

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES**

April 9, 2015

7:20 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Charisse Millett

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)

Board of Fisheries

Orville Huntington - Huslia  
Robert Ruffner - Soldotna

- CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

ORVILLE HUNTINGTON

Huslia, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As appointee to the position of the Board of Fisheries, discussed his qualifications and answered questions.

PAUL A. SHADURA II

South K Beach Independent Fishermen's Association (SOKI)

Kalifornsky, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of the appointment of Orville Huntington to the Board of Fisheries.

REED MORISKY

Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of the appointment of Orville Huntington to the Board of Fisheries.

ROBERT RUFFNER

Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As appointee to the position of the Board of Fisheries, discussed his qualifications and answered questions.

DONALD JOHNSON

Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to the appointment of Robert Ruffner to the Board of Fisheries.

GEORGE PIERCE

Kasilof, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to the appointment of Robert Ruffner to the Board of Fisheries.

SAM SNYDER, Member

Trout Unlimited

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of the appointment of Robert Ruffner to the Board of Fisheries.

PAUL A. SHADURA II, Representative

South K Beach Independent Fishermen's Association (SOKI)

Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of the appointment of Robert Ruffner to the Board of Fisheries.

MIKE NAVARRE, Mayor

Kenai Peninsula Borough

Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of the appointment of Robert Ruffner to the Board of Fisheries.

PAUL OSTRANDER, Chief of Staff

Office of the Mayor

Kenai Peninsula Borough

Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of the appointment of Robert Ruffner to the Board of Fisheries.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[7:20:24 PM](#)

**CHAIR LOUISE STUTES** called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 7:20 p.m. Representatives Herron, Johnson, Ortiz, and Stutes were present at the call to order. Representatives Foster and Kreiss-Tomkins arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**CONFIRMATIONS: BOARD OF FISHERIES**

[7:20:53 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES brought before the committee the appointment of Orville Huntington to the position of the Board of Fisheries. [Packets contain biographical information on both appointees.]

[7:21:29 PM](#)

ORVILLE HUNTINGTON, Huslia, Alaska, advised he is the Director of Wildlife and Parks, for the Tanana Chief's Conference, with two sons working in Anchorage, a daughter at UAF, with one student in high school in Huslia, and he has lived in Alaska his entire life with 20 years of commercial and subsistence fishing. He offered that he had board experience, with good board teachers.

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REPRESENTATIVE HERRON noted this will be Mr. Huntington's second term and asked him to describe his first term, what he learned, and the contributions he made.

MR. HUNTINGTON responded that he has become educated in ocean fisheries, river systems, shellfish, and allocations, and has relied on his scientific skill sets with the board. He opined he should serve another term on the Board of Fisheries to use the knowledge he has obtained before moving on to the Board of Game.

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REPRESENTATIVE HERRON surmised that it was a learning process, and asked Mr. Huntington to describe his ability to voice his views on record.

MR. HUNTINGTON answered that his views and opinions were based upon science during his first term, and he relied on the data available to respond to situations, including the difficulties facing fishermen and the economics of the fisheries.

REPRESENTATIVE HERRON suggested that Mr. Huntington become a very active member and use his science based knowledge thereby putting his talents and skill sets on the record which will protect the species and fisheries in the future.

MR. HUNTINGTON said he completely agrees with Representative Herron's comment.

REPRESENTATIVE HERRON asked his occupation specialty in the United States Marine Corp.

MR. HUNTINGTON advised he was never in the military.

[7:27:52 PM](#)

PAUL A. SHADURA II, South K Beach Independent Fishermen's Association (SOKI), testified in support of the appointee, and advised that the South K Beach Independent Fishermen's Association's (SOKI) mission is protecting and preserving the Kasilof Aquarium System, and it agrees with the appointment of Mr. Huntington. He referred to AS 16.05.22[1](a), which read:

AS 16.05.221. Boards of Fisheries and Game.

(a) For purposes of the conservation and development of the fishery resources of the state, there is created the Board of Fisheries composed of seven members appointed by the governor, subject to confirmation by a majority of the members of the legislature in joint session. The governor shall appoint each member on the basis of interest in public affairs, good judgment, knowledge, and ability in the field of action of the board, and with a view to providing diversity of interest and points of view in the membership. The appointed members shall be residents of the state and shall be appointed without regard to political affiliation or geographical location of residence. The commissioner is not a member of the Board of Fisheries, but shall be ex officio secretary.

MR. SHADURA said that conservation implies within Alaska case law, that it is conserving controlled utilization of Alaska's resource to prevent its exploitation, destruction, or neglect. He stated that within Mr. Huntington's full term he has remained approachable, courteous, and willing to listen to all individuals. Mr. Huntington possesses a unique family history and academic knowledge, and he offers a diversity of views in a fair and impartial manner to the decisions the Board of Fisheries must make, he described.

7:30:00 PM

REED MORISKY, testified in support of Mr. Huntington, advising that Mr. Huntington has served on the Board of Fisheries with distinction, thereby exhibiting his ability and skills to offer balanced decisions regarding Alaska's fisheries resources. He said that Mr. Huntington's cultural knowledge is unsurpassed and has been of great benefit to all Alaskans, and in particular to the board when decisions are being made. He pointed out that Mr. Huntington has accurately and appropriately applied his science background, as he holds to the highest standards of science free from bias or partiality, and is objective. With regard to subsistence, sport, personal use, and commercial users he consistently completes the due diligence necessary to make decisions that fairly regulate and allocate the state's fisheries resources.

CHAIR STUTES closed public testimony after ascertaining that no one further wished to testify.

7:31:41 PM

REPRESENTATIVE FOSTER expressed support for Orville Huntington, and said he looks forward to working with him.

[Later in the meeting, the motion to advance the nomination of Orville Huntington was made and carried.]

7:32:09 PM

CHAIR STUTES brought before the committee the appointment of Robert Ruffner to the position of the Board of Fisheries. [Packets contain biographical information on the appointee.]

7:32:29 PM

ROBERT RUFFNER, said that a love of the outdoors is a major factor in why he has lived in Alaska since 1996. He said he is a geology and civil engineering graduate, is raising a family, and dedicated to remaining in the state. Since his arrival, he has worked for the Kenai Watershed Forum, which is a citizens group interested in the Kenai River drainage that later expanded to cover the entire Kenai Peninsula involving habitat conservation and working with all of the different users group. A key project, he advised was in 2005-2008 when the forum cleaned up the river after their research revealed several hundred gallons of gasoline going into the river a day, including the political process to remediate the problem, and working with the Board of Fisheries. He described key events the Kenai Watershed Forum undertook. He noted, he served on the planning commission 4-5 years, and then signed on to the Road Commission Board because he felt he could make a difference, and remarked he has been a fisherman his entire life and continues to harvest for personal use. Besides having fished for the majority of available species throughout the state, he has minimal experience in commercial fishing, he said. He offered that he is stepping down as executive director of the Kenai Watershed Forum, which started with a very small budget to a current organization of over \$3 million in habitat related work. He described the Board of Fisheries as challenging in learning fisheries across the entire state, working with a new cast of people, with hundreds of millions of dollars involved, and that the Alaska fisheries is in the billions. He pointed out that most of the contention he hears is surrounding Cook Inlet, but this job involves all of the state's fisheries, including fin fish and shell fish, and there is much to learn.

[7:41:33 PM](#)

MR. RUFFNER continued that he offers experience in fishing, with a scientific background, and his experience and understanding in advanced statistics is important as there will be fisheries, economics, and all types of data that many decisions will be based upon. There is importance in the confidence members have in a particular aspect of that data, how to bring those questions up, and discuss them. He noted that since submitting his application, he has learned there are 84 advisory committees across Alaska, with 900 volunteer individuals serving on those committees, and these volunteers provide input to the board. He stated he is very committed to the public process and honors local advisors, and will listen carefully to the information they bring forward.

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REPRESENTATIVE HERRON disclosed he previously met with Mr. Ruffner, and commented that he is "pretty chatty."

[7:44:22 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ noted the value that the appointee places on the advisory committees, and noted there was an earlier proposal to "limit the actions of the Board of Fish to take action only on proposals that come before you, rather than self-generated proposals." He asked whether Mr. Ruffner was familiar with that proposal.

MR. RUFFNER said he is.

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ asked Mr. Ruffner's stand on it.

MR. RUFFNER opined that board generated proposals are necessary; however, bringing them at the right time is important to allow feedback, and suggested a timeline to allow public comment.

CHAIR STUTES opened public testimony.

[7:46:47 PM](#)

DONALD JOHNSON, testified in opposition to the appointment, and he said he appreciates the opportunity to address "this dedicated sport fish board seat" available, and stressed this is a dedicated sport fish seat. He said he objects to the appointment of Mr. Ruffner in that his science background does not position him well to actually address the dedicated sport fish requirement of this seat. He said the seat was included for a dedicated sport fish person to take advantage of, and to allow the public to take advantage of their wealth of experience achieved after years and years' worth of dedicated sport fish use. He noted that Mr. Ruffner has done a little bit of everything, but he is looking for someone "in a dedicated seat" who has put a lot of time into sports fishing and not science. Mr. Ruffner, he pointed out, has dedicated a lot of time obtaining his degrees in geology, environmentalism, drift netting, but no dedication to sport fish use. He opined that the appointee has not been to a single Board of Fisheries meeting, and described him as a passive sport fisherman.

CHAIR STUTES clarified that the Board of Fisheries position is not a dedicated sport fish seat.

MR. JOHNSON replied, "I think it is."

7:49:59 PM

GEORGE PIERCE, testified in opposition to the appointment saying Mr. Ruffner is a fine person but lacks qualifications in that scientists and biologists in fish are needed, not friends of special interests groups. He opined that the "Fish and Game Board" currently is about politics and not science. He stated that special interest groups are sponsoring Mr. Ruffner, and he is not qualified for the board. He referred to comments regarding two stroke motors for the Kenai River and advised it was only for people that had a dip net, "no one else as sport fishing guides, or commercial fishermen were still allowed to use two stroke motors." He remarked that every year the Kenai Watershed Forum passes out pamphlets to warn people regarding the contaminants in the Kenai River water, and not to drink the water. He stated "Mr. Huntington is a qualified candidate, and he is for subsistence and he is a biologist," and a biologist is needed from Kenai.

7:52:18 PM

SAM SNYDER, Member, Trout Unlimited, stated support for the appointee, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I have spent my life as an angler, fishing around the country and fishing around the state since moving to Alaska. I primarily fish from the Kenai to the Susitna and been fortunate enough to travel from Bristol Bay to SE AK fishing for salmon, trout and steelhead.

A life of fishing has also led to a fierce interest in sustainable fisheries management - a concept that few societies in the world outside of Alaska have managed to achieve. I have a PhD with a focus on fisheries sustainability. I currently develop and direct programs for Trout Unlimited Alaska which has over 1,000 angler members in the state. I have called in today on behalf of TU and our members to support Mr. Ruffner's confirmation to the Alaska Board of Fish.

The Alaska Program of Trout Unlimited works to protect, reconnect, restore and sustain Alaska's

salmon and trout resources. We work through scientific investigation, grassroots engagement and supporting partnerships with fishing organizations, NGO's, agencies, municipalities, tribes, business owners and anglers.

We've been troubled to hear the negative response regarding Mr. Ruffner's appointment. It appears much of the negativity spawns from the idea that the vacant seat on the board must be allocated to a specific gear group or region of the state. Despite these views, it's clear the make-up of the board (commercial, sport, subsistence) is not mandated by law. Nor, is there a definition of what constitutes a commercial, sport, or subsistence oriented individual. In fact, it is because Ruffner is not handpicked by a group of stakeholders that TU is compelled to weigh in on his appointment. We feel it is critical that Board members put fish first, not a single user group or a specific place.

There is no doubt, TU is a sport fishing organization. But it is our organizational DNA to look at the big picture when it comes to fish and fishing. We work hard to seek out and engage on issues that unify fisheries stakeholders and fulfill our organizational mission. Mr. Ruffner's science background and longtime leadership with the Kenai Watershed Forum and Kenai Peninsula's Fish Habitat Partnership, as well as his love of angling, aligns well with the interests and values of our members.

Far too often allocation battles have obscured real issues, and eliminated the ability of Alaskans to have reasonable science based discussions on critical issues before the board. Mr. Ruffner is exactly the type of board member Alaska needs at this time; someone who is not handpicked by a user group, someone with a scientific back ground and someone whose experience has been forged working for agreements against the backdrop of the state's most heavily used and possibly its most controversial fishery.

Mr. Ruffner will bring a much needed big picture approach to the board, which in turn will be of tremendous service to the people of Alaska.

7:55:06 PM

PAUL A. SHADURA II, South K Beach Independent Fishermen's Association (SOKI), said he has been on the local Kenai Soldotna advisory committee, is representing the South K Beach Independent Fishermen's Association (SOKI), and offered support for the appointee. He advised the Mr. Ruffner has proven to be a person who strives to communicate with a diverse group of interests. He then referred to a letter Mr. Ruffner directed to Governor Sean Parnell, on February 25, 2010, and stated that he has a deep personal concern for all resource users.

7:58:05 PM

MIKE NAVARRE, Mayor, Kenai Peninsula Borough, stated that on behalf of the Kenai Peninsula Borough, the Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly passed a resolution in support of Mr. Ruffner's appointment and confirmation to the Board of Fisheries. He remarked that the Kenai Peninsula is fortunate as he performed with excellence regarding habitat restoration, which includes culvert replacements, assessments, the Kenai River two stroke [engine] to four stroke [engine] in order to prevent pollution and both identified and resolved the issue. He related that many people were upset when the two stroke engines were about to be outlawed in that they had invested money in their endeavor and couldn't afford to buy a new motor. Mr. Ruffner and his organization took it upon themselves to solicit funds for a buyback program in order to offset part of the cost of outlawing those motors as a good public policy decision and follow-up. He described the applicant as a consensus builder, with a broad and diverse background and a broad diverse group of supporters for his seat on the Board of Fisheries. He pointed out that Mr. Ruffner's time on the planning commission was extraordinary in that he listens to many different opinions, digests the information, does his homework, and makes good rational and well thought out decisions. Mr. Ruffner, he opined, will do the same on the Board of Fisheries and will be an outstanding member of the board in service to the residents of the State of Alaska and to the fisheries resource.

8:00:29 PM

PAUL OSTRANDER, Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor, Kenai Peninsula Borough, stated support for the appointee, advised he is representing himself, and offered background information regarding his personal passion for sport fishing. He then described Mr. Ruffner as an excellent person for this position

in that he will take the facts presented to him and make the best decisions for the resource, as it should not be about the agenda of user groups.

CHAIR STUTES closed public testimony after ascertaining that no one further wished to testify.

[8:02:09 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:02 p.m. to 8:03 p.m.

[8:03:18 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS stated that the committee has two excellent candidates.

[8:03:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON stated that the House Special Committee on Fisheries reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointees as shown in the attached Referral on Confirmation forms and recommend the names Orville Huntington and Robert Ruffner be forwarded to a joint session [of the House and Senate for consideration.] This does not reflect the intent by any member to vote for or against these individuals during any further sessions for the purposes of confirmation. There being no objection, the confirmations of Orville Huntington and Robert Ruffner were advanced from the House Special Committee on Fisheries.

[8:04:40 PM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the \*House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 8:04 p.m.