

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE

March 23, 2018

3:30 p.m.

DRAFT

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Cathy Giessel, Chair
Senator John Coghill, Vice Chair
Senator Natasha von Imhof
Senator Bert Stedman
Senator Kevin Meyer
Senator Bill Wielechowski
Senator Click Bishop

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 176

"An Act establishing the Alaska Tax Credit Certificate Bond Corporation; relating to purchases of tax credit certificates; relating to overriding royalty interest agreements; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED SB 176 OUT OF COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 105 (FIN)

"An Act prohibiting the taking of wolves and the use of certain traps and snares in certain areas adjacent to the Denali National Park and Preserve."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 176

SHORT TITLE: TAX CREDIT CERT. BOND CORP; ROYALTIES

SPONSOR(S): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

02/05/18	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/05/18	(S)	RES, FIN
02/21/18	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

02/21/18 (S) Heard & Held
02/21/18 (S) MINUTE(RES)
03/23/18 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: HB 105

SHORT TITLE: TAKING WOLVES NEAR DENALI PARK; TRAPPING
SPONSOR(s): JOSEPHSON

02/03/17 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/03/17 (H) RES, FIN
02/10/17 (H) RES AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
02/10/17 (H) Heard & Held
02/10/17 (H) MINUTE(RES)
02/15/17 (H) RES AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
02/15/17 (H) Heard & Held
02/15/17 (H) MINUTE(RES)
03/20/17 (H) RES AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
03/20/17 (H) Moved CSHB 105(RES) Out of Committee
03/20/17 (H) MINUTE(RES)
03/22/17 (H) RES RPT CS(RES) NT 5DP 4DNP
03/22/17 (H) DP: DRUMMOND, PARISH, WESTLAKE,
JOSEPHSON, TARR
03/22/17 (H) DNP: BIRCH, TALERICO, JOHNSON, RAUSCHER
03/22/17 (H) RES AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
03/22/17 (H) <Bill Hearing Canceled>
04/28/17 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM HOUSE FINANCE 519
04/28/17 (H) Heard & Held
04/28/17 (H) MINUTE(FIN)
05/15/17 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM HOUSE FINANCE 519
05/15/17 (H) Moved CSHB 105(FIN) Out of Committee
05/15/17 (H) MINUTE(FIN)
05/16/17 (H) FIN RPT CS(FIN) NT 3DP 1DNP 3NR 1AM
05/16/17 (H) DP: GARA, SEATON, FOSTER
05/16/17 (H) DNP: THOMPSON
05/16/17 (H) NR: GRENN, GUTTENBERG, ORTIZ
05/16/17 (H) AM: KAWASAKI
05/17/17 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)
05/17/17 (H) VERSION: CSHB 105(FIN)
01/18/18 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/18 (S) RES, FIN
03/23/18 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

BRANDON BREFCZYNSKI, External Affairs Manager
Alaska Oil and Gas Association (AOGA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 176.

THOMAS ATKINSON, Chief of Staff to Representative Josephson
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of HB 105 for the sponsor.

RICK STEINER, conservation biology consultant representing himself
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 105.

VIC VAN BALLEMBERGHE, representing himself
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support HB 105.

NANCY BALE, advocate
Denali Citizens Council (DCC)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 105.

JOEL BENNETT, representing himself
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 105.

RYAN HARMS
representing himself
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HB 105 - no position.

RANDALL L. ZARNKE, President
Alaska Trappers Association
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 105.

AL BARRETTE, representing himself
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 105.

BRUCE DALE, Director
Division of Wildlife Conservation
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Commented on HB 105.

REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON

Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HB 105.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:30:15 PM](#)

CHAIR CATHY GIESSEL called the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Coghill, Von Imhof, Stedman, Meyer, Wielechowski, Bishop, and Chair Giessel.

SB 176-TAX CREDIT CERT. BOND CORP; ROYALTIES

[3:31:04 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of SB 176, introduced by the Rules Committee at the request of the Governor. She opened public testimony.

[3:31:45 PM](#)

BRANDON BREFCZYNSKI, External Affairs Manager, Alaska Oil and Gas Association (AOGA), Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 176. AOGA supports an expedited resolution to this issue this year, he said. Companies have earned these credits by investing hundreds of millions of dollars to hire Alaskans for the exploration and production of oil. The delay in the payments damages the state's reputation and chills future investment. It has caused projects to be shelved, which has resulted in negative economic impacts to the state and local communities, and now many Alaskans are out of work, especially within the oil and gas industry.

AOGA believes the state should honor all outstanding earned credits in full in the most expeditious way possible. The Governor's bill is an innovative approach and seeks to refund a portion of the earned credits via bonding to raise money and then refunding the credits at a reduced rate.

MR. BREFCZYNSKI said the proposal lowers the refunding rates to cover the state's bond finance costs, but AOGA has concerns about the steep discount rate and some other provisions in this bill and is committed to working with the administration and the legislature to find an equitable solution. "It's simply too important."

[3:34:15 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL, finding no further comments, closed public testimony on SB 176.

[3:34:40 PM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL moved to report SB 176, version 30-GS2863\A, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s). There were no objections and it was so ordered.

[3:35:00 PM](#)

At ease

HB 105-TAKING WOLVES NEAR DENALI PARK;TRAPPING

[3:38:05 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL called the meeting back to order and announced consideration of HB 105. [CSHB 105(FIN), version 30-LS0408\R, was before the committee.]

[3:38:31 PM](#)

THOMAS ATKINSON, Chief of Staff to Representative Josephson, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided an overview of HB 105 for the sponsor. He said this bill would close areas that have been closed before by the Board of Game. Violation of the closure must be negligent to be actionable. That is the standard used throughout other Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) statutes. He explained that the term "negligently" in subsection (c) on page 2, is provable and enforceable, whereas "intentionally" would be hard to prove.

[3:39:22 PM](#)

MR. ATKINSON said the National Park Service (NPS) has a wolf sighting index and it indicates that sightings have declined rapidly and dramatically over the past decade. Wolves are a major tourist draw to the area. The Board of Game established a buffer zone in Denali's eastern boundary, which existed for 10 years, during which time there were more sightings. However, in 2014, less than 6 percent of park visitors were able to see wolves, a decrease from 45 percent when the Board of Game imposed a closure. Wolf populations in Denali have declined in numbers from 116 in spring of 2006 to 50 in the spring of 2014.

[3:40:24 PM](#)

SENATOR BISHOP asked who is doing the wolf counts.

MR. ATKINSON answered just the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

SENATOR BISHOP asked if the National Park Service was involved with any of the wolf counts.

MR. ATKINSON replied he was uncomfortable giving him a definitive answer on that, but the figures he has are from the ADF&G, and it's his understanding that is where the counts come from.

To protect wolves for future Alaskans and visitors, HB 105 would prohibit wolf hunting and trapping in two areas adjacent to Denali National Park & Preserve: The Wolf Townships (AKA: the Stampede Trail) and the Nenana Canyon.

MR. ATKINSON said new information (on slide 3) indicates that five radio-collared wolves from the Denali packs were killed outside of the park in the Stampede Corridor this winter, one of the proposed closure areas. The collar was destroyed. This wolf was commonly seen along the park road and had a role in 2017's higher viewing rate. Two wolves from the Comb pack were also harvested in the Stampede Corridor; one wolf from the Eagle Creek pack was harvested in the Nenana Canyon, which is the other geographical area that the bill proposes to close to taking of wolves; and one dispersed wolf from the Iron Creek pack was harvested near Delta.

[3:42:15 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL asked what "dispersed wolf" means.

MR. ATKINSON replied that it means the wolf is no longer with the pack.

SENATOR COGHILL asked him to verify that "harvested" could mean anywhere from shooting to trapping and that it is done by someone who is known to report.

MR. ATKINSON answered "harvested" means any method of take; it could conceivably be done with a bow and arrow, although that would be difficult.

SENATOR COGHILL explained the reason for his question is that one of the collared wolves was killed and he wondered if an automobile had run over it and if that distinction is made.

[3:43:19 PM](#)

MR. ATKINSON replied that Senator Coghill made a good point and that "have been killed" doesn't necessarily mean by someone who was intending to kill.

MR. ATKINSON explained that the reason Representative Josephson introduced the bill is because wildlife viewing has an economic benefit to the state according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The latest information indicates total direct expenditures by wildlife viewers in the United States in 2011 was \$54.9 billion .

[3:44:27 PM](#)

MR. ATKINSON said slide 5 broke out economic impacts of wildlife viewing in Alaska. In 2011, it was \$2,059,000,000, which helped create 40,000-plus jobs, \$1.5 billion in wages and salaries, and some state and local tax revenues and even more federal tax revenues. Alaska is in the top-10 states ranked by economic output for wildlife viewing.

[3:45:13 PM](#)

SENATOR VON IMHOF asked if this figure was aggregated to include cruise ship passengers looking at sea otters.

MR. ATKINSON said yes, adding that they do know a great many visitors from outside Alaska do have Denali National Park and Preserve (DNPP) on their "To See List" when they come to Alaska, and most of the time they want to see wildlife.

SENATOR VON IMHOF asked if there is a checklist that asks which animals people would like to see.

MR. ATKINSON replied yes, and that visitors tell the National Park Service when they go to Denali they want to see wolves. He offered to follow up on that.

SENATOR VON IMHOF commented that a checklist like that would be a key piece of information since tourism is gaining as one of the state's "bright spots."

[3:47:27 PM](#)

MR. ATKINSON went to slide 5 called "The Buffer Zone," and said to protect wolves for future Alaskans and visitors from outside Alaska (a lot of Alaskans go to Denali National Park and Preserve, also), HB 105 would prohibit wolf hunting and trapping in two areas adjacent to the Park and Preserve: one is the Wolf Townships in the northeast corner where state land juts out to the west into the park and the Nenana Canyon on the other side of the highway running north/south.

[3:48:39 PM](#)

MR. ATKINSON said slide 6 had a map showing the "wolf buffer zone." He explained the bill does not propose to close the area south of Cantwell.

CHAIR GIESSEL noted that was the cross-hatched section.

SENATOR COGHILL asked if downtown Healy was included.

MR. ATKINSON answered yes.

SENATOR COGHILL remarked that including Healy could be problematic for public safety.

CHAIR GIESSEL asked if Cantwell is encompassed by the proposed area.

MR. ATKINSON answered that Cantwell is not encompassed by the proposed closure area.

[3:50:22 PM](#)

MR. ATKINSON said a resolution of support was received from the Fairbanks North Star Borough and that he included the map on slide 7 because it shows the utilization of the area by wolves.

[3:51:12 PM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL said he appreciated that and asked Mr. Atkinson if he had compared the wolf sightings with the sightings of the other animals, because wolf density probably has a lot to do with animals they prey upon like moose and caribou. So, the density of both wolves and prey should be counted.

MR. ATKINSON answered no, but that two biologists who are invited testifiers could better answer that question.

[3:52:30 PM](#)

MR. ATKINSON went to slides 8 and 9, a sectional analysis of the only section in the bill that prohibits the taking of wolves and the use of certain traps and snares in the specific areas adjacent to DNPP. It says a person may not take a wolf or use a cable snare with a diameter greater than 3/32 inch or a leg-hold trap with a jaw-spread greater than 5 inches within the boundaries described.

He explained that this very specific language was arrived at in consultation with ADF&G biologists who told them what trappers typically use for taking wolves as opposed to other animals. They typically don't use traps of this size or larger for taking

smaller animals. Nothing in this section could be construed to prevent the department from taking or authorizing the taking of wolves that present a danger to the health or safety of local residents, which might address Senator Coghill's concern about Healy, although he didn't want to state definitively that it does. He added that a person who negligently violates (a) of this section is guilty of a Class A misdemeanor.

[3:54:01 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked how long it takes for a wolf to die when its caught in a cable snare or a leg-hold trap.

MR. ATKINSON answered that he did not know.

[3:54:50 PM](#)

MR. ATKINSON said HB 105 wouldn't affect the six per-year subsistence federal quota within the DNPP. He added that sub-unit 20(A) is much larger than the proposed closure area. So, closing the Wolf Townships wouldn't necessarily reduce the subsistence opportunities elsewhere in that sub-unit. When the Board of Game closed the Townships to wolf take between 2000 and 2010, no one challenged that closure based on subsistence.

[3:55:39 PM](#)

SENATOR VON IMHOF asked who brought this issue to the sponsor's attention.

MR. ATKINSON replied that Representative Josephson introduced this bill before he was working for him and he did not know that history.

[3:56:20 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL opened invited testimony on HB 105.

[3:56:42 PM*](#)

RICK STEINER, conservation biology consultant representing himself, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 105. He was a professor at the University of Alaska for 30 years stationed in the Arctic, Prince William Sound, and then in Anchorage; he is now a conservation biology consultant.

He said this should be "an easy yes vote." For years, the Denali wolf buffer has been entangled in this ideological dispute between those who object in principle to federal management in parks and refuges versus those who love parks, watchable wildlife, and natural undisturbed ecosystems. He said HB 105 is not about any of that and encouraged the committee to try to

disentangle that ideological context and reframe it as what it is: 1. What is best for the economy of Alaska; and 2. What is best for the majority of the people of Alaska. Through that lens, HB 105 would be a clear yes vote.

MR. STEINER noted a number of undisputed and very clear facts:

1. Denali generates over \$600 million a year in visitor spending. It is Alaska's most valuable tourism resource and viewing of wildlife is clearly one of the main reasons for such visitation to Denali.

2. Denali has been the easiest place in Alaska for people to go see wolves in their natural habitat, and it used to be one of the best such places in the world, but it is not anymore, and that is due primarily to state-permitted take along the boundaries.

3. It is clear that park wolves cross the northeast boundary and return in the spring following caribou primarily and are taken by sport hunters and trappers. On average only four or five are taken each year across the boundary, but already this winter, five collared park wolves have been taken. Given that there are four times as many uncollared wolves in the park as uncollared, it's a virtual certainty that many more uncollared wolves were taken outside the park as well, and the season remains open until the end of April.

4. Science is clear that even a low-level take can cause a disproportionate impact on the eastern park wolf groups and thus visitor viewing success. For example, in 2012, the last pregnant female in the Grant Creek group was trapped. It didn't have pups; it did not den; and the group disintegrated and visitor viewing success dropped by about half that following season. The same phenomenon occurred with the East Pack in 2015/16: what science has called the "breeder loss effect" where essentially the take of one important breeding wolf along the boundary could cause a significant loss in the integrity of a group, dispersion, and a drop in the consequent drop in visitor viewing success.

5. Wolf viewing success has declined from 45 percent when the buffer existed to 4-6 percent for a 4-5-year

period, and last year increased a little bit to 16 percent, but it is still far below the 45 percent it had with a buffer. Much of that visitor success was from the collared Wiley Creek male that was killed this winter in the Stampede Corridor. That alone can lead to the visitor viewing success rate this summer.

6. In Yellowstone, for comparison, 45-85 percent of the visitors have wolf viewing success and the wolf viewing economy there is valued at \$35 million a year.

Science has shown very clearly that a small closed area along the northeast boundary, such as proposed in HB 105, will help protect the eastern park wolf groups most seen by visitors. That would correspondingly increase visitor viewing success and ultimately increase the wildlife viewing economy at the park.

7. The closed area would impact only a few local sport hunters and trappers who can relocate their activities to two miles away. But it would benefit up to 70,000 Alaska citizens and over half million out-of-state visitors who visit the park annually, many of whom want to see wolves in the wild.

8. The closed area is broadly supported by Alaskans, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, many wildlife tourism advocacy organizations, several hundred thousand people who signed an online petition, and countless other efforts to try to secure this buffer.

9. The cost benefit is clearly and overwhelmingly in favor of the bill.

MR. STEINER said based on these facts, the question becomes what state policy should be. Clearly, a rational government would do everything it could to restore, sustain, and enhance this multi-million-dollar economic resource. HB 105 will help this by simply keeping these few animals from being taken along the boundary of the park allowing them to remain alive for visitor viewing in the park.

He also questioned whether 6 million acres in the park is enough in which to take wolves. In fact, 4 million acres of Denali are open to wolf take and only 2 million are closed (the Old McKinley Park). Secondly, too much of Alaska is already closed to hunting and trapping. Less than 3 percent of Alaska is closed

to wolf take: the pre-ANILCA parks, the Denali and Katmai. So, the question should be: isn't 97 percent of Alaska and 350 million acres open to wolf hunting and trapping enough?

MR. STEINER concluded that some folks have said this is just a gift to the federal government and the Park Service, when in fact, it is a gift to the people and the economy of Alaska.

4:05:03 PM

SENATOR BISHOP asked what the typical square-mile range is for a wolf pack.

MR. STEINER answered that it depends; in areas around Denali it could be 50-70 square miles.

4:05:45 PM

VIC VAN BALLEMBERGHE, representing himself, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support HB 105. He was appointed to the Alaska Board of Game three times and is a wildlife biologist in Alaska since 1974. It's important to ask the basic question of why we are here. The answer is because there is an important unresolved problem that has existed for decades: the state of Alaska has not provided a small number of wolves in Denali with adequate protection from hunting and trapping when they travel outside the park. Lacking this protection, when these wolves are shot or trapped, hundreds of thousands of park visitors are deprived of the opportunity to see and hear wolves, putting millions of dollars of tourism revenue at risk.

This is not just a wildlife issue; it is in the best interest of the State of Alaska. The Alaska Board of Game has debated this issue numerous times since 1992 when the first protective buffer was adopted. Between 2000-2010, the board on seven occasions took major actions to create buffers and defended their boundaries. Each time required a large effort by the board, its support staff, the ADF&G, and the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to provide input. And each time hundreds of individuals provided written comments and oral testimony to the board. Numerous organizations representing hunters, trappers, and conservation organizations also provided input.

MR. VAN BALLEMBERGHE said he was on the board in 2002 when it created a protective buffer adjacent to the northeast corner of the park. Several times in previous years, wolf packs were severely reduced or eliminated in this area by legal and illegal hunting and trapping. The board thoroughly debated this proposal, amended, and passed it. He knows how much effort

accompanied this action and how difficult it was to reach consensus. He also knows that no less effort was required each of the other six times the board addressed this issue. Despite their best efforts, over time, the protective buffers were too small, and wolves continued to be lost.

In 2010, the National Park Service and several conservation organizations submitted proposals to the board to enlarge the buffers based on the best available data. Despite strong public support, the board not only rejected the proposals, but eliminated the existing buffers. During the past seven years, with no buffers in place, the problems have worsened with sightings of wolves along the park road dropping greatly.

From 1980 to 2017, he conducted wildlife research in Denali National Park keeping records of wolf sightings along the park road in his study. During those years when the wolf packs were not disrupted by hunting and trapping he saw wolves near the road a lot and often dozens of sightings. During the years when the packs were disrupted, there were few if any sightings. He experienced these differences first hand. Clearly, the Board of Game has demonstrated that it cannot and will not resolve this important issue. It is time to finally provide a lasting solution by moving the Game Board arena to the legislature, and HB 105 will accomplish that.

[4:10:27 PM](#)

NANCY BALE, advocate, Denali Citizens Council (DCC), Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 105. She has been a resident of Alaska since 1971 and spent the first 30 years as a resident of the Denali region. She and her husband developed one of the last homesteads left in Denali Park when the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) selections began. They spent winters there and lived and worked in the Kantishna area in the summers for over 23 years. In 1996, she graduated from nursing school and moved to Anchorage.

In 2000, she joined the board of the Denali Citizen's Council. Many of their 300 members are year-round local residents in Healy, McKinley Village, and Cantwell; others are seasonal employees who benefit from the opportunity to share the national park with roughly a half-million visitors yearly. DCC has been one of the organizations over the years that supported protection of Denali wolves when they have been ventured onto state lands outside the park and supported the board closures of these areas in 2002 through 2010. They have brought numerous proposals and initiatives before the Board of Game.

In the 1980s, radio collaring allowed scientists to learn much more about pack structure, territories, and movements. The wolf program at Denali is unique in the state and has provided valuable data to the scientific community as well as learning experiences for park visitors. Through the Murie Science and Learning Center, park scientists are able to share the results of a lot of that information with park guests. In addition, Denali's wolf program has encouraged cooperation among both state and federal scientists.

One clear result of these studies has been to show that wolves who den in the park predictably visit certain areas of state lands at the northeast corner, particularly in late winter and spring, but return to the park for denning and summer activities. Certainly, some of these wolves disperse entirely away, but radio location data conducted over decades has shown that many venture out and return. These wolves are the ones that are the greatest risk of death from trapping and hunting outside the park. Add to this the ease of highway access on these lands and the long hunting/trapping seasons lasting from August 10 through May 31 in most areas, and in some areas through April 15, and the risk is increased. Such risk concentrated in these areas is what has led to the development of the map. Although hunting and trapping of wolves can occur in the preserves and in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) park additions - 2 million acres north and 2 million acres south - and the preserves in the northwest and southwest.

HB 105 is only asking for a no-kill area on those state lands northeast of the parks as this is where the human harvest risk is concentrated. The overall population of wolves in the area is not threatened but they also know that just a few deaths can be significant for both scientific study and visitor experience.

MS. BALE said the Denali Citizens' Council board has a decades-long history of residing and working in the region. Some members live in the Stampede Corridor and the Nenana Canyon, the areas scheduled for closure. Many are hunters and they do not oppose hunting or trapping. They simply view the closure as a great benefit with a relatively small cost to consumptive uses.

The area within the Stampede Corridor is in Game Management Unit 20(C) and the Nenana Canyon area is in Game Management Unit 20(A), and the very southern tip of that area is in Unit 13(E). In these areas, hunting season lasts between August 10 and May 31 and is closed on April 15 within the Stampede Corridor. The

bag limit is 10 wolves per hunter. The trapping season goes from November 1 to April 30 with an unlimited bag limit. These liberal bag limits and hunting seasons and the unlimited trapping numbers create a great risk when the time is right for certain wolves to be captured and to be unavailable for science and the enjoyment of visitors in the park. She urged them to pass HB 105.

[4:17:33 PM](#)

JOEL BENNETT, representing himself, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of HB 105. He said his primary employment now is in film and television, but he was a Legislative Affairs Agency attorney for nine years specializing in natural resources law, including fish and game. He also served on the Alaska Board of Game for 13 years. In his work, he has traveled extensively in Denali National Park as well as in countless other remote areas of the state. As a resource user, he has been an active licensed hunter in the state every year since 1968.

Over the years, there have been many efforts to reach agreement on what is best for wildlife and what is best for Alaska. Wolf management has always been a challenging and controversial subject, but the issue that HB 105 addresses should not be. Mr. Bennett with previous testimony that HB 105 is not a hunting issue; it is an economic one. In certain limited areas of the state, the highest and best interest of wildlife is for tourism; it is a huge economic driver.

Denali National Park is one of the most popular national parks in the nation and includes visits by tens of thousands of Alaska residents a year. Anything that adversely impacts one of the main things visitors come to see there should be minimized. The restrictions that HB 105 would impose are limited to wolves only and will likely result in more wolves for Denali National Park visitors to view while only displacing a few hunters and trappers who have ample opportunities elsewhere.

MR. BENNETT said the Board of Game recognized this when on several occasions it created buffer areas for wolves in the very areas that HB 105 covers. After that, wolf viewing success in the park was high. Now, with no buffer areas, wolf viewing success is the lowest it has ever been. Passage of HB 105 could change this.

When Jay Hammond appointed him to the Board of Game in 1977, he encouraged him to do what is best for the resource, but also as a hunter and wildlife advocate to look at both sides of an

issue. He respects the values of different user groups and recognizes that some areas deserve special protection and, in some areas, hunting and trapping should be restricted.

MR. BENNETT said he believes that Jay Hammond, an early master guide and hunting defender, would have examined HB 105 on its merits, waived the cost benefit to the state, and seen the wisdom of protecting wolves in these two sensitive areas adjacent to Denali National Park. In the spirit of Jay Hammond, one of Alaska's most visionary public servants, he urged the committee to support HB 105.

[4:22:13 PM](#)

RYAN HARMS, representing himself, Juneau, Alaska, testified on HB 105 and said he didn't have a position on it. When he came to Alaska he lived in Healy, specifically on the Stampede Corridor. He was a bartender for several years and some of his family still live there.

He offered his as a voice "of the tourist that isn't here." In the years that he worked in Denali National Park, primarily as a bar tender, and then later as a teacher, he saw many tourists who loved seeing the wildlife in general, but they would really glow when they talked about seeing wolves. He only saw one in the years he lived there (2004-2009) and it was an elated moment for him. He has seen many bears and sheep everywhere, but wolves are almost majestic in the sense that you don't see them. "Without question, tourists love to see wolves," he said.

As far as public safety, Mr. Harms said, the only thing he has seen in the Healy region is the unintended harming of domestic animals in the area that are attracted to traps and get caught.

[4:25:26 PM](#)

RANDALL L. ZARNKE, President, Alaska Trappers Association, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in opposition to HB 105. The association believes this measure is unnecessary, because the wolf population in the Denali area is abundant and wildlife management is really based on population not on the individual animals, as discussed earlier. As all know, management of wildlife in Alaska is the responsibility of the Board of Game and it should be left to them.

In the association's opinion, this bill is being promoted by people who are opposed to consumptive use who should work with their allies at the Park Service to offer state residents something in return. They would consider supporting a buffer

zone if state residents were allowed to hunt sheep in the Gates of the Arctic area and the Wrangell Mountains.

[4:27:06 PM](#)

AL BARRETTE, representing himself, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in opposition of HB 105. His concern is based on language saying that a leghold trap with a jaw-spread greater than 5 inches would not be allowed in the designated area, and that basically eliminates what trappers call the number-4 size trap. It's probably the second most popular trap in Alaska that is used on the ground. So, it potentially would make any of the subsistence trappers in the area re-supply with less effective, smaller traps targeting other species like coyote, lynx, and wolverine.

His second concern was language on line 18 authorizing the department to take wolves that are presenting a danger for health and safety to local residents, and that is the only option. Currently, the Minto Flats area has a lice outbreak, and the department is considering its options on how to take care of the pelt damage that affects animals' ability to have long hair and survive through the cold winters. This provision in HB 105 wouldn't allow the department to take wolves in that area.

MR. BARRETTE said the definition of "taking" includes capturing or pursuing, and it allows the department to eliminate some of the infected wolves, so the infestation doesn't spread throughout the state, but wouldn't allow them to treat the wolves by pursuing them.

MR. BARRETTE added that one of the four or five collared wolves that were retrieved this year was killed by another pack, and no one ever mentions the high mortality of wolf-on-wolf interaction.

Subsistence users would be impacted in the area. Moving from one area to somebody else's area creates a lot of conflict and confusion with other trappers, he said.

[4:30:42 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL noted department representatives on line and asked if the committee had questions.

SENATOR COGHILL asked for someone to comment on whether the pack size fluctuates with the food supply.

[4:32:02 PM](#)

BRUCE DALE, Director, Division of Wildlife Conservation, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Anchorage, Alaska, answered that wolf density, or population size, is largely a function of the availability of ungulate prey, and when wolf populations decline, its either because prey numbers change or if the vulnerability of the prey changes. Vulnerability to predation could be affected by snow conditions, nutritional status, and that sort of thing. It's a good predictor of wolf density. In a few areas harvest can have an effect, but in Alaska through regular hunting and trapping, harvest typically does not affect wolf numbers. Wolves are capable of providing for a lot of harvest, because dispersal is a real important life history trait. Up to 20 percent of a pack can disperse every year. Wolves have a lot of pups and when they get to be about two years old at about this time of year, from February through June and July, a lot of them seek their own territories. They are looking for places to live and there aren't always places to live and they become vulnerable to other wolves and to the trappers and hunters.

[4:34:07 PM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL said the other part to that question is in this particular zone the wolves are managed by the park and the state manages for wolves within the state and asked if there is any overlap in management. Is there an ability to count accurately?

MR. DALE answered that there is some overlap. The park actually studies the wolves and monitors their population. The state doesn't do surveys inside Denali National Park. He said the primary cause of death in wolves in Denali National Park from 1987 through the late 90s was being killed by other wolves.

[4:35:28 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked Mr. Dale to help him understand the interplay of the Constitution; the general authority section in Article 8, says natural resources belonging to the state are to be used for the maximum benefit of the people. Then there's the common use section, which says fish, wildlife, and waters are reserved for the people for common use. He asked how he accounts for the money the wolf viewing brings in versus the other competing uses and what he thinks is the maximum benefit for this wildlife.

MR. DALE replied that is a policy call for the trustees of the resource, which is the legislature, that delegated that authority to the Board of Game. As the trust manager, the

department provides the information needed to make the decision, and wolf viewing is a high use.

4:37:00 PM

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI concurred with him but asked if he could reconcile all the interests.

MR. DALE answered no; his expertise is in biology, and that is really a "values call."

4:38:22 PM

CHAIR GIESSEL closed public testimony on HB 105.

4:39:00 PM

REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of HB 105, commented that much of what he would say has been said already. The fundamental things he wants the committee to know are that research on the question of who is taking wolves that leave the National Park suggest that it's two or three individuals. An article in the National Geographic Magazine, February 2016, featured a gentleman named Mr. Wallace saying he had ruined the opportunity for millions of people to see wolves. He is right, because taking significant breeding females contributes to the demise of a pack. When a buffer was put in place by the Board of Game, the numbers seemed to correlate with viewability which was down to 6 percent last year from 45 percent - and there was no evidence to the contrary.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON said Mr. Wallace may be right also, because Denali gets about 650,000 visitors per year and that adds up to a couple million people over a number of years. The issue here is economic. It's true that the park entry is doing well, but the question is: could it do better. Fundamentally, it is known that these wolves leave to the north and to the east and evidence indicates that only a handful of trappers are getting any benefit in this area, but that is enough to really do some damage.

Relative to the traps that would be prohibited under the legislation, he carefully crafted that language with Bernard Chastain, the leading Department of Public Safety (DPS) officer in the state on wildlife enforcement policy; Mr. Dale, and former Board of Game member, Vic Van Ballenberg and their general consensus was that those two types of traps were the kinds that a wolf would come upon and end its life over and not necessarily other traps. All other trapping would continue. Mr. Chastain said in correspondence if someone caught a wolf in a

trap, because the bill precludes the taking of wolves, that almost surely would not result in his prosecution, because an affirmative defense could be used to say it was some other animal.

He also noted that people say this is state land and this is basically a conservation easement of sorts in a discrete and narrow way relative to this wolf population.

[4:44:36 PM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL observed that most of the wolf viewing is along the road system and that viewing opportunities within the park are very limited, because it has only one major road and just a few pack areas. It looks like this corridor is really giving the population area that is covered by roads that limitation. Is that observation accurate?

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON replied clearly, the wolf observing happens on the park road and without a doubt the economic benefit of seeing more wolves would be enjoyed by Denali Park hoteliers and restaurants. Some people get permits to go into the units where they have better chances of seeing wolves.

SENATOR COGHILL remarked that he would probably ask the park to put in more access before he would be willing to surrender some of this ground.

[4:46:18 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked his thoughts on weighing the Alaska Constitutional issues of common use versus the maximum benefit for Alaskans.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON answered that there is a discussion on whether predator control polices allow the constitutional goals to be met. But this isn't about that issue. It is, however, about concerns over the rights of folks to see wildlife. It is imperative to do better in terms of the economic value, and the common use principle is seriously undermined when two or three individuals can capture wolves who leave in a seasonal way and undermine the health of the packs, which rely on the knowledge and intelligence of their senior members for their prosperity and health.

[4:48:04 PM](#)

SENATOR BISHOP asked how long the three people he is talking about have been harvesting wolves in this area.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON replied they were prohibited for a time in 2000 to 2010. He didn't know if that was dispositive of anything.

SENATOR BISHOP said he looked at the population estimates inside the park in the last 26 years and saw some good wolf numbers, and he was trying to draw a correlation.

[4:49:27 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON noted anecdotal information from Mr. Shawn McGuire (in the other body) that has not been challenged that animals have been killed to draw the wolves out. He knew that a horse had been killed for that purpose. That concerns him. Folks who come on a two-week trip to Alaska want to see wolves and we should help them see them.

CHAIR GIESSEL thanked the sponsor and held HB 105 in committee.

[4:51:03 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Giessel adjourned the Senate Resources Standing Committee at 4:51 p.m.