

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 4, 2022

4:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Peter Micciche, Vice Chair
Senator Gary Stevens
Senator Natasha von Imhof
Senator Jesse Kiehl

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Joshua Revak, Chair
Senator Click Bishop
Senator Scott Kawasaki

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 85

"An Act relating to forest land use plans; relating to forest land use plan appeals; relating to negotiated timber sales; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSSB 85(RES) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 223

"An Act relating to the confidentiality of certain state records relating to animals; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSSB 223(RES) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 148 AM

"An Act relating to the Alaska Coordinate System of 2022."

- MOVED HB 148 AM OUT OF COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 209(FIN)

"An Act relating to emergency firefighters; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSHB 209(FIN) OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 85

SHORT TITLE: FOREST LAND USE PLANS; TIMBER SALES

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

02/12/21 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/12/21 (S) RES, FIN
04/28/21 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
04/28/21 (S) -- MEETING CANCELED --
05/03/21 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
05/03/21 (S) Heard & Held
05/03/21 (S) MINUTE(RES)
01/26/22 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
01/26/22 (S) Heard & Held
01/26/22 (S) MINUTE(RES)
04/04/22 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 223

SHORT TITLE: CONFIDENTIALITY OF ANIMAL RECORDS

SPONSOR(s): MYERS

02/22/22 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/22/22 (S) RES
03/09/22 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/09/22 (S) Heard & Held
03/09/22 (S) MINUTE(RES)
04/04/22 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: HB 148

SHORT TITLE: ALASKA COORDINATE SYSTEM OF 2022

SPONSOR(s): SHAW

03/24/21 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/24/21 (H) STA, RES
04/17/21 (H) STA AT 3:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
04/17/21 (H) Heard & Held
04/17/21 (H) MINUTE(STA)
04/22/21 (H) STA AT 3:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
04/22/21 (H) Moved HB 148 Out of Committee
04/22/21 (H) MINUTE(STA)
04/26/21 (H) STA RPT 6DP
04/26/21 (H) DP: VANCE, CLAMAN, STORY, KAUFMAN,
TARR, KREISS-TOMKINS
05/05/21 (H) RES AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
05/05/21 (H) Moved HB 148 Out of Committee
05/05/21 (H) MINUTE(RES)
05/06/21 (H) RES RPT 4DP 1DNP 1NR 2AM
05/06/21 (H) DP: SCHRAGE, GILLHAM, CRONK, MCKAY

05/06/21 (H) DNP: RAUSCHER
 05/06/21 (H) NR: FIELDS
 05/06/21 (H) AM: HANNAN, PATKOTAK
 05/15/21 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)
 05/15/21 (H) VERSION: HB 148 AM
 05/17/21 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
 05/17/21 (S) STA, RES
 02/03/22 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
 02/03/22 (S) Heard & Held
 02/03/22 (S) MINUTE(STA)
 02/08/22 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
 02/08/22 (S) Scheduled but Not Heard
 02/15/22 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
 02/15/22 (S) Heard & Held
 02/15/22 (S) MINUTE(STA)
 02/17/22 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
 02/17/22 (S) Moved HB 148 am Out of Committee
 02/17/22 (S) MINUTE(STA)
 02/18/22 (S) STA RPT 3DP 2NR
 02/18/22 (S) DP: SHOWER, COSTELLO, HOLLAND
 02/18/22 (S) NR: REINBOLD, KAWASAKI
 03/30/22 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
 03/30/22 (S) <Bill Hearing Canceled>
 04/04/22 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: HB 209

SHORT TITLE: EMERGENCY FIREFIGHTERS

SPONSOR(s): CRONK

05/12/21 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
 05/12/21 (H) RES, FIN
 02/16/22 (H) RES AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
 02/16/22 (H) Heard & Held
 02/16/22 (H) MINUTE(RES)
 02/23/22 (H) RES AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
 02/23/22 (H) Moved HB 209 Out of Committee
 02/23/22 (H) MINUTE(RES)
 02/28/22 (H) RES RPT 6DP 3NR
 02/28/22 (H) DP: MCKAY, FIELDS, CRONK, RAUSCHER,
 GILLHAM, PATKOTAK
 02/28/22 (H) NR: HOPKINS, HANNAN, SCHRAGE
 03/09/22 (H) FIN AT 9:00 AM ADAMS 519
 03/09/22 (H) Moved CSHB 209(FIN) Out of Committee
 03/09/22 (H) MINUTE(FIN)
 03/14/22 (H) FIN RPT CS(FIN) NEW TITLE 5DP 2NR
 03/14/22 (H) DP: ORTIZ, EDGMON, LEBON, JOHNSON,
 MERRICK

03/14/22	(H)	NR: WOOL, JOSEPHSON
03/22/22	(H)	TRANSMITTED TO (S)
03/22/22	(H)	VERSION: CSHB 209(FIN)
03/23/22	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/23/22	(S)	RES
03/30/22	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/30/22	(S)	<Bill Hearing Canceled>
04/04/22	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

HELGE ENG, Director
 Division of Forestry
 Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
 Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a summary of the major elements of SB 85.

INTIMAYO HARBISON, Staff
 Senator Josh Revak
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an explanation of Amendment 2 for SB 85.

SENATOR ROBERT MEYERS
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 223.

MICHAELLA ANDERSON, Staff
 Senator Robert Meyers
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the explanation of changes from version A to version B for SB 223.

REECE WILLIAMS, Staff
 Representative Laddie Shaw
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HB 148 am on behalf of the sponsor.

JAKE MAXWELL, PLS, Executive Member
 Alaska Society of Professional Land Surveyors
 Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 148.

KELSEY DAVIDSON, President
Alaska Professional Design Council (APDC)
Eagle River, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 148.

REPRESENTATIVE MIKE CRONK
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HB 209.

NORM MACDONALD, Chief of Fire and Aviation
Division of Forestry
Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
Palmer, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation in support of HB 209.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[4:00:21 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR PETER MICCICHE called the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators von Imhof, Kiehl, Stevens, and Vice Chair Micciche.

SB 85-FOREST LAND USE PLANS; TIMBER SALES

[4:01:28 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 85 "An Act relating to forest land use plans; relating to forest land use plan appeals; relating to negotiated timber sales; and providing for an effective date."

He stated that this was the second hearing this session and the intent was to hear a refresher from the department, answer any questions, consider amendments, and look to the will of the committee.

[4:01:57 PM](#)

HELGE ENG, Director, Division of Forestry, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Anchorage, Alaska, stated that the motivation for SB 85 is to support a viable timber industry in the state by increasing the availability of timber from state lands and making the timber sale process more flexible.

MR. ENG stated that SB 85 has two major elements. The first, which is in Section 4, is to provide contractual certainty to

timber operators by prohibiting administrative appeals once a forest land use plan (FLUP) has been approved. An appeal at that point in the process can be disastrous to a small logging company. The four opportunities for appeal during the process remain and the public and agencies could still provide input after the plan is approved. It's just that the appeal option would be eliminated after the FLUP is approved.

[4:05:40 PM](#)

MR. ENG stated that the second element of SB 85 is to allow export of timber harvested in a negotiated sale. The export of timber harvested in a competitive sale is already allowed. He reminded the committee that the two types of timber sales are competitive and negotiated. In a competitive sale the timber is sold in either an open or sealed bid process to the highest bidder. In a negotiated sale, the division chooses the purchaser based on the highest bid and the number of local jobs the sale provides. He said the fact that Southeast Alaska timber operators typically are unable to outbid out-of-state operators in a competitive sale emphasizes the importance of providing a consistent negotiated timber sale process.

MR. ENG stated that SB 85 will amend the negotiated timber sale statutes to allow the local industry to sell the timber it harvests as export, as needed. The current supply of timber is constantly changing and there is more young growth, which is less marketable in Alaska. Furthermore, the demand for species such as hemlock is primarily overseas or the Pacific Northwest.

MR. ENG summarized that SB 85 changes the timber sale statutes by eliminating administrative appeals once the forest land use plan (FLUP) has been approved and the timber sold, and it allows exports of timber harvested in a negotiated sale.

[4:08:48 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked how the division makes the decision about whether a timber sale will be competitive or negotiated.

MR. ENG answered the division considers the number of bidders, the type of timber sale, and the need for timber sales by various timber operators to remain in business. Section 2 outlines the six criteria the commissioner will consider in addition to the considerations of local economic stability and the best interest of the Alaska timber industry.

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE noted that there were amendments for the committee to consider.

4:11:00 PM

SENATOR KIEHL moved Amendment 1, work order 32-GS1607\A.1, on behalf of Senator Kawasaki.

32-GS1607\A.1
Bullard
2/2/22

AMENDMENT 1

OFFERED IN THE SENATE BY SENATOR KAWASAKI
TO: SB 85

Page 1, line 2, following "sales;":

Insert "relating to disposal procedures for selling timber;"

Page 7, following line 13:

Insert a new bill section to read:

"*Sec. 6. AS 38.05.115 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

(d) In making the best interest finding required by AS 38.05.035(e) for a disposal of timber under AS 38.05.110 - 38.05.123, the commissioner shall consider, in addition to other factors, whether the bidder or buyer, to the maximum extent permitted by law, commits to

(1) hire qualified residents from throughout the state;

(2) contract with businesses located in the state;

(3) establish hiring facilities or use existing hiring facilities in the state; and

(4) use, as far as is practicable, the job centers and associated services operated by the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and an Internet-based labor exchange system operated by the state."

Renumber the following bill sections accordingly.

SENATOR MICCICHE objected for purposes of discussion.

SENATOR KIEHL explained that Amendment 1 would require additional factors to be considered in a best interest finding (BIF) in sales that are subject to a BIF. In addition to the existing requirements, the department would also consider whether the bidder or buyer, to the maximum extent permitted by law, commits to hire qualified residents throughout the state; to contract with Alaska businesses; to establish hiring facilities or use existing hiring facilities in the state; and to use, to the extent possible, job centers and other services the Department of Labor offers to promote Alaska hire.

[4:12:19 PM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE asked Mr. Eng how Amendment 1 would impact the timber sale process.

MR. ENG answered that the process could accommodate Amendment 1, but arguably it's not needed because the existing statute allows the commissioner to consider those elements. He also pointed out that the best interest finding is made to determine the type of sale to offer. No decision about the buyer has been made at that the BIF stage of the process, so it would be difficult to determine whether buyers in a competitive sale would meet that additional criteria.

[4:14:10 PM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE noted that the language in the amendment says the commissioner "shall consider" which does not constrain the department. He offered his reading that the amendment suggests that it is important to the extent possible to put Alaskans first in the best interest findings considerations. He asked Senator Kiehl if that was his understanding.

[4:14:38 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL responded that was well said. The amendment does not change the constitution to require Alaska hire for every contract for every sale. It simply urges a hard look at whether Alaska hire and the other Alaska-centered elements can be included in the sales to come.

[4:15:08 PM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE withdrew his objection to Amendment 1 to SB 85. Finding no further objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

[4:15:30 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved Amendment 2, work order 32-GS1607\A.2, on behalf of the committee.

AMENDMENT 2

OFFERED IN THE SENATE
TO: SB 85

Page 5, line 31, through page 6, line 10:
Delete all material.

Renumber the following bill sections accordingly.

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE objected for purposes of discussion.

[4:15:52 PM](#)

INTIMAYO HARBISON, Staff, Senator Josh Revak, Juneau, Alaska, explained that Amendment 2 removes Section 2 of the bill. He relayed his understanding that Section 2 was moot because DNR had amended the section of regulation that bill Section 2 addresses.

SENATOR VON IMHOF asked why Section 2 was being deleted when Mr. Eng just said it was that section that helped the division determine whether to hold a competitive or negotiated sale.

MR. HARBISON said that's correct, but his understanding was that the department changed the regulations so bill Section 2 was redundant and unnecessary.

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE asked Mr. Eng to comment on Mr. Harbison's statement.

MR. ENG explained that [AS 38.05.110] already allows the commissioner to consider any and all factors considered relevant in determining which type of sale to offer. The logic deleting Section 2 is that it is preferable to allow flexibility in the considerations, because prescriptive requirements may in fact serve as springboard for challenges to a timber sale.

[4:18:32 PM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE withdrew his objection; finding no further objection, Amendment 2 was adopted.

SENATOR KIEHL said he understands that the bill is moving from committee today and he believes that some parts of the bill are good. However, he wanted the record to reflect that he had significant concerns about delaying when a forest land use plan (FLUP) has to be in place relative to a sale and prohibiting an appeal once the FLUP is adopted and/or there is a sale. He acknowledged that hypothetically there were four opportunities to comment, but the land use plans for his area of the state haven't changed for 20 years, so the analysis isn't exactly sale-by-sale and that limits the public's ability to provide meaningful comments.

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE solicited a motion.

[4:20:31 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to report SB 85, work order 32-GS1607\A, as amended, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal notes.

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE found no objection, and CSSB 85(RES) was reported from the Senate Resources Standing Committee.

SB 223-CONFIDENTIALITY OF ANIMAL RECORDS

[4:21:05 PM](#)

SENATE BILL NO. 223 "An Act relating to the confidentiality of certain state records relating to animals; and providing for an effective date."

He noted that this was the second hearing and the committee had worked with the sponsor on a committee substitute (CS) to make minor improvements. He solicited a motion.

[4:21:16 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to adopt the CS for SB 223(RES), work order 32-LS1574\B, as the working document.

SENATOR MICCICHE objected for purposes of discussion.

[4:21:46 PM](#)

SENATOR ROBERT MEYERS, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 223, deferred to Ms. Anderson to present the explanation of changes from SB 223 version A to version B.

[4:22:00 PM](#)

MICHAELLA ANDERSON, Staff, Senator Robert Meyers, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, noted that the CS mirrors the House companion bill that is farther along in the process and has stakeholder support. She presented the following explanation of changes from SB 223 version A to version B for SB 223:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 223 - Version A to Version B
Explanation of Changes
CONFIDENTIALITY OF ANIMAL RECORDS

**"An Act relating to the confidentiality of certain
state records relating to animals; and providing for
an effective date."**

Section 1. AS 03.05.084 Confidentiality of certain information; exceptions

1. Removes notwithstanding AS 03.05.010(a)(2) reference regarding duties of commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources requirement to procure and preserve all information pertaining to developing the agricultural industry in the state and disseminate that information to the public.
2. Adds regional health corporations to other agencies that the Department of Environmental Conservation may disclose information to if the department determines there is a health or safety threat to animals or the public and disclosure of information is necessary to address the threat.
3. Clarifies that notwithstanding the confidentiality of certain information established in AS 03.05.084 (a), the Department of Environmental Conservation shall, publicly disclose "records" rather than "information."
4. Removes clause that if the Department of Environmental Conservation discloses information under AS 03.05.084 (b), the Department of Natural Resources shall disclose the information to the public due to redundancy in both departments disclosing information.
5. Adds business in regard to prevention of publicly disclosed records identifying a particular animal, individual or business.

[4:23:51 PM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE removed his objection; finding no further objection, SB 223, version B, was adopted and before the committee.

[4:24:08 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL opined that the important distinction between these businesses versus others is that the records they keep are not only business records but also records about people's pets. It was a reason to pass the bill.

[4:24:46 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to report the CS for SB 223(RES), work order 32-LS1574\B, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal notes.

[4:25:03 PM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE found no objection, and CSSB 223(RES) was reported from the Senate Resources Standing Committee.

HB 148-ALASKA COORDINATE SYSTEM OF 2022

[4:25:19 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE announced the consideration of HOUSE BILL NO. 148 am "An Act relating to the Alaska Coordinate System of 2022."

[4:25:30 PM](#)

At ease.

[4:25:45 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE reconvened the meeting.

[4:25:52 PM](#)

REECE WILLIAMS, Staff, Representative Laddie Shaw, Juneau, Alaska, presented HB 148 am on behalf of the sponsor. The sponsor statement reads as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

HB 148 House Bill 148 revises Alaska Statute chapter 38.20, known as the Alaska Coordinate System, to reflect changes in the federal datum used as a base for the coordinate system and to allow for future updates.

The system is comprised of rectangular plane coordinates used to define accurate positions or locations of points on the surface of the earth.

Currently, forty-eight states have adopted state plane coordinate systems into their statutes. This bill revises the Alaska Coordination System as an ongoing modernization of the U.S National Spatial Reference System to reduce the distortions present in the current system. In addition to improved zone locations, that will cover population and resources areas, a new statewide zone will be created for Alaska. This will reduce the distortion of the projection currently in use and improve the display of statewide geographic data.

This is an important and practical step for Alaska to adapt to this coordination system. Alaska will have the advantage of improvements in the geodetic positioning, and with the new gravity-based elevation. This will dramatically improve the ability to measure elevations in Alaska. This modernization effort will benefit scientists, surveyors, design professionals, GIS specialists, and the geospatial community. The improved coordinate system minimizes linear distortions and is designed to include population centers and resource development.

I encourage your support in the passage of HB 148 as it is critical to Alaska maintaining accuracy to surveying and mapping.

MR. WILLIAMS informed the committee that the term "datum" is a tool to define the shape and size of the earth and a reference point various coordinate systems use in mapping. He said the most recent federal datums were the North American datum of 1983 and the North American vertical datum of 1988. He conveyed the NOAA website definition of datum as the starting point for giving directions. For example, if one were to give directions to their house, they would begin with a known starting point such as a cross street or an address.

[4:27:33 PM](#)

MR. WILLIAMS played a video from the NOAA website that provides more information and explains some of the technical terms associated with global navigation satellite systems.

[4:32:06 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE moved to invited testimony on HB 148.

[4:32:22 PM](#)

JAKE MAXWELL, PLS, Executive Member, Alaska Society of Professional Land Surveyors, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 148. He urged the committee to pass the bill so this updated coordinate system would be available to surveyors and other professionals.

SENATOR MICCICHE asked if the updated coordinate system had any practical application for landowners.

MR. MAXWELL replied that there would be no significant effect on landowners.

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE asked Ms. Gervelis to provide her testimony.

[4:33:33 PM](#)

GWEN GERVELIS, Chief Surveyor, Division of Mining, Land, and Water, Department of Natural Resources, Anchorage, Alaska, stated that she was available to answer technical questions related to HB 148. [There were none.]

[4:34:15 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE opened public testimony on HB 148.

[4:34:39 PM](#)

KELSEY DAVIDSON, President, Alaska Professional Design Council (APDC), Eagle River, Alaska, testified in support of HB 148. She stated that the Alaska Society of Professional Land Surveyors was an affiliate member of APDC and those professionals need the more modern and functional coordinate system in statute in order to utilize the system in their practice. She noted that a letter of support from APCD was in the bill packet. She urged the committee to pass the bill.

[4:35:41 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE closed public testimony on HB 148.

[4:35:54 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to report HB 148 am, work order 32-LS0407\A.A from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[4:36:09 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE found no objection, and HB 148 am was reported from the Senate Resources Standing Committee.

HB 209-EMERGENCY FIREFIGHTERS

[4:36:28 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE announced the consideration of CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 209(FIN) "An Act relating to emergency firefighters; and providing for an effective date."

[4:36:50 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MIKE CRONK, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of HB 209, read the following sponsor statement into the record:

HB 209 authorizes the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources to hire emergency firefighter personnel using general fund appropriations.

By amending AS 41.15.030 (b), allowing the use of general funds to pay EFF personnel, they would be able to perform nonemergency work, such hazardous fuels reduction, fuel break development, fire prevention, habitat restoration or improvement activities in fire-prone areas. In addition, this would provide economic opportunities for Alaskans and empower rural Alaskans, for the department to responsibly manage the state's natural resources, and to enhance public safety to protect and save human lives.

Such nonemergency work could reduce the likelihood, intensity, and damage of wildland fires near populated areas and could bring significant reductions in the state's costs to fight future fires. By employing EFF during non-emergency would provide training, fitness, and readiness for when a wildfire does occur. The number of EFF personnel that may be interested in applying for a permanent DNR job would increase, which would help with recruitment.

Based on the legislative history, amending AS 41.15.030(b)'s last sentence does not appear to yield and constitutional or legal problems. In 1996, the legislature added the last sentence to address concerns of conflict with the Alaska Personnel Act; specifically, that short term non-permanent employees would become full time employees. However, in 2000,

the legislature amended the APA to allow for long term nonpermanent employees. Due to that amendment, the apparent concerns expressed by the legislature in 1996 warranting the inclusion of the last sentence no longer exists.

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE turned to invited testimony on HB 209.

4:39:20 PM

NORM MACDONALD, Chief of Fire and Aviation, Division of Forestry, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Palmer, Alaska, testified by invitation in support of HB 209. He stated that this bill manifests Alaska's need to build firefighting capacity as the challenge of wildland fires increase. The bill will help the division fulfill its primary mission of protecting Alaskans from wildland fires and reducing the catastrophic impacts through hazardous fuels mitigations. HB 209 will also provide jobs and training for rural Alaskans throughout fire-prone areas of the state.

MR. MACDONALD agreed with the sponsor that removing the funding impediment in AS 41.15.030 would allow DNR to use already allocated general funds to pay emergency firefighters for non-emergency fire prevention work during periods of low fire activity. This will enable nonemergency fire prevention work, provide a training ground for EFF employees to learn valuable crossover firefighting skills, and provide consistent and desirable job opportunities for rural Alaskans. Leveraging this workforce could potentially save tens of millions of dollars in future fire suppression costs.

MR. MACDONALD highlighted that while this bill allows general funds to be used for EFF and nonemergency tasks, the division would only use funds that have already been appropriated for fuel reduction and prevention work, which is why the fiscal note is zero. He also noted that the division has and will continue to receive federal funds for fuels mitigation that will be used for fire suppression and fire prevention activities by EFF crews.

MR. MACDONALD emphasized that DOF currently does not have sufficient personnel to staff for both fire suppression and fuels reduction. The lack of consistent work for the EFF crews has resulted in a drastic decline in the number of EFF crews in the last 10 years and the division has had to import Lower 48 crews, which is expensive and makes a quick, aggressive initial

attack impossible. This increases the overall cost to respond to wildland fires.

MR. MACDONALD stated that HB 209 will help the division rebuild its EFF fire crews to create a self-sufficient Alaskan firefighting force, while reducing costs. The bill also dovetails with the division's request in the governor's budget to reinstate a wildland fire academy. The intent is to build back Alaska's wildland firefighting crews by training firefighters in rural communities. Providing secure employment strengthens local economies and enhances public safety.

[4:43:49 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked if the state loans its firefighters to Lower 48 states when the fire danger in Alaska is relatively low.

MR. MACDONALD confirmed that the division shares its resources with Lower 48 states when the fire season is over and the fire indices are low.

SENATOR STEVENS asked for confirmation that it doesn't create a conflict to loan crews.

MR. MACDONALD confirmed that it does not create a conflict. Life and safety are priorities so when Lower 48 states have fire seasons similar to the last several, the division will send support with every available resource, including EFF crews. That's been common practice for the last 40 years and will not stop.

[4:45:07 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE opened public testimony on HB 209; finding none, he closed public testimony.

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE found no further discussion and solicited a motion.

[4:45:43 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to report the CS for HB 209(FIN), work order 32-LS0929\B from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

VICE CHAIR MICCICHE found no objection, and CSHB 209(FIN) was reported from the Senate Resources Standing Committee.

[4:46:38 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Vice Chair Micciche adjourned the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting at 4:46 p.m.