

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
JOINT MEETING
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES
HOUSE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

Anchorage, Alaska

September 3, 2020

10:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

Representative Louise Stutes, Chair
Representative Bryce Edgmon (via teleconference)
Representative Chuck Kopp (via teleconference)
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins (via teleconference)
Representative Geran Tarr
Representative Sarah Vance (via teleconference)

HOUSE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Geran Tarr, Co-Chair
Representative John Lincoln, Co-Chair (via teleconference)
Representative Grier Hopkins, Vice Chair (via teleconference)
Representative Sara Hannan (via teleconference)
Representative Chris Tuck
Representative Ivy Spohnholz (via teleconference)
Representative Dave Talerico (via teleconference)
Representative George Rauscher (via teleconference)
Representative Sara Rasmussen

MEMBERS ABSENT

HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

Representative Mark Neuman

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Harriett Drummond (via teleconference)

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

Board of Fisheries

McKenzie Mitchell - Fairbanks, Alaska
John Wood - Willow, Alaska
John Jensen - Petersburg, Alaska
Abe Williams - Anchorage, Alaska

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

MEGAN WALLACE, Director
Legislative Legal Services
Legislative Affairs Agency
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided invited comment about the board confirmation process.

MCKENZIE MITCHELL, Appointee
Board of Fisheries
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Board of Fisheries.

JOHN WOOD, Esq., Appointee
Board of Fisheries
Willow, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Board of Fisheries.

ABE WILLIAMS, Appointee
Board of Fisheries
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Board of Fisheries.

GARY CLINE
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

ANTHONY ZOCH, Regional Fisheries Coordinator
Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation (BBEDC)
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

SHANNON DONAHUE
Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC)
Haines, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

MELISSA STERITZ
Eyak Preservation Council (EPC)
Cordova, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

BRIAN HIMELBLOOM
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of John Jensen, and expressed concern about the appointments of John Wood, McKenzie Mitchell, and Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

SERENA FITKA, Executive Director
Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)
Valdez, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified that given the Board of Fisheries' current membership and nominee panel, it does not have fair representation of all of Alaska.

EVELYN CORBETT
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

MALCOLM VANCE
McCarthy, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

LINDSAY LAYLAND, Deputy Director
United Tribes of Bristol Bay (UTBB)
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

JEFF SKRADE
La Crosse, Wisconsin

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

ROBERT HEYANO
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams and in support of the appointment of John Jensen to the Board of Fisheries.

STEVE HYAMS
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

NELS EVENS
Bethel, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

JACK DONACHY
Chignik Lake, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

JUDY GONSALVES
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

OLIVA EDWARDS
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

CRAWFORD PARR
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

PHIL HILBRUNER, Owner
Lakeview Outfitters
Cooper Landing, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

AMANDA JOHNSTON
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

VIVIAN MENDENHALL
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

KATHERINE CARSCALLEN
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

VERNER WILSON III
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams and expressed concern about the appointment of John Wood to the Board of Fisheries.

DIANE FOLSOM
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointments of Abe Williams and John Wood to the Board of Fisheries.

MARIEL TERRY
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

MARK RICHARDS
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of McKenzie Mitchell and in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

ANNE CORAY KAHN
Lake Clark, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

DONNA RAE FAULKNER
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

DON MCNAMARA
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointments of John Wood and Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

RICHARD GUSTAFSON
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointments of Abe Williams and John Wood to the Board of Fisheries.

MAGGIE BURSCH
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

KALEB WESTFALL
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

CHUCK DERRICK, President
Chitina Dipnetters Association (CDA)
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointments of McKenzie Mitchell and John Wood to the Board of Fisheries.

CHUCK MCCALLUM
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointments of McKenzie Mitchell and John Wood to the Board of Fisheries.

ROBERT HEYANO
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of John Jensen to the Board of Fisheries.

BEN MOHR, Executive Director
Kenai River Sportfishing Association (KRSA)
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointments of McKenzie Mitchell, John Wood, John Jensen, and Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

SUSAN DOHERTY, Executive Director
Southeast Alaska Seiners Association (SEAS)
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of John Jensen to the Board of Fisheries.

FORREST BRADEN, Executive Director
Southeast Alaska Guides Organization (SEAGO)
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointments of McKenzie Mitchell, John Wood, John Jensen, and Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

GEORGIE HEAVERLEY
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided testimony expressing her concern that the people of Alaska are losing faith in the Board of Fisheries process.

STEPHANIE QUINN-DAVIDSON, PhD, Director, Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided testimony urging that the administration go back to the drawing board and nominate an appointee with knowledge of and experience in subsistence.

KAREN HOFSTAD
Petersburg, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of John Jensen and in opposition to the appointments of McKenzie Mitchell and Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

GALE VICK, Member
Fairbanks Fish & Game Advisory Committee
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of McKenzie Mitchell to the Board of Fisheries.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[10:04:54 AM](#)

CHAIR LOUISE STUTES called the joint meeting of the House Special Committee on Fisheries and the House Resources Standing Committee to order at [10:04] a.m. Representatives Tarr, Tuck, Kopp (via teleconference), Kreiss-Tomkins (via teleconference), Edgmon (via teleconference), Vance (via teleconference), Rauscher (via teleconference), Hannan (via teleconference), Talerico (via teleconference), Hopkins (via teleconference), and Stutes were present at the call to order. Representatives Spohnholz (via teleconference), Rasmussen, and Lincoln (via

teleconference) arrived as the meeting was in progress. Representative Drummond was also present (via teleconference).

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :
Board of Fisheries

[Includes brief discussion of HB 309]

[10:06:24 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES announced that the only order of business would be confirmation hearings for the Board of Fisheries.

CHAIR STUTES stated that due to a loophole in the Board of Fisheries confirmation statutes and the timing of the COVID-19 virus there is a situation where four sitting board members could be making allocative decisions before a vote by the legislature or testimony opportunity by the public. She specified that today's meeting was called to ensure the public's right to weigh in on appointees before those appointees can make decisions affecting the public's livelihoods and way of life, as well as to allow committees to review and question the appointees prior to a joint session for consideration. The Board of Fisheries is a unique allocative board with a tremendous impact on the lives of Alaskans, which is why this opportunity for public and legislative input is crucial. Nearly 500 written public comments have already been received and are posted in BASIS.

CHAIR STUTES pointed out that committees do not have the ability to hold confirmations from moving forward. Today is an opportunity for public input, she continued, but the committee cannot hold names. She said Ms. Megan Wallace of Legislative Legal Services has been invited to provide a statement about this unique situation and the board confirmation process.

[10:08:21 AM](#)

MEGAN WALLACE, Director, Legislative Legal Services, Legislative Affairs Agency, Alaska State Legislature, explained that this year's board confirmation process has been complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the legislature's early recess of the second regular session. The legislature contemplated that unless it did something to act, all the governor's appointees would have been considered declined upon adjournment of the regular session, she recounted. So, before going into extended recess in March, the legislature passed and enacted into law HB

309, which extended the time for which the legislature could act to confirm or decline to confirm the governor's appointments.

MS. WALLACE further explained that HB 309 extended the time for the legislature to hold a joint session to confirm the governor's appointees and provided for a date - the earlier of 1/18/21 or 30 days after expiration of the disaster declaration - by which the failure of the legislature to act would be considered a declination of the confirmation of the governor's appointees. Under SB 241, another bill passed by the legislature, the disaster declaration is set to expire on 11/15/20. If the legislature were to meet to extend the disaster declaration, that would also extend the time for which the legislature could act to confirm or decline to confirm the governor's appointees, but under HB 309 the legislature would still need to act by 1/18/21, if under that hypothetical the disaster declaration was extended. As situated today, the governor's appointees would be considered declined 30 days after expiration of the disaster declaration.

[10:12:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK asked whether the governor has statutory requirements for filling the [currently empty] attorney general position within a certain amount of time.

MS. WALLACE offered her understanding that there isn't a specific date, but qualified she hasn't looked at that to know whether there is a specific date by which the governor must appoint a new attorney general.

[10:13:28 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES noted the House Special Committee on Fisheries heard confirmation of Mr. John Wood in early March, but the House Resources Standing Committee didn't have that opportunity before COVID-19 forced an early adjournment. She thanked Mr. Wood for coming forth a second time.

CHAIR STUTES invited appointee McKenzie Mitchell to testify first. She noted Ms. Mitchell was appointed on 7/1/20 and, if confirmed, her term would run through 6/30/2023. She requested Ms. Mitchell tell about herself and state why she is a good fit for the Board of Fisheries.

[10:15:11 AM](#)

MCKENZIE MITCHELL, Appointee, Board of Fisheries, stated she is testifying from a boat on the Yukon River where she is currently working as a moose hunting guide. She said she was born in northern California where her parents took her hunting and fishing. She has now been in Alaska for 11 years after buying a one-way ticket to Anchorage at the age of 20. She began calling hunting and fishing lodges, landing a job at a remote hunting and fishing lodge near Kodiak where she worked for several years, eventually getting her captain's license, assistant big game guide license, and sport fish guide license.

MS. MITCHELL said she went on to earn her [B.A.] in Economics and her [M.S.] in Resource and Applied Economics, with a focus on her passion of fisheries, from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). Earning her graduate degree required that she critically look at fisheries management policies, allocative decisions, and best practice principles of maximum sustainable yield - basically the process for fisheries management and how to find values to various resources that typically don't have monetary values that are observable in a market. She now continues to work as a seasonal hunting and fishing guide and is teaching economics and recreation management courses at UAF.

MS. MITCHELL said she views being on the Board of Fisheries as the ability to give back to a state that has provided her with everything she wanted to do in her life. If given this opportunity, she will work hard to make the best decisions she can. The best way to do that is to consider the information provided by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) and the data and the science, as well as the importance of fisheries to people's lives in Alaska. She will listen to the stakeholders and educate herself on the various fisheries around the state and their importance to the people as well as the market demands that they satisfy.

[10:19:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ asked whether Ms. Mitchell is a professor or adjunct faculty at UAF.

MS. MITCHELL replied she doesn't have a doctorate degree, but rather a master's degree in resource and applied economics. She contracts each semester to teach a couple different courses. Responding further, she confirmed she is adjunct faculty.

[10:20:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN calculated that serving on the Board of Fisheries could mean up to 30 days of board meetings over the next calendar year. She inquired how that intersects with Ms. Mitchell's obligations to current employers and whether Ms. Mitchell will be able to fully attend the meetings.

MS. MITCHELL responded that she works as a hunting guide typically in August and September. This year it seems as though her working schedule conflicts with her ability to be present for the Board of Fisheries meetings, but she has still managed to make what she can work. However, she noted, this is a COVID-19 related situation as typically the process occurs earlier in the spring when she does have availability. Regarding conflicts with teaching at UAF, she teaches online courses, giving her the flexibility to be in various places and having her laptop along to orchestrate the courses. The department in which she works is supportive and willing to work with her.

[10:22:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN acknowledged Ms. Mitchell has spent time in rural Alaska, but said it appears she is missing experience with subsistence users given her experience is as a commercially employed consumer of sport fisheries. She requested Ms. Mitchell describe her knowledge and experience with the importance and economic value of subsistence users of fisheries across Alaska.

MS. MITCHELL concurred she hasn't necessarily participated in the subsistence fishery in Alaska. However, she noted, she spends a lot of time working remotely. For example, she just took a boat 480 miles down the Yukon River and is familiar with the villages along the route. Working this remotely in the hunting and fishing industry often requires support from villages that are incredibly dependent upon Alaska's resources. The resources supply so many Alaskans with a lifestyle and way of life that is incredibly important. While that way of life may not have an observed monetary value in comparison to a sport or commercial fishery, the subsistence fishery has enormous value, and it is important to maintain and preserve the people's right to the land.

[10:24:56 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR TARR opined that it is important for the Board of Fisheries to have good representation from all regions of Alaska and from different perspectives. She offered her understanding

that the first board meeting ever attended by Ms. Mitchell was after her appointment. Co-Chair Tarr recounted that in the past, appointees have had more experience with the board process and/or have been members of the advisory committees at the local level, and therefore this lack of experience has been brought up as a concern with Ms. Mitchell's appointment. She requested Ms. Mitchell address this concern.

MS. MITCHELL answered that she understands the concern about not being involved in the process prior to appointment. She stated she decided to put her name in last winter when she heard positions were coming open. She explained she wasn't involved before because she just graduated school in May 2019. While in school and completing her pilot ratings she waited tables five or six nights a week. With graduation, she has had more stable employment along with the credentials to afford a different lifestyle than when a student and paying for school. This change in her life is giving her the opportunity to become involved and that is what she is trying to do.

[10:27:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked why Ms. Mitchell applied to the Board of Fisheries rather than the Board of Game since it seems her experience is primarily with game.

MS. MITCHELL replied she would be interested in serving on the Board of Game, as well, given her experience with both hunting and fishing in Alaska is well balanced. During her first years in Kodiak at the hunting and fishing lodge she worked a nine- or ten-month season: fishing in summer, bear hunting in spring and fall, and deer and elk later into the year. She has continued to work in the sport fish industry this summer and the game industry this spring and fall. As a student there were a couple years when she wasn't in big game hunting commercial services and one or two summers where she wasn't a sport fish guide. She cares for both resources, but had the opportunity to apply for one. Because fisheries is her educational background, it is the one for which she is most qualified.

[10:30:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ requested Ms. Mitchell describe her perspective on how the board should use the allocation criteria and where subsistence fits into that allocation scheme.

MS. MITCHELL responded that as a board member, she is aware of the allocative guidelines the board follows, and the board looks at the science and data to make the best allocative decisions that it can. The idea is to conserve, develop, and utilize the fishery according to Article VIII [of the Constitution of the State of Alaska]. A big buzzword in this article is conservation for the people of Alaska, she added, and that would highlight the subsistence use of fisheries in the state.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ noted that subsistence has a priority over other consumptive uses. It is important, she stated, that any member of the Board of Fisheries understands that priority and the way allocation needs to take place in Alaska.

[10:31:52 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK related that Alaska's constitution says all Alaskans own all the state's fish and water resources. He further related that Alaska's Anadromous Fish Act requires that anyone conducting activities which may harm [anadromous] fish habitat must apply for a permit from ADF&G and that there must be public notice and opportunity for public comment. However, he continued, that isn't currently happening. He asked how Ms. Mitchell would ensure that there is adequate public testimony if she were to be confirmed to the board.

MS. MITCHELL answered that Alaska's fisheries are one of the few in the U.S. that are managed in such an open and public process. Maintaining that process is really important, she stated, because Alaska's resources are for the people of the state and that is a priority. [As a board member] she would support public processes throughout because that is the way of fisheries management for Alaska and maintaining that is a good thing.

[10:34:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK drew attention to a letter and documents submitted by Ms. Mitchell and observed that none of them specifically mention conservation. He inquired about the role conservation has with the Board of Fisheries and how much focus Ms. Mitchell will put on conservation to ensure viable fisheries for the future.

MS. MITCHELL replied that much of what she provided is where her education and experience falls into fisheries. She reiterated that her background is resource and applied economics, and that education focuses on allocative decisions, supply and demand,

satisfying market demand, assigning value to goods that don't necessarily have observable market value or dollar flows to look at and make comparisons. Dollar flows cannot be looked at to compare across Alaska's different fish groups - commercial, subsistence, personal use, and sport fish - because, like apples and oranges, they cannot be compared. So, when asked what conservation means to her, she continued, it means the duty of a board member because of Article VIII, which says to make resources available for maximum use consistent with public interest and public interest being all user groups. Article VIII also says to utilize, develop, and conserve the resources. Conserving the resources is one of the most important things to do because if a resource isn't preserved it can't be utilized or developed. Subsistence user groups are incredibly important in the state, Ms. Mitchell stressed; they have a priority in the state for obvious reasons. If a resource isn't sustained, then it cannot be utilized or developed, so conservation is key.

[10:37:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK allowed it wouldn't be easy to take a strong stance especially with a lot of seasoned board members. He posed a scenario in which ADF&G decides not to provide an opportunity for public comment on a fish habitat permit. He asked what actions Ms. Mitchell would take to ensure that the public comment process would be followed.

MS. MITCHELL responded that she couldn't speak to what action specifically because that would be a process, and she would need to understand the reasons why. If it is a funding issue, then making sure that the department has the resources it needs to be able to provide things to maintain the status of how fisheries are managed in Alaska is going to be important. While she cannot say specifically what action she would take, she can say the public nature of how fisheries are managed in Alaska is important and it should be preserved as best as the state can.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK urged that Ms. Mitchell, if confirmed, take into consideration the food security of all Alaskans and make it a priority, especially given the COVID-19 situation and low salmon returns on the Yukon. That is why he asked questions about conservation, he explained. He further urged that when looking at the supply, Ms. Mitchell look at the needs of Alaskans as much as possible.

[10:39:51 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES requested Ms. Mitchell to explain what her graduate thesis entails and why she considers it fisheries management.

MS. MITCHELL answered that her thesis is on the newly adopted Recreational Quota Entity (RQE). A nonprofit, the RQE is to help conduct the transfer of commercial halibut permits to the sport fish side to better utilize the available halibut resource and "whether or not the determinance of sport fish anglers to pay in support of that program through ... some sort of means like a halibut stamp similar to a king salmon stamp or ... the federal duck stamp." She said she considers that fisheries management because it's an idea about how to manage the halibut fishery and how to better conduct the management of the halibut resource for the state of Alaska by allowing the commercial and sport fish user groups to essentially equate the halibut resource in the most economically efficient way. It was a management idea on how to allow them to do that.

[10:41:51 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES inquired whether Ms. Mitchell is familiar with the Community Development Quota (CDQ) program, what it is about, and how it operates in the state of Alaska.

MS. MITCHELL replied that the RQE piggybacks off the CDQ program in a way, however it wasn't applied to sport fish and commercial fisheries. She said she isn't "super familiar" with it, but during her time conducting research it was an entity that was helping to allocate a resource as well, similar to the Guided Angler Fish (GAF) program.

CHAIR STUTES noted that there are several of them across Alaska and it's a huge resource and a huge concern to many rural communities. [The CDQ program] contributes significant social and economic benefit to residents of about 65 communities. She asked whether she is correct in concluding that sport fisheries are Ms. Mitchell's main focus.

MS. MITCHELL confirmed her industry experience is in the sport fishery and her thesis focused on a particular management policy that bridged the sport fish and commercial fishery. But, she specified, as a Board of Fisheries member she realizes the importance of fisheries to all user groups in the state and that her responsibility as a board member is to make the best decisions under the guidelines of fisheries management in the state of Alaska. This will obviously require her to gain a significant amount of education, to talk to a lot of subsistence

users, and probably to travel to learn more about various areas of the state so she can make the best decisions for each fishery, not just the ones for which she has industry or education experience.

[10:44:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS inquired about the GAF program.

MS. MITCHELL explained that the Guided Angler Fish (GAF) program is similar to the recreational quota entity (RQE) program in that the GAF program aimed to allow the transfer of halibut quota between commercial and sport fish user groups, but at the individual vessel level as opposed to the RQE program which aims to do it across the whole user group for various areas.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS requested Ms. Mitchell speak to the analogy she referenced between the CDQ and GAF programs [when responding to a question from Chair Stutes].

MS. MITCHELL responded that they are "not anywhere analogous, just more so as kind of the development for the RQE program kind of as it started as the GAF program, so it wasn't really necessarily with the CDQ."

[10:46:41 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked whether Ms. Mitchell realizes that halibut isn't a state managed fishery.

MS. MITCHELL answered "Yes, absolutely."

[10:47:04 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR TARR related that, historically, representation on the Board of Fisheries has been a split between commercial and sport interests and then subsistence representation. That has gotten out of sync, she opined, not just in these appointments but over the last few years. There is some concern about lack of representation from Western Alaska and Yukon River fisheries and from someone living currently in the Bristol Bay region. Of concern to her with decisions made by the Board of Fisheries, she opined further, is that a lot of work could be done on the front end to avoid conflict and to work with stakeholders to identify people who would have broad support from the public and different user groups. Unfortunately, it seems this process doesn't work in that way. When people don't work together

appointments become highly controversial and there is a lot of conflict. In turn it makes the board process not function as well as it should because of the conflict that was created through the nomination and appointment process. Co-Chair Tarr pointed out that the current board, seated and nominees, is comprised of five sport interests, one commercial, and one subsistence; six members are from Interior Alaska and one from Coastal Alaska. She inquired whether Ms. Mitchell believes the current board reflects the diversity of the state and that all voices are being heard.

MS. MITCHELL replied she understands some of the opposition to board members based on their geographic location in the state. She offered her belief that no matter where the appointees came from there would probably still be some contention because it is hard to get geographic representation from everywhere on a seven-member board in such a large state. The responsibility of the board members, she opined, is to educate themselves the best they can on all the fisheries in Alaska, the user groups, and the importance of the fish to those user groups. That may require travel and talking to stakeholders while in different parts of the state. The position is voluntary and providing services, Ms. Mitchell continued, and ultimately it will require that a lot of time be dedicated to it. She is fortunate that her work oftentimes takes her to various parts of the state where she can talk to people and get better educated so to be able to make decisions for the people and the resource.

[10:51:46 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked whether Ms. Mitchell would be a proponent of shifting some of the commercial halibut quota to the sport industry.

MS. MITCHELL responded that that is a really difficult question. She explained that her thesis focused on looking at what would be the best way to fund a management program that had already been adopted at the time. The idea was to figure out a funding mechanism for this already-adopted program. The most likely mechanism was going to be a halibut stamp of some sort, which would require the sport fishermen themselves to purchase that stamp. She looked at how much could potentially be charged for such a stamp, and how much revenue could be made. She did this by sending a survey to 10,000 sport fishermen which asked them how they would like their halibut catch to be regulated and whether they were willing to pay this additional amount to be able to do that. Ms. Mitchell stressed her thesis was not to

make a statement on whether she thinks there should be a transfer of halibut between the user groups. Rather, her thesis was to analyze and look critically at a newly adopted program to see how it would work and what ways it would be effective.

MS. MITCHELL addressed the question of [whether she is a proponent of transferring some commercial halibut quota to the sport industry]. She stated that if commercial fishermen aren't harvesting all their halibut [in a given] year, then providing them an opportunity to transfer the excess to another user group to utilize for a fee could support them. She said she would need to talk with both user groups to see whether that was in their interest, but she imagines that the development of the RQE program and its ability to get adopted meant there was an interest from both sides for that to happen at some level.

CHAIR STUTES said she presumes Ms. Mitchell's answer to the aforementioned question is basically yes. She then inquired whether Ms. Mitchell was asked to submit her name or applied independently for a seat on the Board of Fisheries.

MS. MITCHELL answered that she received a phone call informing her that there was a position open, and after thinking hard about it she decided to submit her name.

[10:56:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP asked whether Ms. Mitchell is a commercial pilot or private pilot with instrument ratings.

MS. MITCHELL replied she is a commercial pilot with an instrument rating.

[10:56:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP stated that Ms. Mitchell's thesis on the willingness to pay estimates from anglers seems very thorough. Given Ms. Mitchell's commitment to pursuing education and driving at best results, he requested an example of where she has changed her view on a significant public policy matter based on what she had learned.

MS. MITCHELL explained she provided her thesis to show she has the ability to critically think about and conduct research, but not necessarily to make statements about anything. She wanted to show that in a Board of Fisheries position, her mathematical skills and scientific related research with fisheries would give

her an advantage when looking at hard data. Regarding the question itself, Ms. Mitchell stated that her opinion on things changes all the time, especially the deeper she digs into research, data, and comprehension. She noted that a thesis takes several years to complete, and one goes into a thesis with a theory and a hypothesis. Many of the results on her thesis work surprised her. One question she asked the anglers was how they prefer for their halibut catch to be regulated; for example, regulation can be by size limits, spot limits, number of fish per day, or number of fish per season. Seeing and understanding how sport fishermen prefer for their catch to be restricted made her think very differently on how management policies come into play a lot of the time. Ms. Mitchell added that her ability to have boots on the ground as a hunting guide and sport fish guide, and to travel to rural parts of the state where she sees how rural communities live, really gives her a different perspective. Her thoughts change oftentimes with more knowledge from talking to people, reading papers, and looking at the science and the data.

[11:01:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP asked whether Ms. Mitchell is familiar with the legal precedent in Alaska that establishes subsistence as the highest priority for consumptive use.

MS. MITCHELL responded yes, she is familiar that subsistence is of highest priority for consumptive use and she supports that notion. She added that there are many rural Alaskans; it's a way of life up here, so she is familiar with it, understands it, and supports it.

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP offered his belief that in 1978 the Alaska State Legislature was the first to put subsistence into state law. Under the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Congress passed a priority subsistence law for federal lands within the state. Subsistence, he stated, is very much a part of Alaska's culture and is based on thousands of years of tradition. Subsistence use of products is much greater than just fish; it gets into clothing, fuel, transportation, home goods, and the sharing of fish and wildlife with neighbors who cannot hunt and fish for themselves.

[11:03:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN related her understanding that due to COVID-19 the Division of Sport Fish has lost about \$8 million in

revenue, presumably from the lack of tourism and out-of-state fishing licenses. Given the division's budget is \$50 million, she requested Ms. Mitchell's thoughts on how to reconcile such a large loss to the division's revenue stream.

MS. MITCHELL answered that it is going to require a lot of hard work to rebuild and continue to support the way things have been. She said she doesn't have a specific way for solving that problem or promoting any one way to deal with the revenue loss. She stressed the importance of ADF&G and the importance of the department to continue having the ability to conduct research and provide scientific data to board members.

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN asked whether Ms. Mitchell would be supportive of increasing current user fees, looking at taxes the state charges on gear, or increasing commercial fish.

MS. MITCHELL replied she wouldn't feel comfortable choosing without critically thinking about that because every one of those decisions has rippling effects on the various user groups and the resource. She would need to spend a lot of time thinking about it and working with others on the best way to deal with it. All the options mentioned are possibilities that would need to be looked at.

[11:07:44 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES invited Ms. Mitchell to make a closing statement.

MS. MITCHELL stated she would do the same to educate herself while on the Board of Fisheries as she did during the past 11 years of immersing herself into the Alaska way of life and getting her education and credentials. She said it is an honor to serve and to give back and that she appreciates being given the opportunity.

[11:08:49 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES invited appointee John Wood to testify. She said Mr. Wood was appointed to the Board of Fisheries on 5/24/2019. If confirmed, Mr. Wood's term would run until 6/30/2021. She noted Mr. Wood has served on the board for some time, but has yet to come up for a [confirmation] vote. Chair Stutes requested Mr. Wood state why he is a good fit to remain on the Board of Fisheries.

[11:09:17 AM](#)

JOHN WOOD, Esq., Appointee, Board of Fisheries, stated he came to Alaska in 1971. He worked for the Alaska Court System as a court attorney for the Superior Court in Anchorage. Working as a standing master, probate master, and interim master, he heard cases and made recommendations as to what the judges should rule upon. He then went into private practice, which he discontinued in the mid-1990s when he retired. He has been living in the Willow area on 65 acres between two salmon streams.

MR. WOOD said his first experience in Alaska was fishing in Alexander Creek in 1972, a creek that has gone from an abundance of king salmon to almost barren of king salmon. He pointed out it isn't just that particular creek system; the issue is found throughout areas that were formerly world-famous fishing grounds and now are barely holding on. He said this is an outright concern of his, which must be addressed across the board. As staff for then Senator Dunleavy in 2013 and 2014, he worked closely with fish related matters for the senator's constituency and was active during the 2013 and 2014 sessions of the Board of Fisheries. He wasn't working with Senator Dunleavy in 2017 when he observed the Board of Fisheries and didn't actively participate.

MR. WOOD stressed that the one approach he takes foremost before anything else is what he calls a conservation approach. He said he would like to see the actions that he has helped take result in more fish, and fish in their historical size, returning to Alaska's streams. That is his number one priority. Before getting to any of the subsistence, allocation, or consumption questions, it must first be assured that the fisheries are going to be here in the future for future generations. He would like to see the board be more active much along the lines seen with the federal board to rebuild stocks, and to do so requires getting directly into the habitat issue. Many different problems are occurring in the spawning beds that must be addressed and remedied.

[11:12:18 AM](#)

MR. WOOD related that throughout all the meetings of this last cycle he actively reached out to all stakeholders to get their perspective on the current situation and how they would like to see it change. Prior to his first meeting, he continued, he drove to Homer on his own time and nickel to attend the "salmon committee of the North Pacific committee" because they were dealing with a lawsuit brought by a user group, a stakeholder,

that he thinks had and may still have huge impacts on the fisheries in Alaska. He then stayed an extra day to go to Soldotna and Kenai to meet with several of the setnetters and United Cook Inlet Drift Association (UCIDA) folks to get their take on which actions they'd like to see and why, and the why was much more important to him.

MR. WOOD stated he has a reputation for his ability to bring parties together. He said he has been in enough positions on boards and administrative bodies to know to create a win-win whenever possible. As a result of insisting on stakeholders getting together at these last board meetings, groups are now talking to each other that never did before. Outside of the Board of Fisheries he is in communication with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to conduct some of the research in the blue water at no expense to the state. Right now, he explained, there is very little data on what happens to the fish once they get out into the blue water. His fear, he said, is that every net and line could be taken out of the water, yet what happens in the blue water is going to dictate for the most part what the returns are going to be. Under that scenario it would dictate 100 percent and things might still be way under goals. Getting a grasp on that is needed, and that kind of information isn't currently available.

MR. WOOD noted that due to COVID-19, the Board of Fisheries is holding a special meeting in a couple weeks to decide what to do with the meetings coming up this cycle. He said his concern is that the meetings will be postponed or not held because of participants not being able to meet in person. This year that would result in Ketchikan and Cordova issues falling to the wayside, something he isn't willing to see. From the recommendations e-mailed to him last night, which he has perused but not yet studied, it appears the direction is towards not holding in-person meetings. This would be a sad situation, he opined, because the Board of Fisheries brings the unique perspective of the public getting to directly interact with the people who are making the actual decisions.

[11:16:32 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked whether Mr. Wood is presently employed in any capacity by the State of Alaska.

MR. WOOD replied yes, he is under contract with the Department of Administration and the Office of the Governor. In response

to a follow-up question, he said he reports directly to the governor.

CHAIR STUTES asked Mr. Wood whether he thinks a conflict, or a strong potential for a conflict, exists when a Board of Fisheries member on a state contract for other business is reporting directly to the governor, regardless of whether it's a technicality or a technical violation of state statute. This seems like a dangerous precedent, she opined.

MR. WOOD answered that the contract specifically addresses the issues and no fish issues whatsoever are covered by the contract. So, he continued, he doesn't believe that to be any kind of conflict. About 99 percent of what he has done thus far is related to trying to develop a strategy for labor negotiations with the various bargaining units that will be taking place over the next several years.

CHAIR STUTES inquired whether she is correct in understanding that Mr. Wood reports directly to the governor and no one else.

MR. WOOD confirmed he reports directly to the governor and added that he communicates several times a week with folks within the labor negotiating team at the Department of Administration.

CHAIR STUTES stated that this is personally very alarming to her and that it is a moral and ethical conflict in her opinion.

[11:18:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN requested further detail on what Mr. Wood's contract entails for the Department of Administration.

MR. WOOD replied that the department and the governor's office are developing the strategy for labor negotiations, which is the vast majority of the work he's done thus far by a large margin. That is trying to have an approach as uniform as can be with the different bargaining units so the state can accomplish across the board efficiencies and more effective government.

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN asked when Mr. Wood's contract with the Department of Administration would expire.

MR. WOOD offered his belief that it is April 2021.

[11:19:48 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR TARR related that Mr. Wood's contract has been brought up as a concern. She asked whether Mr. Wood would be willing to consider changes in his contract and to share with members the terms of his contract to help them understand how any possible conflicts or autonomy are addressed. She said she sees it as problematic even if Mr. Wood isn't working on fisheries issues because if Mr. Wood is aware that the governor has a particular position on a fishery issue and doesn't want to get crosswise with the governor because that influences where he stands with his contract, then that could cause Mr. Wood to feel undue pressure. She said this is the same concern she has with another individual who is currently employed and there is the possibility for undue pressure with trying to make choices between employment and paycheck and the fishery resource, resulting in bad decisions.

MR. WOOD offered his belief that his contract is part of the public record for anyone to view. He said he has not considered choosing one or the other. He noted that the contract was in existence and disclosed back when he was initially appointed. It went through all the conflict processes - to the Department of Law and back to the chair of the board - and each time it was uniformly determined that there was no conflict of interest. Regarding whether he would step down from that if appointed to the board, Mr. Wood said he doesn't know he will be appointed to the board until there is a vote, and so he is in an awkward situation at best. He stated he was asked to do the work on labor, he didn't seek it out, and thus far he has received absolutely no pressure whatsoever and no discussion from the governor about what way to go on anything with the board.

CO-CHAIR TARR stated she would look for Mr. Wood's contract in the public record. She clarified that it's an ongoing issue, not specific just to Mr. Wood. Questions have come up about these close relationships, she continued, and she is trying to learn as much as she can to evaluate this.

MR. WOOD replied that he understands.

CHAIR STUTES inquired whether Mr. Wood is suggesting that at the last hearing before the Special Committee on Fisheries he disclosed the contract that he had with the governor.

MR. WOOD responded "absolutely."

CHAIR STUTES said she doesn't recall that and will listen to those minutes.

[11:23:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN stated she is looking at Mr. Wood's contract from the perspective that ADF&G employees in different bargaining units are providing professional guidance and advice to the Board of Game on a variety of proposals before the board. She asked whether Mr. Wood sees that those employees could perceive that their guidance to him could impact their positions in bargaining units and therefore put them in an awkward position, or whether Mr. Wood sees his contract and advice as being far removed from impacting those ADF&G employees. She further asked whether Mr. Wood has thought about this and talked about this.

MR. WOOD answered he hasn't thought about it a great deal. He said his advice to the governor is at the 30,000-foot level and he can never envision it going down below that level. It is geared toward subject matter type of discussions as opposed to specific individuals. He stated he doesn't recall having ever talked about specific individual positions. It deals with broad issues, such as how to address health insurance or whether to go to a multi-year approach for wage formats, and therefore isn't at the level that is of concern to Representative Hannan.

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN inquired whether in his contract Mr. Wood shares guidance and background with Tandem Motion, the company that seems to also be providing some contract analysis to the Department of Administration about very similar issues.

MR. WOOD replied no, he has nothing to do with that organization.

[11:26:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK asked whether there is a renewal clause in Mr. Wood's contract.

MR. WOOD responded no, it expires. He said renewing it is an independent choice, which was done recently.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK inquired as to when Mr. Wood's original contract started prior to being renewed.

MR. WOOD offered his belief that it was early spring 2019, probably April, and then it was renewed this year.

[11:27:24 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR TARR recalled Mr. Wood's comment that he would like for the Board of Fisheries to be more active in rebuilding stocks and getting into habitat issues. She noted that that has been a highly controversial topic with the citizen initiative and the legislature has heard legislation. She stated she would like to keep the science situated at the department to depoliticize that as much as possible, keep the allocation decisions at the board, and strengthen the advisory committee process. She asked whether Mr. Wood sees taking actions for improving habitat to be at the board level or the department level.

MR. WOOD answered that the board can identify and ask for the research to be done to identify what habitat issues are impeding the stocks in specific streams, and this has been done in the past. However, he pointed out, a real problem is that the board is without authority to direct the department to do anything specific and to that degree the board is severely restricted. The department must balance a whole litany of different items, he continued, the budget not being the least of which the department has to deal with. A good example of that happening this season is that weirs are being pulled weeks ahead of the time when they were pulled historically, so the counts of fish returning won't be accurate.

CO-CHAIR TARR said she appreciates Mr. Wood's comment and added that it sounds like support for having a real budget for the department because those are the individuals who need to be available and with the capacity to do that work.

MR. WOOD concurred that the work can't be done without a budget.

[11:29:57 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked whether Mr. Wood agrees that the Board of Fisheries is a very active public process in its meetings.

MR. WOOD agreed and added that it is a more public process than he has ever seen before.

CHAIR STUTES concurred and said it is probably because the Board of Fisheries has the ability to affect the livelihoods of many, many Alaskans. She inquired whether Mr. Wood has a suggestion, considering the COVID-19 situation, for how this public process can take place in October if the board meeting goes forward.

MR. WOOD replied that he is willing to meet in person if the board is willing to meet. However, he said, if the board or staff is concerned about doing that, then he wishes he had a system that could be put in place. He has attended Zoom meetings in the past and they aren't going to be effective in accomplishing what the chair has described, he opined, nor will teleconferencing. He said that when attending a board meeting, a board member expects to start at 6:00 a.m. with breakfast meetings with one or two different stakeholders, lunch meetings with stakeholders, and dinner meetings with stakeholders. The only time he didn't meet with stakeholders during the entire process of each meeting was the night before the vote when he would go back to his hotel room to study everything that he had available on the subject matter. At some point, he explained, a board member must get away to process in his/her own mind all the information received.

11:32:25 AM

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN asked whether Mr. Wood has any thoughts on how to capture the nearly \$8 million in revenue that has been lost from [the lack of] license purchases due to COVID-19.

MR. WOOD responded that it is a hard question to answer. He recalled a time when license holders were asked whether they would be willing to participate at a larger dollar amount and the answer was yes provided the dollars went to research and enforcement. The hatchery program, he noted, is a success story in that the commercial fishermen ponied up to ensure continuation of the program. He said he doubts, however, that a license fee increase would meet the full figure [of \$8 million] because he doesn't know that there are enough licenses to support such a figure. There are going to be reductions in service, and it will require being selective in how to go about doing it. For example, if he were making the decisions, then he would cut the two lake system weirs that give no data that can be used for in-season management before he made cuts to the weirs located toward the mouth of the drainage that do give in-season ability. Better science could also be used, such as having genetics play a much bigger role given that samples are already being taken. For example, it could be done like it is in Canada, with a 24-hour turnaround. Decisions could then be made, and the budget would not be hugely impacted.

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN inquired whether Mr. Wood thinks the state is currently doing an adequate job with random sampling and ensuring that statistical analysis is accurate.

MR. WOOD answered that random sampling is never precise. It may be the only thing that can be done and used, he advised. It isn't that it's the best science, but that it's the only science available. It depends entirely on how "random" is done.

[11:35:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said her constituents appreciate Mr. Wood coming to Homer to hear their perspectives about the ongoing issues in Cook Inlet. She asked Mr. Wood to give his thoughts on the phrase "there are winners and losers in the fishery."

MR. WOOD replied that there is a limited resource in the numbers of fish that are available to be harvested. If one particular group harvests amounts that result in another group not meeting what it feels is its just share, then he guesses that is what is meant by one being a winner and one being a loser because whichever fish went to the one particular group would not be available to the other group.

[11:37:12 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES recalled Mr. Wood mentioning he wants to get more king salmon in the rivers. She inquired whether Mr. Wood thinks the lack of king salmon has anything to do with the northern pike predation situation.

MR. WOOD responded "yes."

CHAIR STUTES asked whether this is something that could be addressed by the Board of Fisheries in its capacity.

MR. WOOD answered yes, the board can identify but has no authority to direct, and that is where the rub comes in.

[11:38:01 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK related his understanding that ADF&G isn't issuing proper public notice for public comment when dealing with permits for fish habitat. He offered his belief that both Alaska statute and constitution clearly say that all Alaskans own the state's fish and water resources. He asked where Mr. Wood stands on ensuring that proper public notice is given and that public hearings are held for public comment on fish habitat permits.

MR. WOOD replied that when it comes to Board of Fisheries matters the board is overly emphatic on public participation. However, he explained, the Board of Fisheries doesn't have any ability to direct ADF&G to follow the law when it comes to habitat permits. It's in statute, it's ADF&G's obligation, and is something that absolutely should be followed, but the Board of Fisheries doesn't have the authority to make it mandatory. The board is more limited in authority than people would like to believe. That was evidenced last year when people asked the board to close the hatcheries, but the legislature has acted quite clearly that that is not within the purview of the board.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK inquired whether Mr. Wood would be willing to write a letter to ADF&G if the department doesn't give proper public notification and tell ADF&G why it is important.

MR. WOOD responded he is willing to do anything of that nature if the department isn't following the law. He related, however, that he has voiced his concerns on other issues, and it didn't go particularly forward with the department.

[11:40:45 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked whether Mr. Wood has other areas of concern as a Board of Fisheries member besides the Cook Inlet area.

MR. WOOD answered that he has concerns across the board, but is more familiar with the Cook Inlet area than he is with other areas. However, he continued, the same concerns are applicable in Southeast Alaska, on the Yukon, and elsewhere. A concern that came to light this year that he wasn't aware of until he started dealing with is that there are crab fisheries that haven't been allowed to be open in 30 years. Something is wrong there, he stated, it shouldn't take a stock 30 years to replenish itself. So, yes, there are concerns not just in Cook Inlet that he wants to explore. He will take the same effort that he did in going to Homer and he has already talked with board member John Jensen about concerns in Southeast Alaska.

CHAIR STUTES invited Mr. Wood to provide closing comments.

MR. WOOD, regarding subsistence, urged members to look at the record for the Board of Fisheries meeting in Seward when the board was being asked to make an allocative decision. There was no amount necessary for subsistence (ANS), he related, and he insisted that that be established before the board went forward and that was done. Then it was done several meetings later

consistently before any allocative requests were made. It is his opinion, he continued, that subsistence is second only to conservation.

[11:43:35 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES invited appointee John Jensen to testify. She said Mr. Jensen is the longest currently serving member of the Board of Fisheries, having held a seat on the board since 2003. She noted Mr. Jensen was re-appointed on 7/1/20 and, if confirmed, his term would run to 6/30/23.

[MR. JENSEN was not online.]

[11:45:01 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES invited appointee Abe Williams to testify. She said Mr. Williams was appointed on 7/1/20 and, if confirmed, his term would run to 6/30/23.

[11:45:40 AM](#)

ABE WILLIAMS, Appointee, Board of Fisheries, stated he is a lifelong Alaskan, born in King Salmon. He has lived in Bristol Bay for the majority of his life, he related, but has lived in Anchorage since 2010. He just finished his thirtieth year of commercial fishing in Bristol Bay. Two of his three sons own their own operations in the fishery and the other son fishes with him. Over the years he has served on the Bristol Bay Borough Assembly, the school board, and the Naknek/Kvichak Fish & Game Advisory Committee. Mr. Williams said he has owned multiple businesses, one of which serves the commercial fishing industry in Bristol Bay, and currently he works as director of regional affairs for the Pebble Limited Partnership. His participation in Board of Fisheries meetings over the years has given him knowledge of the process and of the importance of commercial, sport, and subsistence fisheries around the state. He stated that his ability to listen proactively to any and all user groups makes him an extremely qualified candidate.

[11:47:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN shared that she has heard concern about Mr. Williams's role at Pebble Partnership and a potential conflict that it might bring to the Board of Fisheries. She asked Mr. Williams to speak to why it would not be a conflict.

MR. WILLIAMS replied that he has taken a proactive approach to the Pebble Project for many years. It started in 2009 when he was president of a village corporation in Naknek and there were severe recessed runs and financial issues with the fishery in Alaska. He proactively looked at different options in how to diversify the economics of Southwest Alaska as well as the economics of communities that don't necessarily participate in the commercial fishery. For the last two years he has worked directly for the project as director of regional affairs where he engages with multiple communities, commercial fishermen, and others about the project. He stated he respects those who look at his position with the Pebble Project and assume he has a conflict of interest, but he thinks it is just the opposite and he doesn't have a conflict of interest. He further stated that if the Board of Fisheries chooses to take up an issue in regard to the Pebble Project itself, which he doesn't think the board will do, nor that the board has jurisdiction to do, he will conflict himself out as he has done in the past.

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN shared that concern has been raised regarding a lawsuit brought forward by a fellow commercial fisherman. She requested Mr. Williams speak to this.

MR. WILLIAMS responded he brought a lawsuit against the Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association (BBRSDA), an organization set up under state statute that is designed to brand and promote marketability of regional products. The BBRSDA is tasked with the ability to brand Bristol Bay products and bring awareness to the marketplace. His challenge was related to the large sums of monies that [fishermen] pay into BBRSDA being directed to organizations like United Tribes of Bristol Bay and Salmon State where those funds were designated and designed to actively promote and aid folks in the ability to comment on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers environmental impact statement (EIS) process.

[11:52:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN inquired whether her understanding is correct that Mr. Williams felt it was more appropriate to use the money to pursue marketability of commercial fish product coming from Bristol Bay and raising awareness about the importance of the fish in Bristol Bay than use the money to oppose the Pebble Project.

MR. WILLIAMS answered that the monies designed to travel from the BBRSDA were funneled to these certain organizations for

specific purpose of commenting on the EIS process that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was holding, which he said he and others viewed as [inappropriate] use of the tax revenues that fishermen pay into BBRSDA. Under the statute, fishermen are taxed, and those taxes are to be used to promote and market products in Bristol Bay.

[11:54:12 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked about the outcome of the lawsuit.

MR. WILLIAMS replied that it was dismissed.

[11:54:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON posited that Mr. Williams, through his role as director of regional affairs at the Pebble Partnership, has received a lot more visibility in the region than he would have had in the past. This role, he opined, has created quite a strain relative to relationships with a lot of people around the region. Polls have shown time and again that 8 out of 10 people in the Bristol Bay region oppose the Pebble Mine, perhaps even more. Representative Edgmon stated that when he goes to the communities, he hears it regularly and it is the number one issue to a lot of people. People are very concerned about the downstream impacts of the mine on the commercial and subsistence fisheries and the cultural way of life - the future of the region. To provide context about the high visibility of Mr. Williams, Representative Edgmon related that his household in Dillingham has received at least five large-size postcards, at least two having Mr. Williams's name on them, asking that he sign up for the Pebble performance dividend, the dividend being a unique thing on its own.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON noted that Mr. Williams lost his seat on the BBRSDA because many people were unhappy with his position on Pebble. He said he hopes Mr. Williams sees this as a fair question, because clearly Mr. Williams has to know that a lot of people in the Bristol Bay region are very concerned about the Pebble Project, as are many people around the state. He asked how Mr. Williams is going to work with those members of the region who are aligned on the opposite side of the Pebble issue from Mr. Williams.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON stressed the importance of the Board of Fisheries process and noted that the Bristol Bay cycle comes up every three years where the board comes to the region to meet

and to personally interface with key leaders and people who want the best for the fishery and who don't see that putting a huge open pit mine at the headwaters of very sensitive habitat is a part of that. He asked how Mr. Williams reconciles all that discord and will make all that work as the so-called Bristol Bay representative on the board.

[11:58:31 AM](#)

MR. WILLIAMS responded that in his years of participation in leadership roles in Bristol Bay he has always been engaged with everyone and not necessarily key leaders. Key leaders are important to listen to, but so are individual persons in each community, he said, and in his position at Pebble he does that. He travels to the region and he talks to people individually. It sets his course as to how he does the things he does. He stated he thinks he is high profile only because certain loud voices, or certain people who are well thought of, oppose this particular project or they highlight him as somebody who supports mining in Bristol Bay. Mr. Williams added that he is a people person, he has engaged with people for quite some time and will continue doing so, and he thinks he is one of the best to do it.

[12:00:31 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON stated he didn't hear a response to his question. He recalled that the board's last meeting in Bristol Bay was in Dillingham in 2018. He related his understanding that at this meeting Mr. Williams sponsored the proposal to do away with "the 32-foot boat length" in Bristol Bay, which the region at-large vociferously opposes. Yet Mr. Williams is out there talking to people and working to build a consensus. He asked how Mr. Williams could reconcile that with his ability to work with the region as a whole, not just key leaders.

MR. WILLIAMS replied that Representative Edgmon's recollection is incorrect. He said he didn't sponsor such an effort to lift the 32-foot limit.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked whether Mr. Williams has sponsored a proposal like that in the past.

MR. WILLIAMS replied he has not sponsored a proposal to lift the 32-foot limit on the fisheries.

[12:02:02 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON said he stands corrected, but it was his understanding that Mr. Williams either did or was part of an effort to support it. He stated that it is a unique circumstance of being a Board of Fisheries member with direct knowledge about the largest salmon fishery in the world, but yet possibly being on the other side speaking of the controversial Pebble Mine that keeps coming back cycle after cycle. He said he presumes [the Pebble Mine] will come up when the board meets in the Bristol Bay cycle in 2021. He asked whether Mr. Williams would support doing away with the 32-foot limit if a proposal comes before the board at the 2021 meeting.

MR. WILLIAMS responded:

I don't know that I would be supportive to doing away with the 32-foot limit. I think that ... definitely here in the most past recent years a lot of folks have invested into quality efforts on boats and they've done so in a meaningful way that was restricted ... or some people feel that they were restricted by the length of the boat. So you have a lot of capital outlay on existing vessels, and so lifting the limit could pose certain burdens and certain problems on others. Having said that, I am sympathetic to the conversation as we look to bring the best quality product from the Bristol Bay fishery into market and raise our value, raise ... the commercial value and the ex-vessel value. It's important to have the proper tools to do that, and as a fisherman I can see where the limit of [a] 32-foot [vessel] really creates a strain on your ability to do so adequately and be safe when you do it.

[12:04:26 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON offered his appreciation for the dialogue with Mr. Williams. He noted he has known Mr. Williams for a lot of years and said it isn't personal. He offered his belief that Mr. Williams knows what he is stepping into, that he keenly knows the nature of the Pebble issue from being a Pebble employee, and that there is support for the mine in some pockets of the region, but that by and large the opposition is deeply embedded. There are going to be people in the region, he opined, who think the fox is in the hen house now with Mr. Williams being on the Board of Fisheries, and it is up to Mr. Williams to prove that that's an inaccurate characterization.

He further stated that whether in a public or private setting, he doesn't want to be party to slandering anybody's character, but he wants to make these views publicly known because a lot of people are really concerned about this and concerned about a project that may ultimately be shelved anyway with the current permitting process that's underway. He said he appreciates Mr. Williams' forthrightness and looks forward to working with him if he is confirmed.

12:06:02 PM

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK said he appreciates Representative Edgmon's line of questioning. He stated it is hard for him to not see that there is conflict because of the nature of the Pebble Mine, where it's located, and the concern about the salmon fisheries, one of the most abundant salmon fisheries in the world. It's a conflict not only in the position, he continued, but also looking at mines versus salmon in this particular situation. The opposition isn't because of not wanting a mine developed, but because of the mine's location and what the potential harm is to the fisheries. The main role of the Board of Fisheries, he stated, is to conserve and develop Alaska's fishery resources, which, to him, also insinuates protecting the state's fisheries. He asked what Mr. Williams thinks is the greatest salmon producing lake in Alaska.

MR. WILLIAMS answered that multiple lakes are great salmon producing lakes - the Wood-Tikchiks, Naknek Lake, Becharof Lake, Ugashik Lakes - but this doesn't preclude other lakes and streams and tributaries that are in the Bristol region. It is a large area at 40,000 square miles and seven large, major river systems. All these in consort make up this great salmon resource that is being discussed. Managing and conserving these fisheries is important but it is larger than just generalizations. He said he doesn't think his position at the Pebble Partnership should define his qualifications; he has fished in Bristol Bay for 30 years. He has subsistence fished with his grandmother, sport fished with his family and kids, and he cherishes this resource. But, he continued, he also is very, very connected to the people of the region, and when he looks around at the social issues taking place - schools closing and populations moving away - it raises a red flag to him, which is why he is involved not only with the Pebble Project but also the commercial fishery right now.

12:09:52 PM

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK maintained that Lake Iliamna, which wasn't mentioned, is one of the most important lakes. He said he understands Mr. Williams's justification for wanting to promote the Pebble Mine with the social aspects that were mentioned and the economy, but the fishery is a big part of the culture in that area. He said he has concerns and doesn't see how there is no conflict in Mr. Williams's position. He asked why Mr. Williams wants to serve on the Board of Fisheries.

MR. WILLIAMS replied he has been involved in the fisheries for many years as he described and over those years he was involved with policies and how the fishery is managed and executed. He said it started when he was serving on the Naknek/Kvichak Fish & Game Advisory Committee, on which he served for nine years and co-chaired for six years. His interest in participating didn't come overnight. One of the most prominent leaders in Bristol Bay asked him if he'd be willing to sit on the Board of Fisheries, he related, even though the two of them have differing opinions on the Pebble Project. He declined because he was busy at that point in his life and didn't have the time. The previous board member that he is now replacing was chosen. Alaska has many resources, and the fisheries resource is very important throughout all of the state and to many different user groups, he opined. The state has other resources that are also important to all Alaskans, and he takes the approach of an open mind and being an approachable person. He can sit down and critically think, take in public comment and public criticism, and be effective at making decisions that are beneficial to the state of Alaska as a whole.

MR. WILLIAMS apologized for leaving out Lake Iliamna and stated it is the greatest lake in all of Alaska in his opinion. He recounted that in 1996 the Kvichak River began having an issue that created some conservation management that was important to the Bristol Bay fishery as well as to the people around the area. Some folks in the Lake Iliamna area were restricted in their ability to harvest subsistence foods. That hit close to home. That said, he continued, the Kvichak River failed to meet its minimum escapement goal for many years. Now it is slowly coming back, but there is still concern and issues around it. These are issues he has addressed, and that is why he believes he is qualified for this position.

[12:13:59 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES inquired whether Mr. Williams has support from any commercial fishery groups.

MR. WILLIAMS responded he doesn't know. In Bristol Bay there are certain factions of groups. He said he does get a lot of support from folks, a lot of encouragement regarding that.

CHAIR STUTES asked whether it is individuals in the groups.

MR. WILLIAMS answered yes, from individuals. It's important to pay attention to individuals, he stated, because they aren't always aligned with certain groups or certain activities around groups; so, that is where he pays close attention. It's not to disenfranchise groups or organized groups, but to highlight that he's available to talk to anyone regardless of their affiliation.

[12:15:06 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE requested Mr. Williams to elaborate on his business activity, his direct involvement in commercial fishing, and how much influence Pebble has into his income.

MR. WILLIAMS replied that regarding his business activity he and his wife own Bristol Bay Rentals, a real estate rental business. He owns Maritime Industries, a service industry in the Bristol Bay region and a small-boat storage. He requested clarification on whether he is being asked to compare his income from the Pebble Partnership to his income from his business and commercial fishing activity.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE answered yes. She related that many of her constituents are concerned that because Mr. Williams is on Pebble's payroll, he will put Pebble before the interest of the fishery. She asked Mr. Williams to justify this relationship.

MR. WILLIAMS responded that his Pebble income is less than half of what he makes from his commercial fishing operation and, if his business income is included, then it is even less. He said he recognizes the concern. He emphasized that he has fished in Bristol Bay for 30 years, his boys fish in Bristol Bay, his family members fish in Bristol Bay, and there is nothing he would ever do to compromise their ability to do that year after year.

[12:17:41 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES inquired whether Mr. Williams owns any part of the Pebble Mine or Northern Dynasty Minerals Ltd., such as shares or something else along that line.

MR. WILLIAMS replied that through his job he has stock options, but he has not exercised them.

CHAIR STUTES offered her understanding that Mr. Williams said he does not own any shares in Pebble Mine or Northern Dynasty.

[12:18:20 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked whether Mr. Williams was on the [BBRSDA] board at the time he filed the lawsuit against that organization.

MR. WILLIAMS responded no, he was not on the board.

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked whether Mr. Williams had previously been on the [BBRSDA] board.

MR. WILLIAMS answered yes.

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked whether Mr. Williams resigned because of the decision that he then sued [BBRSDA] over.

MR. WILLIAMS replied no, he served a three-year term and was not elected back to the organization.

[12:19:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN stated she is aware that Mr. Williams has sponsored proposals before the Board of Fisheries on several occasions. As recently as 2018, she continued, Mr. Williams had a board proposal to allow for permit stacking, which many Bristol Bay fishermen support, especially ones who have permits and do not live in the region; but permit stacking seems to be opposed by most local permit owners and the smaller communities around Bristol Bay. She noted that as a board member Mr. Williams cannot sponsor that proposal, but asked whether Mr. Williams is still interested in pushing for permit stacking to be allowed in the Bristol Bay fishery. She further asked how permit stacking would impact the region.

MR. WILLIAMS confirmed he sponsored the proposal for permit stacking. The majority of folks in the commercial driftnet fleet, he stated, look at permit stacking as a valuable tool to

achieve the optimum number as described by the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission and ADF&G in the Bristol Bay region, as well as an important tool to manage and be financially successful in the fishery. In 2015, price and ex-vessel value drastically dropped to about 50 cents a pound. Ironically that was when he was elected to the Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association (BBRSDA) - fishermen were scrambling to figure out ways to bring value to their fishery. Commercial fishery permit holders see this as something that is of value, he reiterated. There is a difference of opinion in certain factions in the region, but there is probably larger support in the region for permit stacking than what has been portrayed to Representative Hannan.

[12:21:54 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN said she is trying to draw distinction between Bristol Bay permit holders and Bristol Bay residents who are also permit holders. She stated it seems that the resident fishermen of Bristol Bay have not been supportive of permit stacking even though many Seattle based permit holders are, due capitalization costs and the idea of making a more efficient fishery. But that money would be taken out of the region, she continued, and the number of jobs would be decreased for local crew. Noting that the proposal for permit stacking has failed on several occasions, she asked whether pushing that proposal again is one of the reasons for Mr. Williams getting on the board.

MR. WILLIAMS responded no, that is not a reason for him to get on the board. He said he supports that type of concept, but explained he will be restricted in ways that he can participate in the conversation on that. If someone submitted that proposal, then he would probably be recused from it because he currently fishes in Bristol Bay. He maintained that there is large support from local permit holders in the Bristol Bay fishery for permit stacking.

[12:24:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS said he is aware of the long tenure of work done by Mr. Williams in Bristol Bay. While he might not always see eye-to-eye with Mr. Williams, he said he knows Mr. Williams is knowledgeable on the issues. He asked whether the decision to serve on the board at this time was because Mr. Williams was asked to serve by another party or was of his own volition.

MR. WILLIAMS answered he has been approached multiple times to apply for this position. Ironically, people see his ability and encourage him to do something of this nature, and that is what he is doing.

[12:25:54 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS offered his understanding that Mr. Williams is saying he was asked by others to serve on the Board of Fisheries this go around. He asked which parties requested Mr. Williams to put his name in.

MR. WILLIAMS replied he has had multiple fellow fishermen encourage him to throw his name into the hat for this position. He neglected to do it before because he had multiple things going on in his life. Now he has found the time and can apply some effort, so that is what he is doing.

[12:26:55 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP inquired whether as a Board of Fisheries member Mr. Williams would have any authority, jurisdiction, or input on the Pebble Project permit.

MR. WILLIAMS responded no, he doesn't think the Board of Fisheries will take up anything in relation to the Pebble Project or the permit.

[12:27:54 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP stated that that is how he also sees it; he doesn't see any decision-making authority over Pebble Mine permitting. He related that he and Mr. Williams have known one another for quite a number of years. As a lifelong fellow commercial fisherman and fellow Alaskan in Bristol Bay, he too is a fisherman who supports mining and fishing. He said he supports the nomination of Mr. Williams and that Mr. Williams has a sterling reputation. He added that he appreciates Mr. Williams's comment of listening to everybody and being willing to work with the other side because that pushes back the current political climate to not do that. Every member of this committee, Representative Kopp opined, has suffered in some regard or the other for making hard decisions that were necessary because he or she was willing to learn information and based on that speak the truth and stick to it. He stated that Mr. Williams possesses the integrity to do this job in a way

that is honorable and that will reflect well on both the fishing industry and mining industry. He inquired whether Mr. Williams would continue to support the Pebble Project if the project is unable to meet the bar that the administration has laid down to mitigate wetland and tributary damage.

MR. WILLIAMS answered that all projects in Alaska must go through permitting processes. The state's representatives and people have set that bar, he continued, and projects unable to meet that bar ultimately won't get their permit. Currently, the Pebble Project is going through the federal permitting process, which is coming to a close, and mitigation standards will have to be met. He stated he hopes that all projects are assessed through a process vetted in science, not politics.

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP said he appreciates Mr. Williams as a leader showing up for his community and putting forward real solutions over many decades.

[12:31:57 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR TARR recalled Alaska's late U.S. Senator Ted Stevens stating he isn't opposed to mining, but in reference to Pebble the wrong mine for the wrong place. She stated she is putting it in this context because she doesn't think she's alone among Alaskans in this belief and that that's why the committee has received over 500 emails opposing the appointment of Mr. Williams. It's her job to listen to Alaskans and that's where her opposition is also coming from. The governor has a lot of power in making these appointments, she opined. One way to do that would be to get the stakeholders together to try to remove the conflict before the appointments were made and put together a group that could be embraced by Alaskans and there are no broad conflicts where it compromises the process. Regarding the conflict over the Pebble Mine, she noted that there is already an individual on the Board of Fisheries who previously worked for Pebble Mine and that the commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation is also a former Pebble Mine employee. She said she thinks Alaskans are saying there needs to be separation from these conflicts and there needs to be more trust in this process. She asked whether Mr. Williams is aware of this high level of opposition to his appointment and how Mr. Williams thinks he can be a successful board member when there is such significant opposition and lack of trust by Alaskans.

MR. WILLIAMS confirmed he is aware of folks who are opposed to his appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He said he has

reviewed a lot of the form letters and was amused that he would draw such activity. While he respects the Alaskans who spoke in concern of what they perceive as a conflict, he has some concern about the lack of original thought as many of the documents he reviewed were generated by some kind of a "robo-text" or form letter, with letters coming from as far as New York, Montana, and California. He hasn't calculated how many are from Alaska, he continued, but recognizes that there are those who are concerned, and he respects that.

[12:36:00 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES pointed out that of the over 500 responses mentioned by Representative Tarr, very few were from non-Alaskans, most were from Alaskans who included their names and information.

CO-CHAIR TARR argued that it's an unfair characterization regarding a form letter versus a written letter. She pointed out that people are currently homeschooling their children and may not have had the capacity to type a thorough email. She maintained that when [legislators] hear from Alaskans it must be accepted as public testimony.

CHAIR STUTES agreed with Representative Tarr and stated that however generated, [the emails] were from individual Alaskans.

[12:37:20 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN related that of the first 100 letters reviewed by her staff this morning, 96 were form emails and 24 were out of state. She pointed out that close to 60 percent of [Bristol Bay] permits are owned by non-Alaskans, so she thinks the intent behind Mr. Williams's earlier action with stacking permits was to address a possible problem of needing to find ways to ensure that Alaskans have more opportunities to own these permits and keep Alaskans hired. Alaska's fish, she opined, are one of Alaska's best resources and the commercial fishing industry provides a lot of great paying jobs. It is important that legislators find ways to support Alaska hire and support the board in whatever it can do for Alaska hire. She asked Mr. Williams about how many Board of Fisheries meetings he has participated in in some capacity over the last 10 ten years.

MR. WILLIAMS replied that he doesn't have an exact number, but it has been many. He explained that typically he actively

participates in each and every board cycle that pertains to Bristol Bay and, if not, he listens by phone.

[12:39:46 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN inquired whether Mr. Williams recalls the board taking direct action on the Pebble Mine during any of the meetings in which he actively participated

MR. WILLIAMS responded that he does not.

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN recognized that there has been a lot of concern from Alaskans about the Pebble Mine issue. She said it is important that lawmakers and others familiar with this process reassure people that there are no instances in which the Board of Fisheries would approve or deny any permitting or anything pertaining to Pebble Mine. In looking at the resume of Mr. Williams, she continued, it's clear that he has an extensive background in commercial fishing and is a business owner in Bristol Bay. Qualified candidates from the coastal region are being looked for, and while Mr. Williams currently lives in Anchorage, he presumably spends a lot of his time in the Bristol Bay region. He is a well-qualified applicant to be on the board, she opined, and he has done an admirable job of handling himself despite opposition. The Board of Fisheries wants to ensure that Alaska's fish resource is managed in the best way possible and while there are differences of opinion, it is those differences that make the process great and that are compiled into making the best policy.

[12:42:25 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES remarked that regardless of whether the letters of comment are from in-state or out-of-state, they signify what an incredible and impactful area the Bristol Bay fisheries are - on the whole of the United States as well as worldwide. There is vast concern about maintaining that pristine area as a fisheries area, she stated.

[12:43:13 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 12:43 to 1:02 p.m.

[1:02:04 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES opened public testimony on the appointments of Abe Williams, McKenzie Mitchell, John Wood, and John Jensen to the

Board of Fisheries. Today's testimony will be taken by phone, she noted, and written comment will be accepted throughout the month. She explained that a yay or nay vote cannot be taken in the committee, but that there will be a floor vote at some point and public comment will be part of the record.

1:04:03 PM

GARY CLINE, noted he is the regional fisheries director for the Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation (BBEDC), but qualified he is testifying on behalf of himself. He stated he is a commercial fisherman and the father of a two-year-old son. He purchased a Bristol Bay drift permit in 2018 and bought his boat in June 2020. It took him a while to gain confidence to invest in this fishery, not because he was worried about his ability to succeed as a fisherman, but because he was so nervous about the impacts of the proposed Pebble Mine. It deterred him from buying into the fishery in 2012 because he was concerned how the [proposed mine] would impact the region's salmon markets and the ecosystem. Eventually he decided to not let fear dictate his decisions and he bought into the fishery. He couldn't be happier with his decision because he was able to employ two of his brothers and a cousin throughout this summer.

MR. CLINE stated that as a new entrant he is deeply concerned as to who is appointed to the Board of Fisheries. Within the last several years he has attended various [Board of Fisheries] meetings, along with some work sessions, and he served a short stint on the local advisory committee (AC). He has learned how important the Board of Fisheries is and how the board's decisions could impact the livelihoods of fishermen. Given the Board of Fisheries main role is to conserve and develop Alaska's fishery resource, he finds it highly contradicting to elect someone such as Abe Williams who works for the Pebble Mine, a project that could impact the marketability of the region's salmon, but more importantly destroy the ecosystem that the fishery relies on. He said he therefore believes that Mr. Williams should not be confirmed, nor anyone else who is affiliated with the Pebble Mine project.

MR. CLINE pointed out that he is opposed to permit stacking and increasing the vessel length. Permit stacking is not the answer to increase the amount of permits into local Alaskan's hands. He said he believes most locals feel this way, which is highlighted by the public comments submitted throughout the last Bristol Bay finfish meetings.

[1:07:32 PM](#)

ANTHONY ZOCH, Regional Fisheries Coordinator, Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation (BBEDC), testified in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams. He stated that it is appalling the governor would appoint someone to the Board of Fisheries who currently works for the Pebble Mine, particularly when the board's main role is to conserve and develop the fishery resources of the state. This presents a huge conflict of interest as a Board of Fisheries member should not work for a highly controversial project that could devastate the ecosystem of Bristol Bay and the economy of the salmon fishery.

MR. ZOCH said it is heart wrenching knowing that the salmon returns in other parts of Alaska have been very poor this year. He related that Cordova has requested the state and federal governments to declare an economic disaster. The sockeye fishery in the Chigniks had one of the worst years in history, he continued. He cannot imagine the hardships those fishers and communities will face. [The Bristol Bay region] is very fortunate that over 57 million sockeye have returned to Bristol Bay and it is hoped that the salmon will continue to return to support the local residents, fishers, and economy.

MR. ZOCH explained that one of the main reasons the Bristol Bay fishery has been so resilient and sustainable is because of the genetic diversity of the salmon populations that spawn within the watershed. The Pebble Project, he continued, could destroy certain salmon populations, which would damage the genetic diversity of the two most prolific rivers in Bristol Bay, the Nushagak and Kvichak. Furthermore, if Pebble Mine were to be developed it could potentially disrupt the marketability of Bristol Bay salmon for future generations. This would undermine all the efforts that fishers have made to improve the quality and value of their catch, including the marketing endeavors by the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute and the Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association. Therefore, he stated, it is crucial not to confirm Abe Williams or anyone else to the Board of Fisheries who is closely tied to the Pebble Mine Project.

[1:09:51 PM](#)

SHANNON DONAHUE, Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC), noted that SEACC represents constituents across Southeast Alaska. She said SEACC is concerned with the sustainable

management of Alaska's fisheries and the communities that depend on them. She stated she serves on the Upper Lynn Canal Advisory Committee, but is not in any way speaking on behalf of the advisory committee.

MS. DONAHUE testified against the nomination of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries. She stated that his employment with the Pebble Partnership is a conflict of interest that makes him unfit to serve on the board that oversees the regulations of Alaska's fisheries. She further stated that his nomination is one of many examples of stacking high level positions that make critical decisions on the management of Alaska's natural resources with people deeply associated with the mining industry who stand to profit over decisions that privilege resource extraction over the sustainable management of Alaska's fisheries. She said the appointment of Mr. Williams to the Board of Fisheries would jeopardize Alaska's fisheries and the communities that depend on them and urged that his appointment be denied.

1:11:13 PM

MELISSA STERITZ, Eyak Preservation Council (EPC), testified she works for the Eyak Preservation Council, a nonprofit, Native-led organization based in Cordova that works to protect wild salmon habitat and traditional ways of life. She said the Eyak people of the Copper River Delta have millennia of history in the delta and are the original rightful stewards of the lands and waters.

MS. STERITZ stated that the Eyak Preservation Council stands in solidarity with the United Tribes of Bristol Bay in opposing the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries. As an employee of the Pebble Partnership, she continued, Mr. Williams stands to benefit from large-scale open pit mining in Bristol Bay, which the council sees as a major conflict of interest. Mr. Williams should not be allowed to sit on the Board of Fisheries because of this conflict of interest. All of the board's seven appointees should be people who are unbiased and stand for a strong future for Alaska's wild salmon. She said large-scale open pit copper mines like Pebble have a terrible track record around the world of disasters and failures and this cannot be afforded in any of Alaska's remaining wild salmon fisheries. Salmon are more than a resource, they are relatives, and the Eyak Preservation Council believes it is inappropriate to appoint someone to this level of responsibility who has such blatant conflicts of interest.

1:13:49 PM

BRIAN HIMELBLOOM, said he is a 33-year resident of Kodiak Island. He offered his belief that there should be more cultural representation like there was in the past, but that he does support John Jensen's appointment.

MR. HIMELBLOOM expressed his concern about John Wood due to Mr. Wood's limited fisheries experience. He questioned whether Mr. Wood's previous service as staff to former state senator Dunleavy may have led to the state contract where Mr. Wood reports to now Governor Dunleavy and said he finds it concerning. He maintained that Mr. Wood did not list the contract or the [contract] renewal in his application, which may affect fisheries employees since Mr. Wood is dealing with union materials.

MR. HIMELBLOOM stated he finds McKenzie Mitchell's experience skimpy and narrow. Because Ms. Mitchell had never attended a Board of Fisheries meeting [previous to her appointment], he recommended that she serve at the local advisory level, perhaps in Fairbanks, because it would be more suited for her to learn about Board of Fisheries issues.

MR. HIMELBLOOM allowed that Abe Williams has an excellent fisheries pedigree, but said he is very concerned that Mr. Williams is a highly paid Pebble Mine employee. This is a huge conflict of interest, he stated, since it is known what Pebble Mine is going to be if it happens. He further stated that Mr. Williams is at odds with the majority of Bristol Bay fishermen, and that he is troubled by the lawsuit Mr. Williams filed against the BBRSDA. Given the stock options in addition to his pay, he continued, Mr. Williams has a vested interest in the wellbeing of Pebble Mine, which would overshadow the rest of the board and would be a loss-loss to Alaska.

1:17:02 PM

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN noted Mr. Williams told the committees that he does not have any stock interest in the Pebble Project.

1:17:51 PM

SERENA FITKA, Executive Director, Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA), explained that her nonprofit organization is comprised of subsistence and commercial fishers with the mission of protecting and promoting all wild fisheries and

traditional cultures within the Yukon River drainage. Formed 30 years ago in Galena, the YRDFA board and alternates together represent over 40 Alaskan communities within the Yukon River drainage.

MS. FITKA testified that given the Board of Fisheries' current membership and nominee panel, YRDFA believes the board does not have fair representation of all of Alaska. The YRDFA board highly recommends an appointee to the board who has the qualifications of residing in a rural community and with knowledge of those fisheries. To balance the Board of Fisheries representation, she continued, there needs to be adequate representation of subsistence interests and someone who has lived or worked in the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim region.

[1:19:20 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES clarified that Mr. Himelbloom stated Mr. Williams has stock options, not that Mr. Williams is a stock owner.

[1:19:39 PM](#)

EVELYN CORBETT, stated she is a member of the Curyung Tribe and a subsistence setnetter. Today, she said, she is representing herself as a Yup'ik woman with responsibility to protect the land and waters.

MS. CORBETT testified that she opposes the appointment of Abe Williams because it tilts the tables of bias on the Board of Fisheries. It is known that Mr. Williams is a supporter of Pebble Mine, she said, and it is known that Alaskans are overwhelmingly against [the Pebble Mine]. While economic infrastructure is a reason given for the Pebble Mine, this reason is not valid enough. "No amount of economic infrastructure is worth risking our salmon, our clean waters, our food sovereignty, and our livelihoods," she stated. She continued:

What is Abe Williams? Is he a fourth-generation fisherman of Bristol Bay or the director of regional affairs for the Pebble Partnership? These two parts of identity conflict each other almost entirely, there is no way that they don't. I won't take the chance that Pebble Mine is "safe." There are too many instances where the government deemed things such as mining safe and they devastated the lands and waters, and nothing was done about it. It is not reasonable

to ask the residents of Bristol Bay and the rest of Alaska to accept this nomination. There is obviously a conflict between the salmon and the mine. "The salmon are ours to care for and live by, and by allowing this conflict into our space we are disregarding that responsibility entirely.

[1:21:39 PM](#)

MALCOLM VANCE, said his winter residence is in McCarthy and for the past 40 summers he has fished the Bristol Bay area. He testified that he opposes the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries. He stated that it is a travesty of power that the Dunleavy Administration would allow such a conflict of interest to infiltrate and become a member of the Board of Fisheries.

[1:22:58 PM](#)

LINDSAY LAYLAND, Deputy Director, United Tribes of Bristol Bay (UTBB), explained that UTBB is a tribal government consortium that represents 15 tribal governments in the Bristol Bay region and over 80 percent of the year-round population in Bristol Bay. She said the consortium's mission is to protect the traditional way of life of the Indigenous people of Southwest Alaska, who are dependent on a healthy and pristine ecosystem and the abundant wildlife and wild salmon returns that the region has produced for millennia.

MS. LAYLAND testified that UTBB opposes the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries. She said UTBB does not believe Mr. Williams is an appropriate fit for the board for [two] reasons. First, though Mr. Williams is a Bristol Bay permit holder, he has not lived in the Bristol Bay region for a decade. [Six of the board's seven members] are recently appointed and do not live in rural, coastal Alaska, she continued. This is highly concerning given that the vast majority of commercial, sport, and subsistence activities occur outside of the Anchorage, Matanuska-Susitna, and Fairbanks areas. Without adequate rural representation this current makeup of the board cannot be trusted to accurately represent the fishing communities.

MS. LAYLAND stated that the second reason Mr. Williams is not an appropriate fit is that he is an employee of the Pebble Partnership, a development project that threatens the very ecosystem and habitat that Bristol Bay communities, culture, and

fisheries depend upon. Though Mr. Williams claims he may recuse himself from decisions about Bristol Bay specifically, she continued, there is no guarantee that his input on any issue that the board takes up will not be swayed by the priorities of the Pebble Partnership.

MS. LAYLAND maintained that it is ridiculous that two members of this seven-member board are either previously or currently employed by the Pebble Partnership. She urged the committees to take a hard look at who is selected to represent the fisheries interests of the state before moving forward with this confirmation. She said it is clear from committee member questions, to news articles, to op-eds, to public testimony that the people of Alaska are concerned about Mr. Williams's ability to separate Pebble from the Board of Fisheries. That this topic is taking up so much time in these public hearings raises a red flag and Mr. Williams should withdraw his name from consideration.

MS. LAYLAND stated it is critical that the Board of Fisheries is made up of a group of people who hold the trust of the people of Alaska to make sound management decisions that are based in the best interest of the state's people and the sustainability of the state's fisheries. Even though Mr. Williams was qualified to hold this position, she continued, he lacks the trust of Alaskans and the trust of Bristol Bay. She urged the committees to not recommend Mr. Williams's name for confirmation to the full legislative body. She further urged that the legislature and the governor seek a more qualified, less conflicted, in-region representative to sit on the esteemed Board of Fisheries.

[1:26:17 PM](#)

JEFF SKRADE, testified that he opposes the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries. Presently a resident of Wisconsin, he explained that he spent 48 years involved in professional fishery experience in Bristol Bay. He arrived in 1971, worked his way up to area biologist in Nushagak and managed Nushagak and Togiak salmon as well as Togiak herring. He then worked 22 years for Peter Pan Seafoods before retiring last summer.

MR. SKRADE explained that the board and advisory committee process were set up through the Alaska Administrative Procedures Act. He spent many years attending board meetings and advisory meetings, he said, and this wonderful, painfully democratic process works. The Bristol Bay salmon fishery is flourishing

because of the involvement of the board and the people out there. The participants have made many sacrifices over the years, he continued, and "participants" is a key word. His memory is that there has always been a Board of Fisheries member and resident in Bristol Bay.

MR. SKRADE stated that while Mr. Williams is obviously very well qualified, he is no longer a Bristol Bay resident and it's been a decade since he's lived there. He said he opposes the appointment of Mr. Williams. Image is everything, he continued, and the mystique of the pristine Alaska wilderness contributes to the marketability of Alaska's fish. The perspective of people having a member of a group, this mine that is opposed to a lot of the values in Bristol Bay, is probably the worst thing he can think of.

1:28:58 PM

ROBERT HEYANO, noted that he is a lifelong resident of the Bristol Bay region. He said his primary source of income is from commercial drift gill netting for salmon and seining herring in Bristol Bay.

MR. HEYANO pointed out that Alaska is a large state with many commercial, sport, subsistence, and personal use fisheries. As a past member of the Board of Fisheries, he said what he found helpful in making an informed decision was the ability to physically meet, listen, and interact directly with the public. Detailed reports and comments provided by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), and a diverse expertise and knowledge from the other six members, contributed to the discussion and debates. He added that he shares and supports the concerns of the lack of Board of Fisheries representation from coastal communities.

MR. HEYANO related that while recently reviewing the policy for management of sustainable salmon fisheries he found reference to habitat in 37 different paragraphs/sections. His takeaway, he continued, is that habitat is an important factor when considering management and regulation pertaining to fishery and the resources.

MR. HEYANO maintained that Abe Williams has a history of supporting the destruction of fish habitat in Bristol Bay by supporting the development of the Pebble Mine. Based on the importance of habitat and a diverse Board of Fisheries representation from coastal communities, he urged that the

committees and the legislature oppose the confirmation of Abe Williams.

MR. HEYANO expressed his support of John Jensen.

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REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN noted that several people have referenced a lack of diversity of coastal communities. She requested a definition of coastal community given that, technically, Anchorage is a coastal community.

MR. HEYANO replied that in the past there was a representative from the Kodiak region, a representative from Bristol Bay, and a representative from the Southeast Alaska area. That was about three of the seven board members. Currently there is only one member from what he would consider a coastal community and that is Southeast Alaska. There are enough seats on the board to go around and diversification is important given the importance of these fisheries to those communities where the fishery is happening. It is important to the municipalities as well as the residents residing in them.

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN asked whether coastal community is more geographic distance or different regions of the state versus coastal communities or something off the road system.

CHAIR STUTES clarified that the issue is not only coastal communities but rural coastal fishing communities. She said the concern is that fewer and fewer of Alaska's fishing communities are having representation.

MR. HEYANO concurred with Chair Stutes.

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STEVE HYAMS, said he is a resident of Anchorage and King Salmon. He urged the legislature to reject the nomination of Abe Williams. He encouraged the governor to find a more suitable candidate who has the faith of the fishermen and Alaska's populace in general in fulfilling the board's important role in managing the state's fisheries. He stated that the basis for his position is that the primary responsibility for the members of the Board of Fisheries is to provide appropriate management of these fisheries. He asked how someone could trust Mr. Williams's approach to other areas of the state where resource development threatens critical fisheries. He maintained that,

ultimately, the appointment of Mr. Williams gives Pebble yet another boost to the detriment of Bristol Bay and that his appointment is a deplorable use of Governor Dunleavy's position of power.

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NELS EVENS, noted he is a lifelong resident of Alaska who has participated in the Bristol Bay drift fishery for the last six years. He has owned and operated his own vessel for the last three years.

MR. EVENS said the Pebble Mine scares him because he knows how many people rely on the fishery, how much people have invested into it, and how much the communities of Bristol Bay rely on the fishery. He stated he opposes the appointment of Abe Williams because the appointee's connection to the Pebble Partnership and the Pebble Mine is not in line with the Board of Fisheries' goals of conservation and development of Alaska's fisheries. The potential of that mine going in, he added, could be to the detriment of the Bristol Bay fishery.

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JACK DONACHY, testified he is strongly opposed to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries. He quoted from the board's home page on ADF&G's website, which states that the board's "main role is to conserve and develop the fishery resources of the state." He drew attention to the word "conserve."

MR. DONACHY stated that Mr. Williams's advocacy for and employment with Pebble Partnership represents an extreme conflict of interest. He related that he has asked Pebble and its supporters whether they can show anywhere in the world that a design like what is proposed in Bristol Bay has not done significant damage to the watershed where it is sited. Apparently, no such example exists, he continued, because no party that he has reached out to has responded to this question. The Pebble Mine will significantly damage the Bristol Bay fishery, he said.

MR. DONACHY maintained that when asked a yes or no question regarding stock ownership, Mr. Williams was evasive to declining to provide a straightforward yes or no response, instead referring only to stock options through his work. Mr. Williams claims to communicate, but then immediately dismisses opposition

as "loud voices and robo-texts," he continued, and further Mr. Williams is apparently choosing to ignore numerous polls indicating strong statewide and regional Bristol Bay opposition to Pebble.

MR. DONACHY stated that the nomination of Mr. Williams to the Board of Fisheries is shocking given his advocacy for and employment with Pebble. Mr. Williams's views do not comport with the board's main role, he continued, and therefore his nomination should be summarily rejected. What is needed, is a conservation-minded, science-following representative who actually lives in a coastal Southwest Alaska fishing community.

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JUDY GONSALVES, said she and her family used to live in the Bristol Bay area and continue to fish there. She noted that her children are taking over the fishing operation.

MS. GONSALVES testified that she is opposed to the confirmation of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries. She explained that her concerns over his appointment are twofold. First is his connection to and employment with Pebble Partnership. Second is that while Mr. Williams comes from the Bristol Bay area he hasn't lived there for some time, which relates to there being rural coastal fishing regional representation on the board.

MS. GONSALVES maintained it's clear that [Governor] Dunleavy stands on the development of the Pebble Mine, so this appointment sort of makes sense - put an additional pro-Pebble person on the board. However, she pointed out, the primary goal of the Board of Fisheries is to preserve and develop the state's fisheries. She questioned how Mr. Williams could be an objective, unbiased, and trusted board member with his current employment and strong pro-Pebble stance. Mr. Williams has a direct conflict of interest even though he says he doesn't, she continued. Optics is everything - it's like hiring the fox to guard the henhouse.

MS. GONSALVES stated that even if Mr. Williams were to recuse himself from board decisions involving Bristol Bay issues, his mining-over-fishery stance does not make him trustworthy. Members of the Board of Fisheries need to be trusted by Alaskans, she said. It sounds like Mr. Williams has a no vote of confidence from myriad levels of fishermen in the Bristol Bay area, be they sport, commercial, or subsistence fishers. She

asked whether members of the committees want to ignore that over 80 percent of the region is against Pebble Mine.

MS. GONSALVES argued that in the spirit of full representation, there are plenty of smart, capable, and involved people living in the Bristol Bay region who would make good members of the Board of Fisheries. The Board of Fisheries has an incredible responsibility to both represent rural areas and to have trustworthy objective board members. If Mr. Williams is confirmed there will then be two board members with direct and clear Pebble connections, she stated, which doesn't sound reliable, objective, or trustworthy.

MS. GONSALVES recalled the statement by Mr. Williams in his testimony that with his 30 years of fishing, there is nothing he would do to compromise his ability to continue fishing. She said that statement confuses her because the advent of Pebble Mine directly conflicts that potential

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OLIVA EDWARDS, requested that the legislature reject the confirmation of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries. She said she believes that Mr. Williams holds a conflict of interest with his current employment by the Pebble Partnership.

MS. EDWARDS offered her understanding that the Board of Fisheries has not in the past, and likely will not in the future, be in a decision-making position on the Pebble Mine. However, she continued, Mr. Williams's apparent support of the mine itself is cause for concern when it comes to other issues that the board will address. She worries what other valuable fisheries he might be willing to risk or decisions he might make that are not in line with sustaining Alaska's fisheries for future generations. Ms. Edwards urged that a replacement nominee and future nominees come from rural fishing communities to ensure that all Alaskans are represented on the board.

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CRAWFORD PARR, testified that he opposes the confirmation of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries primarily because the board's job is conserving and developing Alaska's fisheries. Mr. Williams, he continued, supports an organization that is advancing a plan to do the opposite - almost 200 miles of streams would be destroyed in Phase I alone of the mine permitting process.

MR. PARR stated that his opposition is also because a Pebble employee being able to become a sitting member of the Board of Fisheries lends some sort of legitimacy to the Pebble Partnership as a group that has a stake in the conservation and advancement of Alaska's commercial, sport, and subsistence fisheries. This couldn't be farther from the truth, he said, considering all the opposition to the partnership building the mine in a sensitive area perched right above Lake Iliamna, with tributaries leading into Lake Iliamna, the Mulchatna, and then ultimately the Nushagak River.

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PHIL HILBRUNER, Owner, Lakeview Outfitters, stated he opposes the appointment of Abe Williams. There is an obvious conflict of interest with Mr. Williams being an employee of the Pebble Partnership, he maintained. If confirmed, Mr. Williams will be charged with making decisions that directly affect him personally as well as his business and he cannot trust Mr. Williams to do so.

MR. HILBRUNER recalled Mr. Williams's testimony about priding himself on considering science and listening to people. However, Mr. Hilbruner continued, the science has repeatedly demonstrated that Pebble is too much of a risk to Alaska's other resources. Regarding listening, he said peers and neighbors in Bristol Bay, and people from across the state, are speaking in opposition to Mr. Williams. He urged Mr. Williams to listen to the people now and withdraw his name so that the look can begin for a person more suited to the position.

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AMANDA JOHNSTON, noted she is an Alaska resident and Bristol Bay fisher who is not a robot and not copying and pasting her testimony. She is a real person with real concerns about the future and management of Alaska's fisheries.

MS. JOHNSTON urged the legislature to [confirm] only those people whose interests clearly align with the goals of the Board of Fisheries, which are to protect Alaska's rivers and resources. She stated that Abe Williams is in direct conflict with such values. The idea of Mr. Williams serving on the Board of Fisheries is a blatant and absurdly obvious conflict of interest, she maintained. Wouldn't the Pebble Partnership just love to have one of its paid employees sitting on a state board

that's meant to make important decisions about salmon fisheries? Specifically Bristol Bay where the company wants to develop a mine? Isn't it obvious why Mr. Williams is here now trying to get on the board? Ms. Johnston requested that legislators listen to their constituents and not [confirm] Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

1:51:08 PM

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE stated she understands the concern people have about Abe Williams's position with Pebble and that testifiers feel there is a severe conflict of interest. But, she continued, she would like to hear how people feel about John Wood's direct connection with the administration through the contract that he has. If legislators are supposed to take testimony about Pebble in that light, she asked why it would not apply to another board member and therefore she would like people's insight on that as well and not just Pebble.

1:52:01 PM

CHAIR STUTES announced she must leave the hearing to catch a flight but that she would like to provide her closing comments. She stated she is deeply concerned over the governor's most recent nominations to the Board of Fisheries and what it means to the board balance.

CHAIR STUTES said that because the House Special Committee on Fisheries heard Mr. Wood's confirmation earlier in the year, she wouldn't rehash her statements. However, she continued, she wasn't aware at the time and only recently became aware of the disturbing revelation and precedent that a member of the Board of Fisheries would be on contract to the state reporting directly to the governor. If that isn't a conflict of interest, she opined, then the statute needs to be revised.

CHAIR STUTES stated she has nothing personal against Ms. Mitchell and Mr. Williams. She said she wishes Ms. Mitchell had a bit more experience with board meetings and exposure to commercial fishing and that she does not think Pebble's employees should be on the board.

CHAIR STUTES explained that for her, this is about board balance. She pointed out that if all the governor's appointees were to be confirmed there would be: one coastal member and six Anchorage/Fairbanks members; only one commercial fishing seat and no subsistence seat; and one former Pebble employee and one

current Pebble employee. That isn't a balance that's reflective of Alaska or its diversity of fisheries and viewpoints, she opined. The Board of Fisheries has always been about a delicate balance that no one is happy with, but that people can live with. This isn't anything personal against the appointees, she continued, but they would move a very imbalanced board even further toward a sport fishing Cook Inlet centric body. User groups deserve a fairer and equally represented board when it comes to the allocation of this most precious resource.

CHAIR STUTES stated that strictly based on board balance alone, she will be opposing the governor's nominations, with the exception of John Jensen.

[1:54:55 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 1:54 p.m. to 1:55 p.m.

[CHAIR STUTES passed the gavel to Co-Chair Tarr.]

[1:55:32 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR TARR explained that witnesses have signed up to speak to specific appointees and the witnesses heard thus far had signed up for Mr. Williams. She noted that for Mr. Williams there were 17 additional people who had signed up from Sterling, Anchorage, Wasilla, Petersburg, North Pole, Girdwood, Bristol Bay, Fairbanks, and Homer, but they had dropped off the line.

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VIVIAN MENDENHALL, said she has lived in Alaska for 40 years and is a retired biologist and environmental scientist. She was on setnet crews in the Nushagak Bay salmon fishery for 12 years.

MS. MENDENHALL submitted that Abe Williams would not contribute to the board's purposes of conservation and development of fisheries, and that he has a major conflict of interest. Mr. Williams clearly knows a lot about fishing and the people in his corner in Bristol Bay, she said, but that doesn't mean he knows and understands environmental science, including protection of fish habitat. Mr. Williams has shown that he understands the future needs of a mining corporation, she argued, but not those of most people and cultures around Bristol Bay.

MS. MENDENHALL related that the Executive Branch Ethics Act says the standards of ethical conduct for members of the executive

branch need to distinguish those conflicts of interest that are substantial and material. Mr. Williams, she continued, currently works for a mining company, which could, if approved, damage essential fish habitat for Bristol Bay's largest and most important salmon runs. Mr. Williams has shown that he is a vigorous opponent of habitat conservation, she stated, given he and five others sued the Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association (BBRSDA) for opposing the Pebble Mine, and were paid to do so. The judge threw out the case in May 2020, she reported, because the BBRSDA has the responsibility to maintain the marketability and the habitat for the salmon. She said a government board should avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest, let alone a major actual conflict. She urged that Mr. Williams's appointment not be confirmed.

CO-CHAIR TARR requested Mr. Williams to respond in writing to the statement that he was paid to file suit against BBRSDA.

[1:59:46 PM](#)

KATHERINE CARSCALLEN, noted she is a lifelong Bristol Bay/Dillingham resident and a lifelong commercial and subsistence fisher. Most of her family also commercially fishes Bristol Bay, she added.

MS. CARSCALLEN stated she is highly concerned about the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries. She posed the possibility that the governor is trying to send a message to Bristol Bay and Alaskan fishermen by removing a sitting board member in good standing from the region and replacing him with a Pebble employee. She suggested the committee backup the residents and fishermen by sending a return message that they will not allow the Board of Fisheries to be politicized. She offered her belief that committees are not required to forward the names of appointees and urged that Mr. Williams's name not be forwarded for a full vote.

MS. CARSCALLEN questioned the ability of Mr. Williams to be a representative of the best interests of fishing communities, given his dismissal of the testimony against his appointment and laughing because there was an organization effort. Regarding "robo-texts," she noted that her fishing group was created to protect the Bristol Bay fishery from the threat of the Pebble Partnership, the employer of Mr. Williams. The group paid \$50 to sign up for an easy text service, collected text numbers from its fishermen, and sent out an alert about this hearing. If that somehow disqualifies the volume of fishermen and Alaska

residents who have called in to oppose his appointment, will Mr. Williams dismiss grassroots efforts when he is a sitting Board of Fisheries member? Ms. Carscallen stated that over the past decade Mr. Williams has been one of the most prominent voices pushing Pebble Mine in the Bristol Bay region and in no way represents the best interest of the region's fishermen.

MS. CARSCALLLEN addressed the topic of geographic distribution on the Board of Fisheries and that the board makes decisions concerning fisheries for the entire state. She pointed out that over the years state management has been consolidated and moved centrally to save money, with a loss of ADF&G staff positions within the Bristol Bay region. Therefore, she maintained, it must be ensured that Alaska's public boards remain diverse and representative of stakeholders.

[2:04:13 PM](#)

VERNER WILSON III, testified that he is a Bristol Bay sport, subsistence, and commercial fisherman born and raised in Dillingham. He said he commercial fishes with his brother and father who has a permit and boat in Bristol Bay. He related that he has known Mr. Williams for over a decade and is concerned that Mr. Williams won't conserve the fisheries and is concerned about previous efforts by Mr. Williams to reduce fishing benefits to more Alaskans.

MR. WILSON urged a vote against appointing Mr. Williams. Given Mr. Williams's controversial stance on conservation, he continued, he thinks other fishermen from around the state would be concerned about this nomination. He cautioned that if Mr. Williams is for compromising salmon habitat in his own home region for pay, he might bring that approach to other areas of the state as well. Aside from supporting Pebble, Mr. Williams supported permit stacking in the fishery, which would have had profound negative impacts on fishing jobs statewide, especially for young Alaskan fishers, by likely drastically reducing the number of commercial deckhand jobs, for example. Mr. Wilson argued that all communities that depend on the revenues of fisheries should be concerned by Mr. Williams's stance, as should businesses such as stores, restaurants, and airlines that benefit from the broader indirect economic impacts that fisheries bring to Alaska's coastal economies.

MR. WILSON offered his hope that anyone in this position be able to discuss these important conservation issues and be approachable and unbiased to the many Alaskans who need to feel

properly heard when talking to board members about their livelihoods. He again urged a no vote on the appointment of Mr. Williams. He further stated that he also has concerns about the appointment of Mr. Wood.

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DIANE FOLSOM, said she is a member of the Curyung Tribe and that she is testifying on behalf of herself and her family, all active members of the Bristol Bay commercial fishery and subsistence fishers. She noted she is shore support, and her husband is captain of their commercial fishing boat and that her family's subsistence setnet site is in Dillingham. They are recent purchasers of a limited entry Bristol Bay commercial fishing permit and a 32-foot commercial fishing boat, she continued, and her family is multi-generational in the commercial fishing industry.

MS. FOLSOM stated she opposes the appointment of Abe Williams. His appointment would be a huge conflict of interest, she maintained, due to Mr. Williams being an employee of the Pebble Partnership. Mr. Williams is not a resident of the Bristol Bay region and does not represent her interests, she argued, rather he represents his personal interest in the Pebble Mine. She urged the committees and [the legislature] to oppose the confirmation of Mr. Williams.

MS. FOLSOM said she also opposes the appointment of John Wood. Given that Mr. Wood is employed by the State of Alaska and answers directly to the governor, she stated, he has a direct conflict of interest by sitting on this board. She encouraged starting over and looking for qualified applicants who reside in the Bristol Bay region, who commercially or subsistence fish, and who don't have conflict of interest issues.

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MARIEL TERRY, noted she is a born-and-raised Alaskan who splits her time between Anchorage and Bristol Bay where she works as a fishery scientist, and said she opposes the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries.

MS. TERRY expressed her concern with the prospect of someone who is receiving payment and employment by out-of-state and international corporate interests that are very misaligned with the majority view of the region to which Mr. Williams would be tasked to represent. She noted the Board of Fisheries was

established for purposes of conserving and developing fisheries resources around Alaska. However, she continued, Pebble Partnership, the employer of Mr. Williams, is attempting to permit a development project that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently admitted would likely result in significant adverse effects to the aquatic system. She offered her understanding that it is a project in direct conflict with the mission to conserve and develop the fishery resources of the region.

MS. TERRY argued that a lengthy body of evidence suggests that Mr. Williams has a clear and targeted agenda. For example, in a 2013 interview Mr. Williams advocated development of Pebble Mine under the pretext that it would bring economic growth to the communities of Bristol Bay. At the time he sounded like a great candidate to hold a paid position with the Pebble Partnership, which coincidentally is now what he does as their director of regional affairs.

MS. TERRY stated she is concerned that an individual with such an overtly political position would be tasked with objectively synthesizing and incorporating scientific assessment provided by scientists at the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G). She further related her concern that a person tasked with ensuring the success of this large-scale and environmentally detrimental mine that would be selected to represent a community that opposes the mine by 77 percent, according to a recent poll by the Hayes Research Group.

MS. TERRY urged the committees to reject the appointment of Abe Williams. She added that she would like to see more representation from rural, coastal fishing communities.

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MARK RICHARDS, noted he is a member of the Fairbanks Fish & Game Advisory Committee, but is testifying on his own behalf. He stated he supports the appointment of McKenzie Mitchell, given her many accomplishments since moving to Alaska 11 years ago. He said her accomplishments in the sport fishing and hunting industry, along with her UAF credentials and work, show that she is a fast learner and a hard worker.

MR. RICHARDS addressed statements made in opposition to Ms. Mitchell that she isn't knowledgeable enough on issues at this time to serve on the board and that she isn't from a coastal community. As to the latter, he argued that one doesn't have to

be from a "coastal" community to serve on the board or to experience impacts from Board of Fisheries decisions. Every community in Alaska is a fishing community in some way or another and is affected by Board of Fisheries decisions. As to the notion that Ms. Mitchell is not yet experienced enough to serve on the board, he pointed out that she has said she has work to do to learn the process and the issues, and he has no doubt she is capable and can learn. He further stated that it would be great to get the perspective of someone who is younger and is a woman to serve on the board. He urged that Ms. Mitchell be confirmed in joint session.

MR. RICHARDS said he opposes the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries. He stated it is audacious that the governor would appoint a current employee of the Pebble Partnership to the board. He recalled that last year the legislature voted to confirm Ms. Carlson-Van Dort who five years prior was also the director of regional affairs for the Pebble Partnership. If Mr. Williams is appointed, he noted, both the current and former directors of regional affairs for the Pebble Partnership will be serving on the board, which looks bad. The public must have some trust in the board's integrity and know the board is not biased.

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ANNE CORAY KAHN, related that her family came to Alaska in the early 1950s. She was born on Lake Clark, which joins Lake Iliamna. The fish come up the Kvichak River and many fish spawn in Lake Clark. Her brothers fished Bristol Bay in the 1950s.

MS. KAHN voiced her extreme opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries. This appointment is unconscionable, she stated, given Mr. Williams is a Pebble Partnership employee. It is clearly another move by Governor Dunleavy to appoint Pebble supporters to important political positions. The governor used this same tactic when he appointed Pebble supporter Jason Brune to head the Department of Environmental Conservation.

MS. KAHN said she is even more outraged by this appointment now that she has heard Mr. Williams speak. The lawsuit he brought against the labeling of Bristol Bay salmon, she charged, was clearly an attempt to undermine the importance of the wild salmon market. Furthermore, his language is evasive, and he is utterly unconvincing in his claim to not have a conflict of interest regarding Pebble. Regarding whether the fishery can

exist with a mine, Ms. Kahn asked that the public be shown one example of a large-scale open pit mine that is near a salmon area that has not had detrimental environmental impact. She again urged that the appointment of Mr. Williams not be advanced.

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DONNA RAE FAULKNER, testified that during these stressful times, Alaskans don't need more drama and controversy. While she doesn't know Abe Williams personally and he may have great integrity, she cannot support his appointment because as director of regional affairs for the Pebble Mine he naturally has a conflict of interest. Even if Mr. Williams were to recuse himself from discussions, the appointment is still inappropriate. Making controversial appointments is insulting to Alaskans. It is already a highly charged political environment and the waters don't need to be muddied further, which sows more distrust with leadership and the process in the state of Alaska. She urged that the appointment of Mr. Williams be rejected.

[2:21:00 PM](#)

DON MCNAMARA, expressed his opposition to the appointments of John Wood and Abe Williams to the Board of Fisheries. He urged that local Bristol Bay people be appointed to the board rather than Anchorage residents. He suggested that Pebble Mine is just an amusement for Mr. Williams.

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RICHARD GUSTAFSON, spoke in opposition to the appointment of Abe Williams. He related that he is a retired biologist, having served over 30 years with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G). Early in his career he was in the headwaters of most of the eastern side of Bristol Bay, which included Lake Iliamna, and also on the western side. Pebble is a really bad thing, he stressed.

MR. GUSTAFSON said the Board of Fisheries is a very important process for the state. Residents need to have confidence in the board's members, he continued, and the biologists that testify must try to make the people understand the conservation moves to apply to the fisheries. He stated that Mr. Williams definitely has a conflict of interest and suggested that the governor look

into and appoint one of the many fishermen in the Bristol Bay region.

MR. GUSTAFSON said John Wood seems to have a conflict of interest given he is being paid by the State of Alaska and the governor to serve on a board. Mr. Wood needs to do one or the other because it doesn't pass the red-face test.

[2:23:49 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN asked whether during his time with ADF&G Mr. Gustafson ever testified directly before the Board of Fisheries about any Pebble measures.

MR. GUSTAFSON replied that he provided testimony on some clam issues in the Homer area. Mainly, he was the person in the field collecting the data, so he wore out many pairs of hip boots in Bristol Bay.

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN reiterated her question.

MR. GUSTAFSON responded no, not about Pebble Mine. But, he continued, he testified in many other instances, such as to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other places, about the Pebble Mine.

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MAGGIE BURSCH, said she grew up in Homer and is a second-generation commercial fisher in Bristol Bay. She bought her own commercial fishing boat and permit seven years ago when she was 20 years old. Throughout her childhood Pebble Mine has been a huge concern for her, she related.

MS. BURSCH stated she strongly opposes the appointment of Abe Williams because she is dependent on fishing for everything in her life. She pointed out that the Pebble Mine's proposed plan includes a gas pipeline that would carry with it the possibility of breaking during seismic action, which would threaten the Cook Inlet fishery. Mr. Williams suing the BBRSDA because it is helping to fund organizations that work toward salmon conservation is very telling in where he stands on salmon conservation, she said, and therefore Mr. Williams has no place on this board.

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REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN praised Ms. Bursch for her endeavors in the male-dominated commercial fishing industry.

MS. BURSCH responded that she has lived in other places in the world and Alaska is a place where a young person can start a business by money they make exclusively in that business, and that is what she did with commercial fishing. She studied economics, she continued, and having small businesses and family run businesses is crucial and unique to this area and she would like to preserve that.

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KALEB WESTFALL, related that he is a lifelong Alaska resident and has lived in and commercially fished from Dillingham since 2001. He said commercial fishing put him through college and puts food on his table.

MR. WESTFALL urged the committees to reject the nomination of Abe Williams as well as any other nominees who have a conflict of interest. He maintained that Mr. Williams is a "win at all costs" kind of person. He recalled that Mr. Williams went from being the president of BBRSDA to suing the organization, which he had helped to build up. He further recalled a claim by Mr. Williams that his involvement with Pebble started in 2010 and recounted that in 2014 the 1,650 members of BBRSDA passed opposition to large-scale mining. Mr. Westfall therefore charged that this is testament to "a wolf in sheep's skin."

MR. WESTFALL recounted being at a BBRSDA meeting after Mr. Williams had stepped down as president and at which Mr. Williams touted the wonders of farmed salmon possibly starting in the East Coast. In talking about conservation and development of Alaska's fisheries Mr. Westfall said he would be interested in how that would be done when Mr. Williams is thinking more internationally and possibly specifically for Pebble Mine.

MR. WESTFALL shared that while he was an intern in 2007 for the late U.S. Senator Ted Stevens, the senator and interns would have discussions. In these discussions, he reported, Senator Stevens stated that he would never trade a renewable resource for a nonrenewable resource, meaning the senator would never trade salmon for an open-pit mine or anything else that was nonrenewable.

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CHUCK DERRICK, President, Chitina Dipnetters Association (CDA), noted that the CDA represents about 10,000 Alaska residents who annually partake in the Chitina personal use salmon dipnet fishery on the Copper River.

MR. DERRICK testified that CDA supports the appointments of McKenzie Mitchell and John Wood to the Board of Fisheries. He said both appointees are knowledgeable of the importance of consumptive uses of salmon, whether personal use or subsistence. He stated that both appointees support the high value these uses bring to food security for the residents of Alaska and economy for the entire state.

[2:35:26 PM](#)

CHUCK MCCALLUM, related he has been a resident of Anchorage since 2002 and has been involved in the Board of Fisheries process since 1988. He noted he is a retired Chignik commercial fisherman and the executive director of the Chignik Regional Aquaculture Association (CRAA).

MR. MCCALLUM voiced his support for John Wood's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He said Mr. Wood has shown himself to be a quick study of the complex management issues with a willingness to view issues from an independent point of view. Mr. Wood has demonstrated an ability to listen to and understand all sides of complicated issues and achieve reasonable and equitable management compromises. The Board of Fisheries, he continued, needs intelligent, perceptive, and fair-minded individuals like Mr. Wood. Alaska's natural fish resources are vitally important and deserve highly qualified members like Mr. Wood to serve on the Board of Fisheries.

MR. MCCALLUM also voiced his support for McKenzie Mitchell's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He related that he has spoken to Ms. Mitchell about her appointment. While her resume is admittedly a little slim, he said he thinks she is a hard worker and will turn out to be a good member.

[2:37:58 PM](#)

ROBERT HEYANO, reiterated his support for the appointment of John Jensen to the Board of fisheries. He said Mr. Jensen brings diversity and provides representation for rural coastal communities to the board.

[2:39:05 PM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

[2:39:28 PM](#)

BEN MOHR, Executive Director, Kenai River Sportfishing Association (KRSA), explained that KRSA is a charitable nonprofit dedicated to ensuring sustainability of the world's premier sportfishing region, which is Alaska. He registered KRSA's support for the confirmation of each of the governor's four appointees.

MR. MOHR stated he has observed John Jensen and John Wood at Board of Fisheries meetings over the last year and both nominees demonstrated a clear understanding that service on the board is a public trust responsibility and their decisions answered to all Alaskans. It is common to see multiple stakeholders promoting proposals or amendments at these meetings, he related, and both Mr. Jensen and Mr. Wood proved to be accessible to the public and met with all different viewpoints during these meetings. Mr. Wood's most significant character traits is his desire for equity and inclusiveness, which he showed at these meetings by constantly encouraging collaboration across sectors in order to reach the ultimate goal of the Board of Fisheries, which is to conserve and develop the fisheries resources of Alaska. Mr. Jensen has served Alaska with distinction and for many years in this role. Mr. Jensen's experience and knowledge of Alaska's fishery sectors is an asset to the state.

MR. MOHR said Ms. Mitchell brings to the board a new and fresh perspective that will serve Alaska well. Ms. Mitchell's familiarity with Alaska's fisheries as a guide is an important perspective and it deserves representation, he stated. Her position as an academic with a knowledge of economies will also influence her decision-making processes when it comes to the core goal of the board to conserve and develop the fisheries. Ms. Mitchell has an ability to help maximize the value of the fishery for all Alaskans.

MR. MOHR offered his understanding that Abe Williams has been an active participant in the Bristol Bay commercial drift fishery for 30 years, often one of the most successful fishermen in the district. He said Mr. Williams has experience with BBRSDA and Naknek/Kvichak Fish & Game Advisory Committee. His knowledge of the commercial fisheries in Alaska will be of value to the board.

MR. MOHR said the Kenai River Sportfishing Association applauds the willingness of each of these nominees to serve Alaska on the Board of Fisheries. On behalf of KRSA he urged a positive confirmation vote by these committees and the full legislature.

2:42:10 PM

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN commented that Mr. Mohr's statement about Ms. Mitchell bringing a new perspective to the board was something she needed to hear. She related that when she got elected to office, she had never held any other political office before that, which she thought was good because it is important to have new perspectives.

2:44:00 PM

SUSAN DOHERTY, Executive Director, Southeast Alaska Seiners Association (SEAS), related she is speaking on behalf of the 100 members of SEAS. She stated that SEAS supports the appointment of John Jensen and highly recommends his confirmation. She said Mr. Jensen has a wealth of knowledge about Alaska's fisheries and has demonstrated his approachability, his knowledge concerning complex user group dynamics, and a concern for the fisheries resource as a renewable asset of the state and its users. Additionally, Mr. Jensen is the lone voice of Southeast Alaska and of coastal fishing communities.

MS. DOHERTY charged that the Board of Fisheries candidate selection and confirmation process is broken. That names of individuals with years of fisheries service around the state are put forth as candidates yet not forwarded, while those with no experience are forwarded, testifies that the system is broken, she stated. Alaska's fisheries and fisheries resources are too important to have people cut their teeth on.

MS. DOHERTY said SEAS believes that, unless being considered for reappointment, no candidate should be able to sit and make judgment decisions that affect the lives and livelihoods or cultural opportunities of Alaska's people without first being confirmed. She implored the House and Senate to correct this issue by working together on legislation and/or amendments, or the constitution if necessary. People who are given such power should be seasoned, knowledgeable, and fully vetted by the confirmation process. While she understands the reason behind the current language, appointments made intentionally when there is no time to confirm have overshadowed the intent. Expiring terms are scheduled and not a surprise, she pointed out. The

selection, vetting, and confirmation process should start perhaps a year from any given expiring seat to allow for a seamless and consistent sitting Board of Fisheries.

MS. DOHERTY stated SEAS agrees that coastal fishing communities are not adequately represented in the current slate of appointees. She said SEAS understands that there are no set seats, but argued that any Board of Fisheries that makes resource decisions throughout the state should also have balanced statewide representation to have any real credibility. That a name like Robert Ruffner was not forwarded for confirmation yet people with absolutely no knowledge or experience are on the list of appointees today is criminal. It's an indictment on the many people who depend on this process for their livelihood and the health of the resources, whether they are commercial, subsistence, or sports fishermen. She thanked Mr. Ruffner for his service and years of dedication and stated that his reappointment would have served to add coastal fishing community representation, as well as much needed experience and knowledge to the Board of Fisheries.

[2:47:38 PM](#)

FORREST BRADEN, Executive Director, Southeast Alaska Guides Organization (SEAGO), explained that SEAGO represents the marine recreational fishery in Southeast Alaska. He voiced SEAGO's support for all four appointees being considered for the Board of Fisheries and said SEAGO is looking forward to working with them.

MR. BRADEN stated SEAGO has had personal experience with Mr. Jensen in a variety of fisheries settings. He said Mr. Jensen has a strong history with the board with lots of exposure to the dynamics of Alaska's fisheries and a lot of experience in decision-making. Mr. Jensen will be a good anchor for the board moving forward.

MR. BRADEN related that he observed Mr. Wood at the both the Upper and Lower Cook Inlet meetings during this past cycle. He said Mr. Wood displayed a sincere desire to understand the needs and issues facing fishermen regardless of user group. Mr. Wood was prepared on proposals, he continued, and showed a tendency to dig and ask questions to get through the things he didn't fully understand. Further, he saw Mr. Wood change his position on an issue based on new information. He didn't find that Mr. Wood had allegiance to anything other than the facts and his own conscience.

MR. BRADEN said Ms. Mitchell and Mr. Williams both appear to have skill sets suited for the board. He stated that Ms. Mitchell has enthusiasm for the seat and familiarity with commercial, sport, and subsistence uses of fishery resources and an educational background that should lend well to processing conservation and allocative issues. While Mr. Williams has taken flack today for his connection with the Pebble Project, Mr. Braden continued, he personally finds it hard to believe that Mr. Williams would knowingly jeopardize the fishery that has supported him for decades. It seems like Mr. Williams has a lot at stake, but it may boil down to a risk tolerance with developing mine activity in the Bristol Bay region. He said he thinks Representative Rasmussen was getting at the idea that there is a separation from Mr. Williams's view of that situation and his beliefs on the board.

2:50:15 PM

GEORGIE HEAVERLEY, related that she is a born and raised Alaskan, a second generation commercial fisher, a drift gillnet permit holder in Cook Inlet, and a member of the Anchorage Fish & Game Advisory Committee. She further related that she is an active participant in the Board of Fisheries process.

MS. HEAVERLEY maintained that the people of Alaska are losing faith in the Board of Fisheries process. Several individuals seeking confirmation to this board today, she continued, are glaring examples as to the reason for this declining trust in the system. She questioned how Alaskans are to place their confidence in a board member that would be unqualified as shown through Ms. Mitchell's inability to effectively prove her fisheries knowledge, a board member who would be blatantly biased toward irresponsible resource development as shown through Mr. Williams's alarming conflict of interest regarding the Pebble Mine, or a board in general that is currently unbalanced like never before, representing sport-fishing interests at the expense of commercial. Ms. Heaverley stated it appears that no matter what the people of Alaska are saying, what they are pleading, the Board of Fisheries will not listen and instead vote in their own particular interest.

MS. HEAVERLEY argued that confirming Abe Williams does not mean that the Alaska Legislature can check the box for commercial fishing representation on the Board of Fisheries. It doesn't matter that Mr. Williams has fished Bristol Bay for 30 years, she said, it matters that he works for the Pebble Limited

Partnership. The lawsuit that Mr. Williams was involved in against the BBRSDA was widely opposed by commercial fishermen. To appoint Mr. Williams as a commercial fishing representative that doesn't even have the support of the sector is an insult to this process and an insult to Alaska's fishermen.

MS. HEAVERLEY urged the committees and legislature to consider appointees who are knowledgeable in fisheries issues and who currently live in Alaska's coastal fishing communities. Alaska should exemplify the model of fisheries management, she stated. As Alaska's leaders, consider whom you are putting through to these positions of power.

MS. HEAVERLEY said she is proud to be a part of the young and upcoming generation of Alaska commercial fishermen. Her generation, she added, is asking legislators to stand up for them and the sustainability and the future of their industry.

[2:52:52 PM](#)

STEPHANIE QUINN-DAVIDSON, PhD, Director, Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC), said she is a fisheries scientist and that she previously worked as a research biologist and then a fishery manager for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) on the Yukon River. She stated she is testifying today in her official position as director of the Yukon River Inter-tribal Fish Commission with TCC and that the Fish Commission represents over 30 federally recognized tribes along the Yukon River.

DR. QUINN-DAVIDSON related that the decisions made by the Board of Fisheries directly impact the livelihood, and physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing of TCC's people. These decisions need to be taken seriously, she stated, and she has concerns with some of the responses the committees have received from these appointees today that showed woeful inexperience with, and knowledge of, Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) fisheries. The AYK region is the largest subsistence region in the state, she pointed out. On the Yukon River this year the people's king, chum, and silver salmon did not return. The people do not have the food that they depend on, and have depended on for generations. She had to purchase salmon from Bristol Bay this year so it could be distributed to the elders and those most in need so that they have some food this winter.

DR. QUINN-DAVIDSON stated that the decisions made by the Board of Fisheries are not just important; they are vital. The TCC

tribes in rural communities are already at a disadvantage of participating in the board's public process. The advisory committees that advise the board meet fewer times on average than urban or road system advisory committees due to their remote locations, cancelled flights, bad weather, and phone connectivity problems. To prepare for and participate in a Board of Fisheries meeting costs the Fish Commission \$100,000 to have its advocates participate in a weeklong meeting in Anchorage or Fairbanks.

DR. QUINN-DAVIDSON said TCC believes the legislature should send the administration back to the drawing board. She urged the appointment of someone who is knowledgeable of, and has experience in, the largest subsistence region of the state. She further urged appointing someone who is actually qualified, not someone who has simply floated by or flown into these communities.

[2:55:33 PM](#)

KAREN HOFSTAD, offered her high recommendation for the appointment of John Jensen to the Board of Fisheries. She pointed out his experience and dedication to doing the right thing for all of Alaska.

MS. HOFSTAD maintained that since statehood Alaska's Board of Fisheries has been balanced with all users - commercial, sport, and subsistence. She said she finds it unbelievable that Governor Dunleavy has not appointed any commercial fish knowledge to the board given that seafood is by far Alaska's top export, number one private employer. Governor Dunleavy wants to tell the world Alaska is open for business, contracting with new businesses to bring business to town, when he is working so hard against Alaska's number one industry. She said her question is, Why? The seafood industry affects all Alaskans and should not be a political issue. There are many experienced Alaskans that know of all fish types, she continued. The issue is balance, not bias.

MS. HOFSTAD urged a no vote for Mr. Williams, the Pebble Mine's lobbyist, and for Ms. Mitchell. Balance is needed and balance means commercial fishermen, she said. Everyone is working together, but there cannot be only one user group represented.

[2:58:30 PM](#)

GALE VICK, Member, Fairbanks Fish & Game Advisory Committee, noted she is a fisheries and policy consultant in Fairbanks, a 52-year resident of Alaska, and a 40-year veteran of many fish arenas in the state. She further noted that she was a commercial driftnet fisher in Prince William Sound for over 20 years, a subsistence fisher in years past, and a recreational and personal use fisher for over 50 years. She stated that because of her work on the Yukon River and other rural regions she is a very strong supporter of subsistence priorities in both law and for food security. She is an advocate for increased salmon science and monitoring as it relates to the continuing loss of salmon size and run strength all over Alaska. As a co-author of a recent scientific paper on this subject, she sees this the predominant issue facing all fisheries stakeholders.

MS. VICK testified in support of the nomination of McKenzie Mitchell to the Board of Fisheries. While Ms. Mitchell is new to this process, she said the advisory committee believes Ms. Mitchell will bring a unique combination of fishing, science, and economics experience to the board. She said Ms. Mitchell has illustrated her belief in subsistence priorities, has shown a specific concern over the resource itself, has illustrated her ability to critically review hard data and understand complex relationships, and has energy and intellectual interest in learning about all sectors in depth. Ms. Vick related the advisory committee's belief that Ms. Mitchell is an effective listener and a dedicated researcher who will take seriously all Board of Fisheries petitions with knowledge and equity.

[3:00:24 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR TARR thanked the witnesses for their testimony [and closed public testimony].

[3:00:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN thanked the witnesses for their time and for sharing their impassioned views.

[3:01:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN offered her appreciation to the witnesses. She expressed her alarm that nearly one-third of the state's commercial fishing permits are held by non-Alaskans. She offered her hope that in the future the number of permits held by residents could be increased.

[3:02:42 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK thanked the witnesses. He requested that another joint meeting between the two committees be held to discuss this last year's fishing season. He pointed out that in Southeast Alaska the fish runs were low, and the pandemic caused a decrease in fish prices and there was a lack of fish on the Yukon and in the Interior. He would like to see what could be done to help out the communities and families in the fishing industry using money from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. He related he has heard from a lot of people about needed relief from the poor salmon season.

[3:04:51 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR TARR responded that she has heard from Commissioner Anderson that the service industry, hospitality industry, and fishing industry are the number one applicants for the business relief. She said she doesn't know if that included the sport-fishing folks who were impacted by the lack of tourists coming to Alaska. She said she would follow up on Representative Tuck's request.

[3:06:36 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR TARR explained the confirmation process by noting that at the committee level the committees do not take a vote in support or opposition of an individual. The committee action today will result in a committee report that this confirmation hearing was held, she said. Until the legislature reconvenes and sets a time for a joint session these individuals will not be taken up for a vote. She pointed out that appointments are not stopped at the committee level. She closed the hearing with the following statement:

The House Special Committee on Fisheries and the House Resources [Standing] Committee have reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointees as shown below and recommends that the names be forwarded to a joint session for consideration. This does not reflect intent by any of the members to vote for or against the individuals during any further sessions for the purpose of confirmation and that applies to Mr. Jensen, Ms. Mitchell, Mr. Williams, and Mr. Wood.

[3:07:05 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committees, the House Special Committee on Fisheries and the House Resources Standing Committee joint meeting was adjourned at 3:07 p.m.