

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 24, 2021

1:02 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Josiah Patkotak, Chair  
Representative Grier Hopkins, Vice Chair  
Representative Zack Fields  
Representative Calvin Schrage  
Representative Sara Hannan  
Representative George Rauscher  
Representative Mike Cronk  
Representative Ronald Gillham  
Representative Tom McKay

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Representative Kevin McCabe

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

OVERVIEW(S): DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Commissioner  
Department of Fish and Game  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Offered an overview of the work that the Department of Fish and Game does.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CHAIR JOSIAH PATKOTAK** called the House Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. Representatives Hopkins, Schrage, Hannan, Rauscher, Gilham, Cronk, McKay, and Patkotak were present at the call to order. Representative Fields arrived as the meeting was in progress.

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

**[Contains discussion of HB 79, HB 80, SB 22, SB 59, and SB 60.]**

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CHAIR PATKOTAK announced that the only order of business would be an overview of the Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

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DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Commissioner, Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), expressed that the resources managed by ADF&G belong to the people of Alaska and that by being engaged in the legislative process, residents are expressing their preferences on how the resources are used.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG provided a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Alaska Department of Fish & Game; House Resources Committee Department Overview." He directed attention to slide 2, "Constitutional and Statutory Mandates" which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

**The Constitution of the State of Alaska**  
**Article 8 -Natural Resources; §4. Sustained Yield**  
Fish, forests, wildlife, grasslands, and all other  
replenishable resources belonging to the State shall  
be utilized, developed, and maintained on the  
sustained yield principle, subject to preferences  
among beneficial uses.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG explained that the key phrase here is "sustained yield principle," which is unique to Alaska. He further noted that Article 8 of the Constitution does not, however, call for a "maximum sustained yield." He cited rainbow trout as an example of something that is managed for a sustainable yield rather than a maximum yield. He stated that

Alaska doesn't try to get the maximum poundage of rainbow trout, instead many of Alaska's trout populations are optimally managed to have populations that are giving the best catch and release numbers possible. He further clarified that this is subject to preferences amongst beneficial uses, which is why there exists a Board of Fish and a Board of Game process -- to decide who gets to utilize these resources. He reiterated that both those principles of a "sustained yield" and "subject to preference" are in the Alaska constitution.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG continued onto the second point on slide 2, his duty as the commissioner, in the middle third of the slide, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

**The Alaska Statutes**

**Title 16. FISH AND GAME; Sec. 16.05.020. Functions of  
commissioner**

(2) manage, protect, maintain, improve, and extend the fish, game and aquatic plant resources of the state in the interest of the economy and general well-being of the state.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said those were the authorities he was vested in and noted that he had emergency order authority to work with the Board of Fish, the Board of Game, and the Alaska State Legislature to ensure that the resources are used in the best interest of the state's economy and the well-being of the state. He explained that there may be times where there is a conflict between what is best for the economy and what is best for the well-being of the people of the state of Alaska. He offered the example of dealing with human-bear interactions in urban communities, which he would categorize as being in the well-being of the state.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG concluded with the departments mission statement, which read as follows on the bottom third of slide 2 [original punctuation provided]:

**Mission Statement**

To protect, maintain, and improve the fish, game, and aquatic plant resources of the state, and manage their uses and development in the best interest of the economy and the well-being of the people of the state, consistent with the sustained yield principle.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG moved on to slide 3, "Core Services," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

**Management**

Provide hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities, protect state's rights to manage its fish and wildlife resources, conserve and improve habitat and access.

**Stock Assessment and Research**

Ensure sustainability and harvestable surplus, improve assessment and research capabilities, invest in new technologies, anticipate changing conditions.

**Customer Service and Public Involvement**

Make improvements to information and education services, the Boards and other regulatory processes, licensing and permitting.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG explained that ADF&G has a fundamental management program that manages the areas listed on the slide. He said there is a research program that is associated with that. He noted that the second component in the department is the "Stock Assessment and Research" arm, clarifying the department's management is based on science-based research. He shared that Alaska has a world-wide recognized stock assessment program. He described ADF&G as "cutting edge" in stock assessment in commercial fisheries. He said the final component is "Customer Service and Public involvement," which enables people to use the resources managed by ADF&G. He said that ADF&G has walk-in capacity across the state for the average Alaskan to come in and ask about how and where to go hunting and fishing.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG next directed attention to slides 4 and 5, titled "Return on Investment" and "Return on Investment Continued," both of which were subtitled "The Alaska Department of Fish and Game turns a \$198 million dollar (of which \$62 million is GF) into a return of over \$11 billion annually." He summarized the contents of the slides, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

**Economic Value of Commercially Harvested Alaska Seafood:**

- Directly employs 60,000 workers annually, more than any other industry in Alaska - Largest private sector employer in Alaska

- Contributes \$146 million in taxes, fees, and self-assessments which help fund state, local and federal government
- Alaska seafood contributes an annual average of \$5 billion in economic output to the Alaska economy
- Alaska exports over 1 million metric tons of seafood each year, returning over \$3 billion of new money into the U.S. economy

#### Economic Value of Sport Fisheries

- 15,879 Jobs supported
- \$246 million in taxes contributed (adjusted for inflation, \$298.64 million in 2019 dollars)
- \$545 million in income provided (adjusted for inflation, \$661.63 million in 2019 dollars)
- \$1.6 billion industry output. (adjusted for inflation, \$1.950 billion in 2019 dollars)

#### Economic value of Wildlife

- More than 27,000 Jobs supported
- 1.4 billion in labor income (adjusted for inflation, 1.566 billion in 2019 dollars)
- 3.4 billion spent by hunters and wildlife viewers (adjusted for inflation, 3.87 billion in 2019 dollars)
- \$4.1 billion economic activity statewide. (adjusted for inflation, 4.59 billion in 2019 dollars)

#### Economic Value of Subsistence

- 2014 Nutritional replacement value schedules show that subsistence provides Alaskans with between \$183,878,022- \$367,756,045 (\$200,826,510- \$391,020,417 adjusted for inflation to 2019 dollars) worth of wild food per year.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked where the \$136 million that is not in the general fund (GF) is spent.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that a later slide will break down ADF&G's budget. He noted that subsistence is a statutory and constitutional requirement in Alaska and that the fisheries are managed with a subsistence priority, which has greatly helped people in rural Alaska.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG continued to slide 6, titled "Alaska Department of Fish & Game Leadership," and highlighted Deputy Commissioner Rachel Baker, who leads the national and international fishery issues. He said that she has a chair on the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC). Ben Mulligan is the other deputy commissioner, who oversees the habitat program, federal subsistence program, Board of Game and Board of Fisheries activities, and federal/state subsistence interactions. He named Legislative Liaison Rachel Hanke, Special Assistant Rick Green, and the Division of Administrative Services (DAS) Deputy Director Melissa Hill. He also named the division directors as Sam Rabung, Director of Commercial Fisheries; Dave Rutz, Director of Sport Fish; Eddie Grasser, Director of Wildlife Conservation; Kristy Tibbles, Executive Director, Board of Game; and Glenn Haight, Executive Director, Board of Fisheries.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said there are two sections in ADF&G: the Habitat section, and the Subsistence Research Section. He explained that those used to be divisions, until about two years ago. He said that during the first round of budget cuts, a decision was made to forgo assigning directors, and rather leave those as sections.

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REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked for the backgrounds of Deputy Commissioner Ben Mulligan and Deputy Commissioner Rachel Baker.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that Deputy Commissioner Rachel Baker worked for ADF&G a number of years ago and was more recently with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in Washington D.C. She has experience with national and international fisheries issues. He explained that she understood the federal processes when it comes to managing fisheries. Deputy Commissioner Ben Mulligan was a legislative liaison for ADF&G for many years and has experience in the Division of Sport Fish.

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked whether both deputy commissioners have a fisheries background.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered that Deputy Commissioner Mulligan's time as a legislative liaison gave him experience in a wide range of issues including habitat, fisheries, and subsistence. Deputy Commissioner Baker, he continued, has had more experience in fisheries.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG turned to slide 7, "Budget," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

FY 2020 Authorized Budget

- \$202,781 million
- 835 permanent full-time positions
- 605 permanent part-time positions and 8 non-permanent position

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG explained the two pie charts also included on the slide show funding sources as undesignated general fund (UGF), designated general fund (DGF), other, and federal, and he clarified that the category "other," which is the single largest source of funds, is a combination of Fish and Game fund with DGF receipts. Unique to Alaska, he explained, is the dedicated Fish and Game fund. He explained that voters chose to designate that fund to allow access to additional matching federal funds such as the Pittman-Robertson (PR) fund and the Dingell-Johnson funds, which are created by taxes collected on hunting and fishing licenses at the federal level and returned to the states with a matching ratio of 1:3. He noted the high amount of federal and UGF dollars used to fund ADF&G. By component, he continued, the largest division is Commercial Fisheries, which is followed closely by the Wildlife and Sport Fish. Next is the Support Services and then Subsistence and Habitat, he concluded.

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REPRESENTATIVE GILLHAM inquired about CARES Act funds totaling \$50 million and asked whether that money was included in the budget as described.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG explained that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) made \$300 million available for nationwide fisheries relief, of which Alaska received \$50 million. The money was added to NMFS's budget and given to the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) for distribution, assigning to the State of Alaska the task of creating a spending plan. He noted frustration at the slow progress and explained that the plan was to allow all affected fisheries eligibility for relief; however, two factors affected

the pace of the funding rollout. Some fisheries opened in the fall, he said, and they shouldn't be ineligible simply due to a late start date. Another factor was that a fishing operation was required to have suffered a 30 percent loss in revenue over the calendar year; this necessitated waiting until the fisheries were closed, since a loss over two months could be made up for in the longer term. He also noted that the public needed to be engaged in the process, and the plan was open for two rounds of public comment before being submitted to PSMFC for approval. Commissioner Vincent-Lang related that PSMFC is currently awaiting approval from NMFS. He concluded by stating that none of that money is in ADF&G budget.

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REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN noted that the Dingell-Johnson funds are federal funds but are included in the "other" section of fund sources instead of the "federal" section.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered, "Yes."

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked how much of the "other" is recaptured by license fees and how much is federal Dingell-Johnson money.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered that PR funds are much greater than the Dingell-Johnson right now.

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REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked where PR funds are shown in the chart.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that PR funds are included in the "other" section.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked how much money is received from PR and Dingell-Johnson funds.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that the funds total \$14-\$15 million and that he would get the exact amounts.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked about spending restrictions on PR and Dingell-Johnson funds.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG explained that the funds must be used for wildlife management, development of shooting ranges, or

access. He noted that there has been an issue in recent years in not having enough money in the ADF&G fund to match all eligible PR monies.

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REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked how specific [the allocation of PR dollars must be] to hunting and fishing access and whether there exists a gray area.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied citing a proposal for the Chugach State Park to develop a parking area for access to wildlife viewing. It was difficult to use PR funds for this project because the area is closed to hunting, he explained. He finished by saying PR funds are intended for hunting and fishing.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked if the funds could be used for conserving land as a hunting area.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that they could but explained that land purchased with federal dollars has a long-term expectation that the land is used for that specific purpose.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked whether the Advisory Committees (ACs) are paid for by the GF or by federal dollars.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that they are funded by the GF and explained that PR and Dingell-Johnson funds can't be used for regulatory measures.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG resumed presentation by paraphrasing slide 8, "FY2022 Budget Highlights," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- The Department will be able to continue to provide an excellent return on investment as we have in the past under the governor's proposed budget.
- The proposed budget includes \$26 million to fisheries, wildlife, and resource projects.
- We do not anticipate any reduction in services as a result of the proposed budget.

•We were able to use alternative funding sources and cost efficiencies to reduce our general fund needs.

•We are consolidating the various budget components in the Division of Commercial Fisheries into a single unit to improve efficiency.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG explained the structure of ADF&G, as addressed on slide 9, "Office of the Commissioner." He explained that his office provides management and oversight, as well as handling the obligations to approximately 76 boards and commissions such as the Pacific Salmon Commission and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. He explained that the budget for the Office of the Commissioner of ADF&G is \$1.2 million, with seven full-time staff.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked about the Board of Fisheries "doubling up" on meetings and whether residents in remote areas are able to participate in meetings held via online.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied with the note that the regulatory process is publicly driven, and any individual can submit a proposal for consideration; the ACs offer individuals an opportunity to voice their concerns on a proposal while in their local area. He said ADF&G ensures that every AC has an opportunity to send somebody to participate in the board process during proposal deliberations. He explained that in transitioning to COVID-19 protocols it was his recommendation to the Board of Fisheries (BOF) and Board of Game (BOG) to not rely heavily on virtual meetings because of the possible compromises to the public process; BOG decided to move all of its meetings into "out years," while BOF decided to double up on meetings next year at a cost of approximately \$500,000 not currently included in the budget. He clarified that he has informed BOF that he doesn't have the additional money in his budget to double the meetings.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG continued his explanation of the structure of ADF&G with slide 10, "Division of Commercial

Fisheries," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]

**Contribution to Department Mission**

The mission of the Division of Commercial Fisheries is to manage subsistence, commercial, and personal use fisheries in the interest of the economy and general well being of the citizens of the state, consistent with the sustained yield principle, and subject to allocations through public regulatory processes.

**Core Services**

Ensure the conservation of natural stocks of fish, shellfish and aquatic plants based on scientifically sound assessments.

**FY 2020 Authorized Budget**

- \$70.5 million
- 295 permanent full-time positions
- 373 permanent part-time positions

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG moved on to slide 11 which contained more information about the Division of Commercial Fisheries, which manages all of the salmon, herring, shellfish, groundfish, and dive fisheries, as well as many but not all personal use and subsistence fisheries.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG then addressed the structure of the division as outlined on the slide; management regions are Southeast, Central, Westward, and Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK). The division has chief scientists to oversee the salmon fisheries research and groundfish/crab research, and it houses the federal fisheries coordination staff and Pacific Salmon Treaty staff.

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REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN noted that ADF&G gets \$70 million from the GF and asked how much the commercial fish taxes bring into the GF.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that he did not have that information, but Alaska collects more in fish taxes than budgeted to ADF&G.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG continued onto slide 12, "Division of Sport Fish" which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

**Contribution to Department Mission**

The mission of the Division of Sport Fish is to protect and improve the state's sport fishery resources.

**Core Services**

**Fisheries Management:** Manage the state's sport fisheries for sustained yield and angler satisfaction.

**Fisheries Research:** Perform objective-based research based on sound scientific practices to support sport fisheries management.

**Fisheries Enhancement:** Create and diversify sport fishing opportunities for anglers.

**Fish Habitat:** Protect and restore fish habitats for the benefit of fish and sport anglers.

**Communication and Outreach:** Inform and communicate with the public about sport fishing.

**Internal Operations:** Provide leadership and administrative support for the Division's core functions.

**FY 2020 Authorized Budget**

\$40.9 million

187 permanent full-time positions

145 permanent part-time positions

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said "the division is "basically funded" by federal Dingell-Johnson funds and ADF&G funds, "with a little bit of UGF and comes in to that section to do things that aren't eligible for funding under the other two categories." He added, "So, they're basically a user-funded division; they're funded through license fees and ... federal excise taxes on sport fishing."

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REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked about the part-time positions in the department.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that the permanent positions are mostly research, management, and administrative positions. The part time positions are the positions on the weirs [counting fish returns] and survey work.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG next presented slide 13, which offered more information on the Division of Sport Fish and read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

**Major Fisheries**

- Salmon
- Freshwater fisheries
- Groundfish
- Personal Use Fisheries

**Structure**

- Houses 3 management regions (Southeast, Southcentral, Interior)
- Houses Sport Fish Hatchery Operations
- Houses one chief fisheries scientists
- Houses Department Invasive Species Program
- Houses Sport Fish Access Program

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG noted that according to federal statute, a portion of the Dingell-Johnson funds must go towards boating access; this is an annual appropriation matched with ADF&G funds, a small component of which goes towards non-boating access in the form of developing trailheads.

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REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS referred to slide 12 and asked whether the UGF is composed of user and licensing fees.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered that a bit of additional UGF covers things that cannot be paid for with Dingell-Johnson or federal funds, such as regulatory support.

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REPRESENTATIVE GILLHAM asked whether by-catch for ground fish is managed by either one of the divisions.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG explained that by-catch management falls under interactions with the federal fisheries management with NPFMC, which uses the limited entry program to reduce by-catch by spreading out the fisheries or by setting hard limits on by-catch.

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REPRESENTATIVE GILLHAM asked whether it's state or federal responsibility to manage halibut by-catch, considering halibut is federally-managed.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that the State of Alaska has no distinct management authority over halibut, since it's a federal program covered by a treaty. He added that one of the priorities of the NPFMC is to get accurate by-catch numbers while maintaining affordability for fishing operations.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG turned to slides 14 and 15, "Division of Wildlife." Slide 14 read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

**Contribution to Department Mission**

The mission of the Division of Wildlife Conservation is to conserve and enhance Alaska's wildlife and habitats and provide for a wide range of public uses and benefits.

**Core Services**

Maintain and enhance opportunities to hunt, trap, and view wildlife.

Provide opportunities for Alaskans to gain knowledge of and appreciation for Alaska's wildlife, its management, and ways to safely and ethically interact with wildlife.

**FY 2020 Authorized Budget**

\$50.5 million

231 permanent full-time positions

52 permanent part-time & non-permanent positions

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG then directed attention to slide 15 which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

**Major Activities**

Management of hunting and trapping across the state

Management of Special Areas

Participation in Board of Game process

**Structure**

Houses 3 management regions (Southeast, Southcentral, Interior, Central/Southwest)  
Houses Department ANILCA/State Defense program  
Houses one chief wildlife scientist  
Houses Department Veterinary Program  
Houses Shooting Range Program  
Houses Department Waterfowl Program  
Houses Department ESA Program  
Houses Department Marine Mammal Program  
Houses Department Wildlife Diversity Program

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG elaborated on the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), explaining how a primary driver for gaining statehood was the right to manage state resources, which had previously been subject to federal oversight. As part of the compact, Alaska attempted to gain the right to manage fish and game regardless of whether the resource was on state or federal land. He said that the state believed ANILCA further aided Alaska in obtaining management rights. He opined that federal agencies were intruding into the authorities granted by statehood and ANILCA and that ADF&G needed to "defend up at a state level to try to defend those rights that we had guaranteed at statehood and through ANILCA."

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked which is the deciding entity when the hunt structure changes, and how funding is affected.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered that the money goes into the Fish and Game fund, and that BOG decides who has the authority to make the changes.

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REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked about the recent migration of cougars into Alaska, and whether increased numbers had been measured by ADF&G.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG described the increasing movement of various animals from the Yukon into Alaska and opined that as the climate changes, wildlife will move. He said that ADF&G is somewhat concerned about disease vectors presented by wildlife not historically present in the state.

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REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS referred to a moose hunt in the Nenana area for which all of the permits were sold out online in under a minute, so residents with internet access problems didn't have a chance for a permit. He asked whether ADF&G is looking at diversifying ways to access permits.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that having permits available only in rural communities, ensuring local access to resources, creates a different problem when encountering travel restrictions.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked how the BOG will address similar issues in the future.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that the BOG will discuss options next year. He noted that the Fortymile Caribou hunt resulted in damage to the habitat.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked what some possible proposals would be, especially those relating to the Fortymile herd.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that the winter hunt is still ongoing, so proposals will be considered later; he noted that some of the hunt happens on federal land and that the requirements are different.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked if there is a long-term plan for the herd in the Nelchina River Basin.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that the state's intensive management statute is the authority for that herd and that there are harvest objectives which have been met. He said that part of the complexity is that the herd overlaps occasionally with the Fortymile Herd. He also noted that even though there were enough animals to meet federal subsistence needs as well as non-federally qualified users, the Federal Subsistence Board limited access for the non-federally qualified users and legal proceedings are ongoing.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked where it is "on the radar" to make a plan for the Nelchina herd.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that the herd is monitored annually and managed based on access, permits, and past success rates. He explained that caribou are very habitat-dependent, and the populations can fluctuate for reasons other than hunting; a bad winter that naturally thins the herd will affect the hunt later.

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REPRESENTATIVE GILLHAM referred to Commissioner Vincent-Lang's earlier note of deer migrating from Canada and asked whether someone can shoot one.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that the deer may be shot.

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REPRESENTATIVE CRONK referred to the emergency order for a "two caribou bag limit" and asked whether the decision for that order was sudden.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that after the survey there were more animals than expected in the Fortymile herd and many discussions on harvesting were had.

REPRESENTATIVE CRONK asked what the last survey number was.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that he was unsure what the number was, but herd size was still a concern.

[2:01:44 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG resumed presentation with slides 16 and 17, "Habitat Section," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Contribution to Department Mission

Protect Alaska's valuable fish and wildlife resources and their habitats as Alaska's population and economy continue to expand.

Core Services

— Review applications and issue permits for activities in fish-bearing waters and legislatively designated Special areas; provide expertise to protect important fish and wildlife habitat; monitor authorized projects and conduct compliance actions.

→ Manage Alaska's Special Areas in accordance with legislative guidelines; prepare and update management plans for these areas.

→ Review proposed timber harvest activities; conduct field inspections; work cooperatively with timber operators and other governmental agencies

→ Review development projects (e.g., oil and gas, hard rock mining, hydroelectric) authorized under other agencies' authorities.

→ Maintain and update the "Catalog of Waters Important for Spawning, Rearing, or Migration of Anadromous Fishes."

→ Conduct applied research to develop methods and means to minimize impacts of development projects on fish and wildlife resources

→ Seek opportunities to improve and protect habitat in cooperation with state and federal agencies, local governments, non-governmental organizations, and others.

#### FY 2020 Authorized Budget

- \$5.4 million
- 37 permanent full-time positions
- 3 permanent part-time & non-permanent positions

#### Major Activities

- Title 16 permitting
- Special Areas permitting
- Maintenance of the Anadromous Fish Catalog
- Involvement in the DNR Project Management and Permitting Program
- Pipeline Office Liaison

#### Structure

- Houses 3 management regions (Southeast, Southcentral, Interior) 1

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REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked about Department of Natural Resources' (DNR's) proposed regulations on water reservations as they would affect anadromous fish.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG explained that the concept of water reservations comes from the western U.S. where water is owned;

he explained that instream flow reservations are often based on model data, which could give an inaccurate average stream flow and affect the amount of water available to be drawn. He said that it's a better approach to decide on the instream flow requirement at the time of permitting any large project, using real data collection as a condition of the permit.

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked whether Commissioner Vincent-Lang was saying that the new regulations would affect ADF&G's ability to say that the volume of water in a body needs to remain the same.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied, "Let's say a mine was going to be developed. My staff would have to look at the water flow requirements of the context of what's occurring out there as part of out Title 16 permitting, and we would not issue a permit unless we were sure we were protecting the fish down below there." He added that a stream flow requirement may be established at that time.

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REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN remarked that the Anadromous Fish Catalog is not inclusive of all relevant streams and is continually updated, and she asked how many of Alaska's anadromous streams are catalogued.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that with the major river systems and tributaries already catalogued, he is confident that most of the water is catalogued and that it's likely missing headwaters in remote areas.

[2:08:54 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG tuned to the Subsistence Research Sections and emphasized that ADF&G takes the state subsistence program seriously and considers the program in decisions to open sport and personal use fisheries. He paraphrased slides 18 and 19, titled Subsistence Research Section," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Contribution to Department Mission

The mission of the Subsistence Section is to scientifically gather, quantify, evaluate, and report information about customary and traditional uses of Alaska's fish and wildlife resources. (AS 16.05.094)

## Core Services

→ Compile and analyze existing data; conduct research to gather information on the role of hunting and fishing by Alaskans for customary and traditional uses.

→ Disseminate current subsistence use information to the public; appropriate agencies and organizations; and fisheries and wildlife management divisions.

→ Assist the Board of Fisheries, the Board of Game, and the Joint Board of Fisheries and Game to evaluate customary and traditional uses of Alaska's fish and wildlife resources and amounts reasonably necessary for subsistence uses (ANS) of those resources.

→ Assist fisheries and wildlife managers in preparing management plans to ensure information on customary and traditional uses and fish and wildlife harvests is incorporated.

## FY 2020 Authorized Budget

- \$5.3 million
- 22 permanent full-time positions
- 27 permanent part-time & non-permanent positions

## Major Activities

- Collection of Subsistence Use Information
- Participation in the Board process

## Structure

- Houses 2 management regions (Southern and Northern)
- Houses statewide program manager position overseeing research activities

[2:11:06 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG summarized slides 20-21, "Board Support Section" which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

### Contribution to Department Mission

The Boards Support Section facilitates an effective board and public process for the state's fish and wildlife regulatory system.

#### Core Services

→ Ensure citizens participating in the fish and game regulatory process have clear and helpful information in advance to engage effectively.

→ Provide and support an environment for board members to make effective decisions.

#### FY 2020 Authorized Budget

- \$1.2 million
- 6 permanent full-time positions

#### Major Activities

→ Support of the Boards of Fisheries and Game process

#### Structure

→ Houses 2 executive director positions (Board of Game and Board of Fisheries)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG paraphrased slide 22, titled "Advisory Committee Support Section," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

#### Contribution to Department Mission

The Boards Support Section facilitates an effective board and public process for the state's fish and wildlife regulatory system.

#### Core Services

→ Ensure citizens participating in the fish and game regulatory process have clear and helpful information in advance to engage effectively.

→ Provide and support an environment for board members to make effective decisions.

#### FY 2020 Authorized Budget

- \$0.5 million
- 0 permanent full-time positions

[2:12:02 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG directed attention to slide 24, "Last Year," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The Department worked to ensure we had the necessary research and management infrastructure in place to safely conduct fisheries and hunts across Alaska

- Nearly all commercial fisheries were conducted, allowing commercial fishermen to fish their permits and thereby make a living and contribute to the state and local economies through collected fish taxes.
- Sport and personal use fisheries operated, allowing anglers an opportunity to fill their freezers, feed their families, and get outside.
- Subsistence fisheries and hunts occurred, allowing subsistence harvesters opportunities to feed their communities and pass on traditions.
- Hunts occurred throughout Alaska, giving Alaskans opportunities to fill their freezers and pass on traditions.
- Charter fishing and guided hunting operated, providing needed recreational opportunities and economic boosts to the state and local economies.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG expressed his appreciation to ADF&G staff for working hard throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and noted that almost all fisheries were open.

[2:13:17 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG presented slide 25, "Issues/Concerns," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Reduced marine survivals of salmon
- Federal intrusion into state management authority
- COVID-19 impacts e.g., lost license revenue to Fish and Game Fund
- Impacts associate with implementation of the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act
- Urban wildlife management issues
- Hatchery-wild stock interactions

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG explained that while freshwater habitats throughout the state have remained largely unaltered, marine survivals of salmon have been clearly reduced and he has assigned a fisheries scientist to take a lead role in finding out how the ocean is affecting the fish. He discussed the push by federal partners into the state's resource management and how national diversity guidelines don't necessarily apply to Alaska's resources. He discussed his concerns with impacts associated with the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal

Protection Act and opined that Alaska is being singled out for climate-related listings.

[2:19:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCKAY said that he understood that Bristol Bay has been having record salmon runs. He also asked about how engine size impacts salmon spawning on the Kenai River.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG explained that Bristol Bay is likely "masking" marine survival numbers due to its freshwater capacity, but other habitat areas are in complete collapse. He then said, as far as Cook Inlet is the "breadbasket" of Alaska and the most complex fishery managed by ADF&G, the department will consider all possibilities.

[2:22:39 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked a question related to the impacts of the pandemic on fisheries.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that with the delay of cruise ships, there may be fewer fishermen in Southeast Alaska, so ADF&G will be creative in how the sport fisheries are managed.

[2:23:48 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CRONK expressed his concern about the Yukon River salmon run.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that the Yukon is a transboundary river, so it's managed differently, and ADG&G has an obligation to pass a certain amount of fish across the border. There is extra funding from the federal government and ADF&G will be assessing the salmon's survival rate.

[2:27:26 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN said that in a typical year there would be 12 bears killed in the Haines area, but in 2020 the number was over 36 and the bears were causing an excess of damage. She asked what is being done about that problem.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that ADF&G missed the shift in attitude from tolerance to an issue of personal safety and is examining what happened in 2020 and whether there should have been more control of the situation.

CHAIR PATKOTAK spoke of his observations with what he characterized as "federal overreach" and said that he is looking forward to working with ADF&G.

[2:31:14 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG concluded his presentation with slide 26, "Legislative Bill Priorities," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Sport fish hatchery license surcharge (SB60/HB80)
- Saltwater guide licensing for saltwater logbook program (SB59/HB79)
- Intensive management surcharge sunset (SB22)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG described how hatcheries in Anchorage and Fairbanks were funded and how SB 60 and HB 80 are intended to fund the maintenance of those facilities as well as fulfill the commitment to produce chinook and coho in southeast Alaska. He then discussed SB 59 and HB 79, which would reinstate sportfishing guide licensing standards and address fees and logbook reporting requirements. He then described SB 22, which would repeal the termination date for the intensive management hunting license surcharge. Last, he discussed the capital budget for marine mammal research and Endangered Species Act issues.

[2:40:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked whether there were any concerns regarding verification of eligibility for the Senior Resident Permanent Identification Card.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that currently an enforcement officer may ask someone to prove residency, and that any action taken on lifetime licensing would be the call of a different department.

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked whether, from the perspective of ADF&G, possible abuses of the benefit are a problem.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that in terms of harvest, it's not a problem.

[2:42:33 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS commended ADF&G on the work done during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG noted that all offices were kept open.

[2:43:07 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GILLHAM asked whether HB 79 is for halibut counting.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that it's for halibut and salmon in southeast Alaska and that the state has treaty obligations for salmon.

REPRESENTATIVE GILLHAM said that all catches are written on the back of the fishing license, so he doesn't see the need for a logbook.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that currently one isn't required to report what's on the back of their fishing license; ADF&G is working on a new licensing program using a smartphone application. He said that the issue is regarding allocations set for the charter industry, which have no way of being reported except for in a logbook.

REPRESENTATIVE GILLHAM asked whether the electronic reporting system is in place.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that it's in the works.

[2:45:48 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE asked whether there are broad efforts to understand the changes that are coming as the result of climate change.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG explained that research efforts have recently become more focused on management-related activities, and questions of climate change are broader than ADF&G would be able to answer. He said that fisheries scientists are interacting with international boards and commissions, some staff members have been assigned to the cruises moving through the Arctic Ocean to collect samples, and overall the plan is to be engaged, watch carefully, and participate where possible. He remarked that it would be irresponsible to not consider the effects of climate change.

2:49:08 PM

CHAIR PATKOTAK summarized those questions requiring more discussion, thanked the commissioner, and asked whether Commissioner Vincent-Lang had any closing remarks.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG stressed that he has been trusted as the commissioner to manage ADF&G, but that the department belongs to the residents of Alaska.

2:50:52 PM

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Resources Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:51 p.m.