained yield principle in order to provide economic benefit while addressing the wellbeing of the state. Additionally, he stressed the department's priority for providing Alaskans access to the resources for reasons that include: food security, economic security, and recreational opportunities. Community sustainability is often dependent on access to the fish and game

resources. The department's general guidance is found in the state constitution and the Alaska Statutes, Title 16. The department is divided into three general areas for providing core services, which are: management, with success measured by the commercial harvest and angler days; stock assessment and research, measured by meeting escapement goals and meeting or exceeding catch levels; and customer service and public involvement, which provides educational programs, sells licenses, and engages public input via committee and board participation.

[10:06:50 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER COTTON turned to the ADF&G organizational chart, to illustrate the six divisions and the board support section, in relation to the Office of the Commissioner. Directing attention to the committee handout, titled "Alaska Department of Fish & Game, House Special Committee on Fisheries, Fisheries Overview, February 3, 2015," page 5, he pointed out the distribution of the department's year around representation throughout Alaska; a presence that is significantly expanded on a seasonal basis. Referring to the pie charts, page 6 of the handout, he indicated the ADF&G budget by division as well as by the total number of staff in each. The Division of Commercial Fisheries has the largest budget and greatest number of employees, followed by Division of Wildlife Conservation. The Divisions of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife Conservation both enjoy budget supplementation from federal government receipts.

[10:08:06 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER COTTON reviewed the responsibilities of the commissioner's office, which include: membership on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC), Pacific Fishery Management Council, and non-voting membership on the Boards of Fish and Game, and providing representation to a list of agencies. He directed attention to page 7, of the committee handout, and qualified the headings shown as a partial roster.

[10:09:35 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER COTTON stressed the importance for Alaska to maintain an active presence on the NPFMC, given the jurisdiction area of that agency; all waters that are beyond three miles of the coast. He described the prevalence of the fishing effort exerted in areas that directly affect Alaskan waters for species such as Pollock. Although the council process is complex, he

said the fishery management plans for the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) and the Bering Sea are continually amended by the NPFMC. By-catch reduction is a contentious issue and the department works to minimize the allowed numbers set by the council. Another contentious issue is the rationalization for GOA fisheries. The offshore federal fishery cannot be directed for Alaskan fisherman only, but it is possible and important to ensure that Alaska gets fair treatment via the [NPFMC] management plan.

[10:14:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HERRON asked for a comparison of serving as a legislator versus commissioner.

COMMISSIONER COTTON responded that it is easy for him to relate to the legislators that he now serves.

REPRESENTATIVE HERRON inquired what surprises have thus far arisen.

COMMISSIONER COTTON responded that the pleasant surprise, and affirmation, has been the outstanding, professional staff. The budgetary restrictions and trying to get along with less presented somewhat of a surprise; however the user fees and federal receipts provide significant contributions and will help to keep ADF&G activities going.

[10:17:41 AM](#)

CHARLIE SWANTON, Deputy Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), said the United States and Canada entered into the Pacific Salmon Treaty in 1985, for the purpose of conserving and allocating salmon harvests of inter-jurisdictional fish. He defined inter-jurisdictional to mean fish that are harvested in one country or state but spawned and reared in another; the situation pertaining to the salmon stocks of the Pacific Northwest, Alaska, and Canada. The agreement took two decades of negotiations and was signed amid developing conservation problems, particularly around the Chinook salmon stocks. At the time the negotiations were established, the issues included the concerns that 80 percent of the Chinook salmon harvested in Southeast Alaska (SEAK) were fish that originated in Canada or the Pacific Northwest. There were also high levels of interception of Pacific Northwest fish in Canadian Chinook and coho fisheries. Also occurring, were Washington State fishery interceptions of coho and sockeye salmon destined for the Fraser River. Adding to the mix, he said, was the [ruling made by

federal judge, the Honorable George H. Boldt, on United States v. State of Washington, Civ. No. 9213, 1974, (Boldt decision)], recognizing treaty fishing rights for Pacific Northwest Stevens-Palmer treaty tribes [negotiated 1855].

[10:20:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS asked what type of gear groups compose the Canadian salmon fisheries.

MR. SWANTON recalled that it is primarily sport fishing charter boats, some gill netters, troll and seine fleets, but possibly others. The fleets may be similar to what exists in Alaska, he conjectured.

[10:21:07 AM](#)

MR. SWANTON added that the Boldt decision essentially allowed for harvest sharing between Northwest tribes and other user groups in Washington and Oregon. As a means to spur the agreement, aggressive Canadian fleets were harvesting fish, at the time of the negotiations. The broad, basic treaty principles are to prevent overfishing, provide for optimum production, fair sharing based on the equity principle, and avoid undue disruption to existing fisheries in the various states and countries. He said the scope of the treaty encompasses 1,276 linear miles, extending from Cape Falcon, in Northern Oregon, to Cape Suckling, near Yakutat, Alaska, and all waters in between that are associated with Washington State and British Columbia, Canada. The treaty creates national obligations and is unique due to the U.S. states and Pacific Northwest (PNW). Treaty Indian tribes negotiate the fishery provisions. The states and tribes are responsible for conducting programs that attempt to fulfill the treaty and national obligations. He then provided a map of the area, page 14 of the committee handout, to indicate migratory patterns of the Chinook stocks managed under the treaty.

[10:23:10 AM](#)

MR. SWANTON reviewed the makeup of the Pacific Salmon Commission, which is comprised of four U.S. and four Canadian commissioners. Among the various standing committees and panels are two that relate are primary to Alaska: the Trans-boundary Panel and the Northern Panel, each with an attached technical committee. He mentioned that well over 80 individuals comprise the Chinook Technical Committee, making it the largest technical

committee, with members that include scientists from both countries as well as other official representation from Canada, the states, and Alaska. Regarding decision making, he explained that consensus of U.S. and Canada is required to recommend action. The U.S. decisions require consensus. The authority is vested through the commissioners for the states of Alaska, Washington, and Oregon and the Pacific Northwest tribes with each state and tribal commissioner have a vote. The federal commissioner is a nonvoting member and Washington and Oregon are each allowed one vote. Thus, the U.S. section has three votes. The advisory panels of the stakeholders include: Northern Panel, Trans-boundary Panel, and Southern and Fraser River Panels.

[10:24:31 AM](#)

MR. SWANTON listed the Southeast Alaska fisheries that are touched by the treaty, which include: drift gillnet, set gillnet, troll and sport, and purse seine. He reported that the 2014 ex-vessel value of the Southeast fishery equaled \$150 million. The value of the sport fishery to Southeast is not included in that figure, but is estimated to be about \$273 million annually. Directing attention to page 18 of the committee handout, he pointed out the general areas for the Southeast fisheries.

[10:25:58 AM](#)

MR. SWANTON provided a flow chart to illustrate the position of the 57 individuals involved in administering the treaty, comprised of 32 ADF&G staff, 6 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) staff, and 19 industry representatives.

[10:26:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS inquired whether it would be accurate to state that very few Chinook from the Pacific Northwest systems migrate into the Bering Sea.

MR. SWANTON deferred.

COMMISSIONER COTTON offered that genetic work has been conducted in the Bering Sea for stock identity purposes. He said there are Chinook salmon present in the Bering Sea that represent western Pacific stocks, but the preponderance are from Western Alaska stocks originating in the Unalakleet, Kuskokwim, and

Yukon River systems. The GOA fish are non-Alaskan stocks, according to the early studies.

[10:28:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT noted the legislature's aggressive stance regarding the Endangered Species Act [Title 16 U.S. Code Chapter 35 - ENDANGERED SPECIES, 1973] listings, and asked whether department push back would continue under the administrative change.

COMMISSIONER COTTON reported that a team is working on the subject in conjunction with the Department of Law (DOL). The work encompasses Steller sea lions and the various ice seals that have been listed. The department involvement is active, he assured the committee.

[10:30:26 AM](#)

THOMAS BROOKOVER, Acting Director, Division of Sport Fish, Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), began with the mission statement, which is to protect and improve the state's recreational fisheries resources. In carrying out that mission, the Division of Sport Fish is charged with management and oversight of fresh and salt water sport fisheries throughout the state, and includes both finfish and shellfish stocks. He directed attention to the committee handout, titled "Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Sport Fish, 2015 House Fisheries Overview, dated February 3, 2015, to a page containing a montage of photos illustrating the diverse locales and various approaches that are taken throughout Alaska in pursuit of sport fish. Images included fishing efforts as depicted from river banks, via boats, in remote areas, and ice fishing.

[10:32:26 AM](#)

MR. BROOKOVER provided a graph, titled "Sales of Fishing Licenses," to indicate statewide sales over the past seven years; 2008-2014. The annual sales in recent years total about 450,000, with the majority being sold to nonresidents. He reported that of the total 2014 sales, totaling approximately 463,000, roughly 273,000 were purchased by nonresidents versus 190,000 sold to residents. Interestingly, he noted, the resident sales remain steady, while the nonresident sales have fluctuated over the seven year period.

[10:33:36 AM](#)

MR. BROOKOVER provided that, administratively, the Division of Sport Fish serves the state through three geographical regions. Headquarter offices are located in Juneau and Anchorage, and three regional offices: Southeast Region I, with offices in Douglas; Southcentral Region II, with offices in Anchorage; and Interior Region III, with offices in Fairbanks. A research and technical services unit (RTS) is maintained in Anchorage. The three regional offices, RTS, and headquarters, comprise the division's five units. A total of 22 management areas are supported by offices across the three regions, and he provided a color coded state map to illustrate each area.

[10:34:36 AM](#)

MR. BROOKOVER reviewed the FY16 proposed operating budget and the funding sources that support the sport fish programs, including federal receipts and user fees. He pointed out the two primary funding sources, which are the federal Sport Fish Restoration Dingell Johnson (DJ) funds generated from federal taxes associated with the sale of sporting goods and fuel, and the Fish and Game funds derived from fishing license and King salmon stamp receipts. These two components comprise 62 percent of the budget, and are supplemented with competitive grant projects, partnerships, matching funds, and legislative appropriations. The undesignated general fund contribution is roughly \$6.3 million, in the governor's endorsed budget.

[10:35:33 AM](#)

MR. BROOKOVER said the division's strategic plan was developed ten years ago and was revised in 2010. The plan is used to guide the division towards achieving the goals of the mission statement through focused activities around six core services. First is the priority for fisheries management: Manage Alaska's recreational fisheries for sustained yield and recreational angler satisfaction funded on an area-based management system. The area managers work at the local level.

[10:36:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT asked about a communication plan regarding the management of local fishing limits and closures.

MR. BROOKOVER responded that the area managers are the direct source of local communication. Some issues require prepared

statements; however, the area management biologist is the facilitator.

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT clarified that the area managers write and carry out the plan/communications to the local user groups, which could call for in-season actions, such as closures or gear change.

MR. BROOKOVER concurred that typically the area communication plans are developed at the local management level, but can be distributed on a broader scale throughout a region or to other area offices considering similar action.

[10:38:45 AM](#)

MR. BROOKOVER pointed out that the area managers also monitor fishery and stock and assessment projects and other sources of information to modify regulations in-season, in order to achieve fishery management objectives. The Division of Sport Fish also works with the Division of Commercial Fisheries, and other entities, to coordinate in-season management actions. Annual reviews of the fisheries are conducted, along with stock assessment projects to identify data needs for the coming year. Habitat restoration and enhancement activities are also participated in by the division to help maintain boating and angler access to the state's public waters and resources.

[10:39:26 AM](#)

MR. BROOKOVER moved to the second strategic core service, fisheries research, and said the management of Alaska's recreational fisheries is based on sound scientific practices and objective-based research. The research and monitoring projects are designed and conducted to assess a wide variety of management information needs. The projects typically focus on subjects such as: quantifying and monitoring abundance of salmon stocks and resident species; estimating size and composition as well as other biological attributes of a stock; quantifying angler effort catch and harvest; and other fishery characteristics. He said the division strives to ensure that the research projects conducted are statistically and scientifically sound. That goal is accomplished via an improved written departmental operational planning process, which is used to identify measurable objectives and ensure that appropriate sampling methods and analytical techniques are employed in all of the research and stock assessment projects that are undertaken.

10:40:28 AM

MR. BROOKOVER said the goal of the core service for fisheries enhancement is to increase and diversify angler opportunities by producing and releasing hatchery reared fish. Two new hatcheries are currently producing: the Ruth Burnett Hatchery in Fairbanks, and the William Jack Hernandez Hatchery in Anchorage. These hatcheries produce both coho and Chinook salmon, along with rainbow trout, Arctic char, and Arctic grayling. In addition to the fish produced at these hatcheries, staff also work with operators of private non-profit hatcheries to conduct enhancement projects.

10:41:16 AM

MR. BROOKOVER stated that, regarding the core service for angler access, 15 percent of the federal aid receipts are restricted to the use of maintaining and improving boating access, and require matching fund contributions of 25 percent. Capital appropriations have recently been providing these matching funds. The information and education core service provides information on fishing opportunities, enhancement, angler access, regulations, management, stewardship, and a number of other areas serving a variety of individuals and groups. Different media venues are used, as well as the ADF&G website. Frequent updates ensure up to the date information on the website, regarding regulations changes or emergency orders. The division's participation in local sportsmen shows and other events provides additional visibility. The Division of Sport Fish also compliments the work done by the Division of Habitat, and a core service is identified for that purpose. Funding from the Division of Habitat, as well as public and private grants, contribute to the division's effort of protecting and restoring fish habitat. The work includes: conducting research on fish habitat; administering stream bank restoration and fish passage programs; and coordination of department support of local fish habitat partnerships that are formed under the national fish habitat plan.

10:43:04 AM

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT recalled that funds for Chinook research have been removed from the governor's budget and asked how these studies are to be funded.

MR. BROOKOVER assured the committee that the department has received capital appropriations for two years, about \$15 million, for statewide Chinook salmon research. The plans have been developed and the project will continue, he said.

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT inquired how much has been spent and how comprehensive is the plan for studying the statewide downturn in Chinook harvest.

MR. BROOKOVER agreed to provide further information.

[10:45:19 AM](#)

MR. BROOKOVER highlighted the past years accomplishments. Beginning with management and research, he pointed out that, although in-season regulations saw further restrictions on Chinook throughout the state, bag limits were increased in many systems for coho and sockeye. Also, the regulation summary booklets, which are being revised to simplify and standardize a user friendly guide for anglers, have been released in all but Region II. The revision for Southcentral is the final area to receive a new booklet, and it will be out in time for the 2015 season.

[10:47:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON referred to the Susitna drainage fishery and asked whether information with the Alaska Energy Authority (AEA) is shared regarding the studies surrounding the hydro project.

MR. BROOKOVER responded that the division is working with AEA, and the energy agency is funding some of the research being conducted. He offered to provide further information.

[10:49:30 AM](#)

MR. BROOKOVER returned to accomplishments in the area of enhancement and said a key milestone was the completion of the four year project transitioning the old Fort Richardson facility to the new William Jack Hatchery. Also, production of reared/released fish biomass, for the interior region, reached a twenty year high. The Crystal Lake Hatchery, in southeast, is owned by the state, operated under contract by the Southern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association (SSRAA), and funded by the Division of Sport Fish. The facility is important for the production of Chinook salmon stocks, which contribute to

regional commercial and sport fisheries. In March of 2014, a fire destroyed the majority of the structure and it is being rebuilt using risk management funds and SSRAA contracts, he reported. Although minor loss occurred to eggs and smolt, the majority of the rearing fish were unharmed and able to be released with minimal disruption to the operations planned for 2014. A fair amount of the 2015 stocks were a loss, but the rebuild of the hatchery will be complete, this year, and brood take goals are expected to be met, which will comprise the foundation of stocks for rearing and release in succeeding years. Finally, he said, the fishery center doors were opened to the public at the hatcheries in Anchorage and Fairbanks. These centers will allow visitors the opportunity to learn more about departmental enhancement operations.

[10:51:38 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked whether the Fairbanks hatchery could be used to rear Chinook salmon for release in the Yukon River.

MR. BROOKOVER stated his understanding that Chinook are already being reared in that facility. The question would be whether or not additional stocks could be reared. On the member's request, he agreed to provide further information regarding the concept.

MR. SWANTON offered that use of the Fairbanks hatchery to rear additional Chinook salmon, is an issue of capacity. Additionally, lacking an understanding of how the released stock might fair, during the first year of ocean residency, presents a concern. He cautioned that it is important to establish a cost on return ratio when enhancing a stock, and it could prove to be fairly costly.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked to qualify what fairly costly represents and he stressed the current statewide concern over the Yukon River Chinook stocks.

MR. SWANTON said estimates do exist and he offered to provide further information.

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT asked about viability research and what the department has to report on success rates.

MR. SWANTON said the smolt to adult survival is about one percent. A good rate would be the three to five percent range and the costs are commensurate.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked whether conversations have been held with Canada regarding the possibility of sharing the costs for stock enhancement.

MR. SWANTON deferred, stating that the director of the Division of Subsistence could answer that question. He offered that a mitigation hatchery has been used in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada, for enhancement efforts to some degree.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON expressed interest in pursuing Canada as a partner, during these economic times. Also, study of the Canadian success rates may prove helpful, he opined, and suggested that this avenue be pursued.

[11:03:59 AM](#)

MR. BROOKOVER continued to review the 2014 accomplishments and the access improvement activities, which includes work on a False Island mooring float, the Hoonah boat ramp, a fish cleaning facility in Southeast, the Bings Landing dock, the Cooper Landing ramp, a Birch Creek launch, and Wrangell and Haines pump-outs.

[11:04:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked about progress on the Kasilof ramp.

MR. BROOKOVER agreed to provide specific information.

[11:05:01 AM](#)

MR. BROOKOVER moved to the 2014 accomplishments of the habitat program, which works with communities to restore riparian areas, and rehabilitate stream banks and lake shores. He provided a series of before and after pictures to illustrate the work that has taken place. Further, he reported: 2,400 feet of riverbank area has been rehabilitated; 192 miles of water bodies have been added to the anadromous waters catalogue; 11.9 miles of fish passage have been improved with culverts; and 20 reservation of water applications have been submitted, which, if approved by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), will reserve in-stream flows for fish.

[11:06:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT returned to the bank enhancement activities to inquire about work on the Susitna River drainage.

MR. BROOKOVER agreed to provide further information.

[11:07:22 AM](#)

MR. BROOKOVER reported on the efficiencies in the workforce that have been in progress since FY08, in response to a decline in funding. The FY16 budget request is only slightly more than what was submitted in FY08, he pointed out. Important projects and programs have been maintained despite the reduction of 91 positions and a cut of \$600 thousand in administrative staff costs.

[11:08:16 AM](#)

MR. BROOKOVER turned to the handout page titled, "Moving Forward," to note the division's activities in the coming year, which include: update of the strategic plan; work with the University of Alaska to transfer the Kachemak Bay research reserve from the division to the university; initiation of efforts to develop electronic reporting, including a 2015 launch of an electronic charter logbook program on the Kenai River and marine creel data.

[11:08:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT recalled that the charter logbook for the Kenai River has been in place for six years.

MR. BROOKOVER offered that the log book program has been in place since about 1998.

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT asked specifically about the Chinook salmon log book data.

MR. BROOKOVER said that the log book requirement, as it is now understood, dates to 2005. He further explained the use of the harvest information, how it is accessed by federal and state agencies, and that ADF&G accesses and uses the data at different times of the year. He provided a number of examples.

[11:11:13 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES clarified that the log book information can be gathered and used in-season as well as at the end of the season.

MR. BROOKOVER concurred and added that an annual harvest report is compiled from the data, along with the other uses.

[11:11:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ inquired about using a limited entry approach for charter boat fishing and suggested that it may prove helpful for tracking harvest information.

MR. BROOKOVER acknowledged that the idea has been discussed, but no crystalized plan exists for moving in that direction. He emphasized that the current reporting methods are considered adequate, useful, and provide a comfortable level of information.

[11:13:22 AM](#)

MR. BROOKOVER continued with the current activities, and said that an electronic permitting and reporting program for personal use fisheries is being introduced in 2015, which will allow dip net users to obtain permits and report activities via the ADF&G website. He added that this will not preclude the option for paper applications and reports. Finally, he said the two access projects that will be taken up in 2015 are the Auke Bay harbor improvements and the Homer boat ramp and float facility.

[11:14:27 AM](#)

MR. BROOKOVER said the challenges for the division include fluctuating revenues that must be dealt with while still delivering on the core services; low Chinook salmon abundance, which is expected to continue; invasive species; and the completion and staffing of the interactive public fishery centers at the Anchorage and Fairbanks hatcheries. Regarding the invasive species, he elaborated on the eradication and elimination of pike in certain locales and the ongoing removal of invasive tunicate from Sitka's Whiting Harbor, which is being handled with assistance from the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center.

[11:17:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked for a discussion regarding the gill net across the Kenai [River], and the inevitable court case.

MR. BROOKOVER deferred.

COMMISSIONER COTTON answered that, to his knowledge, a court case has not been filed. The federal subsistence board was petitioned, and approved, the use of a gill net for the village of Ninilchik. Of the four agencies that sit on the board, the National Parks Service voted to allow the use, despite the area being designated as a wildlife refuge. Reconsideration may be requested, and as concerns have continued, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) has joined the conversation.

[11:20:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT asked about the existence of citizen advisory groups to the Sport Fishing Division.

MR. BROOKOVER answered that there are no formal advisory groups established, but a number of angler groups do contribute and work with the division.

[11:21:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT requested an opinion as to whether adequate public input exists around local sport fish management efforts and the Board of Fisheries (BOF) process.

MR. BROOKOVER responded that the BOF conducts a transparent process, which allows for a high level of participation. Many recreational anglers are not aware of the board operations but the division works to inform users about the process.

[11:22:47 AM](#)

JEFF REGNART, Director, Division of Commercial Fisheries, Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), described the major tasks of the division, which are to manage subsistence, commercial, and personal use fisheries in the interest of the economy and general wellbeing of the citizens of the state, consistent with the sustained yield principal, and subject to allocations through public regulatory processes. He reviewed the division's primary responsibilities, which are to: manage subsistence, commercial, and personal use fisheries within state waters; manage shellfish species and some groundfish out to 200 miles; conduct applied research on Alaska's aquatic resources; plan and permit salmon hatcheries and mariculture operations; negotiate fishing agreements subject to the Pacific Salmon treaty and Alaska-Yukon Treaty; and coordinate with federal and

international fisheries management agencies. The core services are harvest management, stock assessment and applied research, aquaculture permitting, and customer service and public involvement. Elaborating on these core services, he said harvest management is at the heart of the divisions activities. Harvest management involves supporting the Board of Fisheries (BOF) in establishing regulations and management plans; opening and closing fishing areas and setting fishing times; and collecting harvest and biological data.

[11:24:35 AM](#)

MR. REGNART continued with the components of harvest management, which provides in-season management through the employment of a cadre of fisheries managers, proximate to the pertinent areas, who exercise broad authority to open and close the fisheries. Applied science is used in order to ensure that management of Alaska's fisheries is consistent with the sustained yield principle. He then provided a series of pictures to illustrate the variety of Alaska commercial fishing techniques, which included images of vessels for seining and crabbing. In the area of stock assessment and applied research, he explained that a number of techniques are employed which include: salmon escapement enumeration through the use of weirs, towers, sonar, foot and aerial surveys; estimate juvenile salmon production; groundfish and shellfish surveys; herring spawn deposition and hydro-acoustic surveys; aerial surveys for herring; dive surveys; and biological, genetic, and coded-wire tag sampling. Pictures of salmon weirs for enumeration and sampling as well as some to illustrate how field staff conduct stock assessments, were shared.

[11:26:33 AM](#)

MR. REGNART said the division is involved in the permitting process of all aquaculture endeavors, and reviewed the active permits, which include: 29 hatcheries for salmon, 2 shellfish hatcheries, 68 shellfish farms, and 8 shellfish nurseries. He directed attention to a page in the committee handout, titled "Commercial Salmon Harvests" showing graphed information from 1977-2013 to contrast the harvest of fish sources from natural runs versus hatchery production.

[11:27:04 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES inquired about the division's involvement in the fertilization project at Karluk and whether the project is moving forward.

MR. REGNART confirmed that the division is involved with assessing the biological perspective, and the state has given a green light to the project; however, being situated on a refuge, an Environmental Impact Assessment is out for comment and the federal government is in charge of the next step.

[11:27:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT provided questions on behalf Representative Herron regarding the Kuskokwim management strategy. She asked whether the division's in-season managerial staff is adequate, whether staff will work with the local advisory groups, and whether there is pull to have a year-around manager position for that area.

MR. REGNART said the division meets regularly with the local working groups, shares information, and attempts to reach consensus on in-season decisions. Often there is accord, but not always; however, the division uses the disagreement points as learning opportunities.

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT stressed the importance to have year-around management for the Arctic, Yukon, and Kuskokwim (AYK) area.

MR. REGNART agreed, and said that staffing an imbedded manager is the goal; however, the Bethel office has been difficult to staff year-around and in recent years has had a seasonal manager who works out of Anchorage.

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT asked whether a communication plan is in place to help ease the closure situations. She reported that small, AYK communities can be devastated and their livelihoods threatened through the closure actions.

MR. REGNART agreed that outreach is important and described the pre-season and in-season activities for informing the residents of predicted actions and in-season occurrences. He reminded the members that federal waters are also included in the AYK drainage.

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT stressed the importance to position an employee who will be a stable presence and glean beneficial

institutional knowledge of the area. Local talent may be necessary to ensure stability, when staffing a fisheries manager.

[11:33:08 AM](#)

MR. REGNART reviewed the research that is on-going regarding the interactions of hatchery fish with wild stocks. The legislature initiated funding but the industry is now financially sustaining the work. It is a long-term project that is expected to yield better salmon research and enhance the department's partnership with the industry. He described the laboratory services that the division actively supports, which include: pathology, coded wire tag and otolith aging, and genetic stock identification. The division hosts four management regions, which are: Westward comprised of Kodiak and points west through the Aleutian islands including Chignik, False Pass and Dutch Harbor; Arctic, Yukon, and Kuskokwim (AYK) comprised of lands north of the Kuskokwim River and taking in the Yukon River, Kotzebue Sound, and Norton Sound; Central comprised of the points south of the Kuskokwim and extending west from Cordova to Bristol Bay; and Southeast, which encompasses the panhandle, through Yakutat, to Cordova.

[11:34:44 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES recalled that when the Bering Sea was rationalized, a cap was placed on the percentage of the quota that any single entity could hold, and asked about capping the quota ownership prior to a possible rationalization program being invoked for the GOA. An entity is currently purchasing real estate and boats in anticipation and, she opined, without appropriate planning "it could end up as a one-horse town."

MR. REGNART offered to provide further information, and include the work that is underway in collaboration with DOL.

[11:36:26 AM](#)

MR. REGNART reviewed the 2014 regional highlights, beginning with the AYK area, which included: the Chinook salmon run exceeded the forecast; the successful use of dip nets for harvesting chum salmon while releasing Chinook salmon, proved successful; Kotzebue's commercial chum salmon harvest was the second largest on record; Norton Sound had a salmon harvest that ranked as the highest since 1998; and Norton Sound also had a profitable red king crab fishery, which had an ex-vessel value of \$1.96 million. The Westward region, being the home of the

largest crab and groundfish fisheries in Alaska, reported: nearly 60 million pounds of Pacific cod harvested in state waters; and the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery harvested nearly 10 million pounds for an ex-vessel value estimated at \$61 million. The Central region reported an all species Bristol Bay harvest value of \$196.6 million, maintaining the status of Alaska's most valuable salmon fishery; and the Prince William Sound pink salmon harvest reached 36.8 million fish. In the Southeast region, the summer Dungeness crab season was the most successful in recent history, with a total value of \$12.2 million; and the pink salmon harvest was better than expected, with a harvest of 31 million fish.

[11:38:27 AM](#)

MR. REGNART reviewed the economic impact of the seafood industry on Alaska's economy, to report: 63,100 jobs generated, that are combined in the areas of harvesting, processing and related support industries; 41,530 of these jobs are held by [Alaskan residents]; \$1.73 billion is generated in direct payments to labor, with \$1.28 billion going to Alaskan residents; and total sales of Alaskan caught product totaling about \$4.6 billion.

[11:38:53 AM](#)

MR. REGNART directed attention to the committee handout page, titled "Exvessel Value of Alaska's Commercial Fisheries" showing the graphed results for salmon, shellfish, halibut, herring, and groundfish from 1977-2013, in millions of dollars. He pointed out that since 2004, following steady declines, there has been an uptick, which he attributed to an increase in salmon value. He followed this with another graph, titled "1878-2014 Alaska Salmon Catches and Value," to provide a historic perspective of the salmon industry and include the 2014 preliminary outcomes. Indicated on the graph are points of interest such as the year that the state began managing the salmon harvest and the inception of limited entry. He opined that, although Mother Nature continues to contribute to the outcomes, the fishery has had record success, during the last ten years, under state management.

[11:39:40 AM](#)

MR. REGNART said the statewide division staff [projected for 2016] are for 308 permanent and 433 seasonal positions, to man 20 permanent offices and 84 seasonal offices/field camps. Addressing the FY16 budget, he indicated a total request for

\$71,341.7 million, with a breakout comprised of 62 percent unrestricted general fund dollars, 10.5 percent designated general fund dollars, 14.3 percent federal contributions, and 13.2 percent from other sources.

[11:40:12 AM](#)

MR. REGNART discussed the highlights from 2014, which included strong salmon harvests that were above average in many areas, increased crab harvests albeit in federal waters, and advancement in information received via technological innovations including electronic landing and fish ticket reporting. Finally, he alluded to the effects that the fiscal challenges will incur, which include: fewer stock assessment and research projects; greater uncertainty in population estimates, trends, and forecasts; in some cases, more conservative management will be employed; and a limited ability to support new fisheries.

[11:41:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked whether northerly based geoduck permits have been requested since the legislature provided for the action.

MR. REGNART reported that no permit requests have been submitted.

[11:42:07 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked on behalf of Representative Herron, whether the division anticipates re-staffing the Round Island walrus sanctuary.

COMMISSIONER COTTON reported that the cost is about \$100,000, for a staff of two, for three months. Plans are to meet the need for protecting the walrus and allow visitors to the island without allocating those funds to that project. To accomplish this goal, electronic visitor registration and user group partnerships are being sought.

[11:44:05 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked what measures the department will take to comply with the governor's request for budget reduction.

COMMISSIONER COTTON indicated that one example is how the commercial division has prioritized projects and eliminated those low on the list; the other divisions have done similarly. An area that will not be reduced, he said, is the cost for supporting the board and maintaining the opportunity for the public to participate in those meetings. He pointed out that one valuable source of funding comes from private user groups who contribute to the department to help finance projects. New partnerships are being sought. Additionally, these private contributions assist in meeting the requirement for matching federal funds; which has seen a rise in receipts. He said the match is a 1:3 ratio, where one state dollar is matched by three from the federal Pitman-Roberts program.

[11:46:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLETT recalled that many members of the Anchorage advisory board have recently resigned, but offered to hold the question for the confirmation hearing.

COMMISSIONER COTTON returned to the member's earlier question regarding public communication, to state that the administration is prioritizing improvement in this area and welcomes all feedback. Regarding another member's interest in the potential for rearing Chinook salmon at the Fairbanks hatchery, he assured the committee that the cost estimates would be made available.

[11:48:37 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES thanked the participants and announced the next meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 11:48 a.m.