

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
February 26, 2024
1:35 p.m.

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CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Johnson called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 1:35 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Bryce Edgmon, Co-Chair
Representative Neal Foster, Co-Chair
Representative DeLena Johnson, Co-Chair
Representative Julie Coulombe
Representative Mike Cronk
Representative Alyse Galvin
Representative Sara Hannan
Representative Andy Josephson
Representative Dan Ortiz
Representative Will Stapp
Representative Frank Tomaszewski

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

Doug Vincent-Lang, Commissioner, Department of Fish and Game; Bonnie Jensen, Administrative Services Director, Department of Fish and Game.

SUMMARY

HB 268 APPROP: OPERATING BUDGET; CAP; SUPP; AM

HB 268 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 270 APPROP: MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET

HB 270 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

OVERVIEW: FY 25 DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

Co-Chair Johnson reviewed the meeting agenda.

#hb268

#hb270

HOUSE BILL NO. 268

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and loan program expenses of state government and for certain programs; capitalizing funds; amending appropriations; making capital appropriations; making supplemental appropriations; making reappropriations; making appropriations under art. IX, sec. 17(c), Constitution of the State of Alaska, from the constitutional budget reserve fund; and providing for an effective date."

HOUSE BILL NO. 270

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and capital expenses of the state's integrated comprehensive mental health program; and providing for an effective date."

^OVERVIEW: FY 25 DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

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DOUG VINCENT-LANG, COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME, introduced a PowerPoint presentation titled "Alaska Department of Fish and Game: FY2025 Budget Overview," dated February 26, 2024 (copy on file). He began on slide 2 titled "Constitutional And Statutory Mandates:"

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.

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.

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

Commissioner Vincent-Lang pointed to the sustained yield principle that was included in the state constitution and noted that no other state adopted the principle in its constitution.

Co-Chair Johnson asked how the commissioner interpreted the constitutional mandates of the department. Commissioner Vincent-Lang replied believed that it was meant for the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) commissioner to manage for a yield that benefited Alaskans and the economy. He elaborated that the philosophy was permeated through all department divisions and all game and fish were managed to benefit Alaskans under the sustained yield principle.

Co-Chair Johnson provided a scenario where prices were down for fish, and wondered how he balanced market forces with sustainability over time.

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Commissioner Vincent-Lang replied that the department managed for a maximum sustainable yield level and often closed fisheries well before harvesting could affect viability. He emphasized that DFG would forego short term yield for long term opportunity. He expounded that Chinook salmon were depressed across the state, but it did not mean their viability was at risk. They were working to rebuild the stocks.

Commissioner Vincent-Lang discussed slide 3 titled "Core Services:"

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.

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Commissioner Vincent-Lang turned to slide 4 titled "Leadership." He listed the department's leadership team and their duties. He reported that DFG had a Habitat Section that dealt with Title 16 permitting. In addition, the Subsistence and Research Section helped the board make informed decisions on subsistence priorities.

Co-Chair Johnson appreciated the low turnover within the department's leadership.

Representative Cronk asked if there was a Division of Subsistence. Commissioner Vincent-Lang replied there was a section for Subsistence. He explained that 5 years prior, DFG cut the division directors for the Division of Subsistence and the Division of Habitat due to a \$200 thousand budget cut during a fiscal crisis. Both of the director positions were open, and the divisions were small therefore, he decided not to hire directors versus cutting existing division employees. Representative Cronk asked if it implied subsistence was not as important as other department responsibilities. He believed someone should be in the lead on subsistence due to the importance to Alaskans. Commissioner Vincent-Lang answered in the negative and added that statute directed that subsistence was a priority. He felt that Subsistence was elevated because he led the Subsistence Section.

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Representative Galvin relayed that she had heard from constituents about the lack of directors in the Subsistence and Habitat Sections. The individuals had a deep relationship to subsistence. She expressed her concern over the situation. Commissioner Vincent-Lang replied that the department did not disagree with its importance and assured her that subsistence remained a priority for the department.

Representative Hannan asked how many people worked in the Subsistence and Habitat Sections. Commissioner Vincent-Lang estimated that they were both in the 20s.

Representative Ortiz stated that the work done by DFG was particularly important to his district. He had also heard some concern about the subsistence issue from constituents. He asked how many people were currently dedicated to subsistence issues compared to five years ago. Commissioner Vincent-Lang replied that the number was about the same. He reminded the committee that Subsistence was not a management section, but a research section as defined in statute. The section undertook community surveys regarding meeting their subsistence needs, and the section was trying to fund the research activities through federal grants, therefore the Unrestricted General Fund (UGF) funding remained stable.

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Commissioner Vincent-Lang reviewed slide 5 titled "FY 25 Budget Highlights:"

The Department will continue to provide an excellent return on investment as we have in the past under the Governor's proposed budget.

ADFandG turns \$250 million-dollar investment, of which \$70 million is General Fund (GF), into a return of over \$14 billion dollars annually. No reduction in services as a result of the proposed budget. The proposed budget includes new funding for fisheries, wildlife, and resource projects. This includes funding for statehood defense, marine science and genetics, restoration of commercial fisheries research, and wildlife surveys and management.

Commissioner Vincent-Lang read from prepared remarks. He reiterated that the fish and wildlife resources were managed in an approach that provided substantial investment in the state and local economies that produced more jobs and economic value "than any other sector in the economy." He listed the benefits to DFG's management approach. He stressed that there were no reductions in services anticipated in the proposed budget that included new funding for fishery and wildlife research projects (highlighted in later slides). He noted that slides 6 and 7 highlighted DFG's return on investment.

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Commissioner Vincent-Lang moved to slides 6 and 7 both titled "Return on Investment."

Economic Value of Commercially Harvested Alaska Seafood

62,200 jobs supported, more than any other industry in Alaska

\$200.7* million in taxes, fees, and self-assessments contributed

\$7.0* billion in economic output

Alaska exports 2.2 billion pounds of seafood each year, returning over \$3.7* billion of new money into the U.S. economy

The Economic Value of Alaska's Seafood Industry, January 2022 - Study by McKinley Reach Group

Economic Value of Sport Fisheries

15,879 Jobs supported

\$373.9* million in taxes contributed

\$828.4* million in income provided

\$2.4* billion industry output

Economic Impacts and Contributions of Sportfishing in Alaska, 2007 - Professional Publication by Southwick Associates, Inc. in collaboration with ADFandG Return on Investment

* Dollars were adjusted to account for inflation Jan. 2024

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Slide 7: Return on Investment Continued...

Economic value of Wildlife
More than 27,000 Jobs supported
\$2.1* billion in labor income
\$5.2* billion spent by hunters and wildlife viewers
\$5.7* billion economic activity statewide

The Economic Importance of Alaska's Wildlife in 2011 - ADFandG contracted with ECONorthwest on a study to quantify the economic importance of Alaska's Wildlife

Economic Value of Subsistence
Replacement value of the wild food harvest of communities outside non-subsistence areas is estimated between \$215.9-\$431.8* million and \$288.3-\$576.6* million for all Alaska communities

Subsistence in Alaska: A Year 2017 Update - ADFandG Report

* Dollars were adjusted to account for inflation Jan. 2024

Commissioner Vincent-Lang briefly reviewed slide 8 titled "Budget Organizational Chart:"

Sport Fish
Sport Fisheries

Wildlife Conservation
Wildlife Conservation
Hunter Education Public Shooting Ranges

Statewide Support Services
Commissioner's Office
Administrative Services
Boards of Fisheries and Game
Advisory Committees
Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council
State Facilities Maintenance
Anchorage and Fairbanks Hatcheries

Southeast Hatcheries

Habitat

Subsistence Research and Monitoring

Commercial Fisheries

Southeast Region Fisheries Mgmt.

Central Region Fisheries Mgmt.

Arctic Yukon Kuskokwim Region Fisheries Mgmt.

Westward Region Fisheries Mgmt.

Statewide Region Fisheries Mgmt.

Commercial Fish Entry Commission (CFEC)

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Commissioner Vincent-Lang discussed slide 9 titled "FY 2025 Operating Budget Comparison." He indicated that the FY 25 budget was approximately \$250 million compared to \$200 million in FY 23 actuals and was 2 percent higher than the FY 24 management plan and a 4.4 percent increase in UGF. He listed \$68,385.9 UGF, \$12.820 DGF, \$76.906 Other \$90.166 Federal Funds.

Representative Cronk asked who decided on projects funded by the Pittman-Robertson Funds. Commissioner Vincent-Lang answered that the Division of Wildlife's leadership team made recommendation to the commissioner, and he ultimately decided in the funding. Representative Cronk stated that residents wanted to know what agreements were made regarding the Yukon River fish. The local residents felt left in the dark. Commissioner Vincent-Lang answered that there was a treaty involved with the Yukon Government. The department was the lead negotiating agency, and it was the Division of Fisheries and Oceans in Canada. He elaborated that the Canada's Chinook salmon stocks were at risk and severely depressed and they migrated through the United States. The Canadians were asking for some assurances from DFG about what it would do to help rebuild the stocks. Both sides wanted to avoid any critical habitat or endangered species designations. Therefore, both sides entered into an agreement regarding the number of fish that could pass into Canada while allowing US stocks that were meeting their escapement to still be fished. The department agreed to a pause on commercial, sport, and personal use fishing over the next seven years. He did not agree to limit fishing on stocks that were meeting escapement goals. However, DFG was

not going to put Chinook salmon stocks going into Canada at risk by allowing gillnet fishing for chum salmon and other gear types used to harvest chum. He added that there was a complete closure of commercial fishing on both sides because border passage goals were not reached. However, very limited cultural camps were allowed to remain open. The agreement also looked at things such as trawl bycatch and interception.

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Representative Cronk asked if fish wheels were safer than nets. Commissioner Vincent-Lang answered in the affirmative and indicated that they worked better in the upper river. He was considering the opportunity for very shallow gill nets use. He informed the committee that the outlook for summer chum was meeting escapement goals and to possibly have a fall chum fishery.

Co-Chair Johnson asked members to ask general questions.

Representative Ortiz followed up on Representative Cronk's question. He noted the commissioner would look at the bycatch issue as having an impact on stocks. He heard a lot about the impact of bycatch from constituents. He asked for details. Commissioner Vincent-Lang replied that the council established a Chinook bycatch limit based on projected abundance. Currently, 6,000 sub-adult Chinooks was the trawl bycatch limit. He stressed that the issues were complex because of trawlers catching Russian hatchery chum bycatch and he was proceeding with caution in order to limit salmon bycatch.

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Commissioner Vincent-Lang added that regarding intercepted fish, DFG successfully brought chum salmon bycatch down from a high of 1.2 million to 200 thousand.

Representative Hannan asked about Yukon Chinooks. She asked if the department had any ability to work to reopen a closed hatchery in Whitehorse. Commissioner Vincent-Lang answered that it was a mitigation hatchery and was still operational due to a dam across the river. He described the hatcheries methods and maintained that it was not an optimal design and was damaging the genetic integrity of the stocks. In addition, returns had been very low. He

informed the committee that Canada was interested in building another program to keep the genetic integrity preserved.

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Representative Tomaszewski read the following bullet point from slide 6 " Alaska exports 2.2 billion pounds of seafood each year, returning over \$3.7* billion of new money into the U.S. economy." He asked what amount the state received. Commissioner Vincent-Lang was unsure and would follow up.

Co-Chair Johnson pointed to slide 9 and wondered why the DGF had decreased in GY 25.

BONNIE JENSEN, ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME, replied that a future slide would show a fund swap in the Division of Commercial Fisheries (DCF).

Commissioner Vincent-Lang reviewed slide 10 titled "FY 2025 Expenditures/Allocations." He indicated that the chart showed the differences between FY 23 Actuals, FY 24 Management Plan, the FY 25 Governor's Amended request, and the FY 24 to FY 25 differences. Some of the differences reflected budgetary realignments and needs. He pointed to the significant amounts in the personal services line and services items. He moved to slide 11 titled "FY 2025 Fund Group Breakdown" and provided a breakdown of the budget by fund source. He reported that 36 percent of the budget was in federal funds, 33 percent in UGF and DGF, and 30 percent other funds.

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Commissioner Vincent-Lang addressed slide 12 titled "FY 2025 Fund Source Breakdown" that provided greater detail of the data on slide 10 and 11. He reviewed slide 13 titled "FY 2025 Division Breakdown." He pointed out that the Division of Commercial Fisheries was the largest division at \$86 million. The Division of Wildlife Conservation was the second largest division at \$70 million. The Division of Sport Fish was the third largest division at \$53 million followed by Statewide Support Services. The Habitat Section and Subsistence Section were the smallest sections.

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Representative Galvin cited the Differences column on slide 12 and observed that the receipt funds were lower. She wondered if it was because of current market difficulties.

Ms. Jensen replied that in the DCF there was one GF fund swap that was increased in prior years that will soon be depleted.

Representative Galvin referenced slide 13 and saw that the subsistence section was one of the smallest sections. She thought it appeared that subsistence may not be a high priority. Commissioner Vincent-Lang replied that it reflected the amount of money the department was spending on subsistence research to inform board decisions and did not include subsistence management or the research on fish and wildlife stocks. He furthered that a large amount of funding for subsistence was embedded into other portions of the pie chart.

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Commissioner Vincent-Lang turned to slide 14 titled "FY 2025 Budgeted Positions and History" that showed the PCN's (Position Control Number) decreased over the years with a recent increase over the prior two years. However, the department had grown, and he was asking for additional positions for the increased workload demands. The governor added some PCNs to help the department.

Representative Ortiz pointed to slide 13 and 14 and asked if there was a graph showing the resources allocated to DFG to meet its constitutional mandates while accounting for inflation. Commissioner Vincent-Lang asked if Representative Ortiz was interested in stock management assessment. Representative Ortiz answered in the negative and clarified that he was asking whether the department had the resources to fulfill the requirements for managing to the maximum sustained yield and if the department could do an even better job with more resources. Commissioner Vincent-Lang believed the governor's budget accurately reflected the right balance of funding to preserve scarce resources. He believed that it was the legislature's decision regarding funding levels for all departments. He felt that he was "doing a fairly good job." He shared that when he began the budget was \$195 million and grew to \$250 million. He along with the governor recognized the value of added resources for the department. He thought that the

lower PCN count was still troublesome but that the department was effectively meeting needs and carrying out its mission.

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Ms. Jensen discussed slide 15 titled "Position Vacancy History." She reminded the committee that roughly half of the workforce for Divisions of Commercial Fisheries, Wildlife, and Sport Fish and were permanent part-time seasonal employees due to field work. She read from prepared remarks. She delineated that 91 positions had been deleted in prior years, many of the positions had been vacant and an increase in positions was necessary to manage resources effectively. She noted that there was a slightly higher vacancy percentage due to the creation of new PCN's that take time to fill. The vacancy rate was expected to even out as positions were filled.

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Ms. Jensen addressed slide 16 titled "FY 2025 Operating Budget Change Highlights Commercial Fisheries:"

Southeast Region Fisheries Management Total Amount
Add Administrative Assistant 1 (11-#033) to Support
Southeast Region Fisheries Management
\$85.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund
Southeast Region Fisheries Management Inflation
\$50.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund

Add Authority for Commercial Fisheries Project
\$200.0 Other 1108 Stat Desig.

Central Region Fisheries Management
Central Region Fisheries Management Inflation
\$100.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund

AYK Region Fisheries Management
Add and Reclass Two Accounting Technicians (11-#038,
11-7019) to Support Arctic Yukon Kuskokwim Region
Fisheries Management \$90.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund
Arctic Yukon Kuskokwim Region Fisheries Management
Inflation \$75.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund

Ms. Jensen reported that the Southeast region requested the position due to the increased workload from the Salmon Treaty Project.

Commissioner Vincent-Lang interjected that there was an internal survey performed within the department that discovered the reasons employees were leaving was due to lack of safety training and increased administrative workloads for positions like biologists. He was attempting to address the issue by hiring more administrative staff.

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Ms. Jensen continued with slide 16 and discussed the increases due to inflation.

Commissioner Vincent-Lang added that the reality was that costs were increasing, and DFG would lose almost \$500,000 in management projects if inflationary costs were not addressed.

Representative Hannan deduced that if the inflationary increments were adopted, they would be embedded in the budget as contracts or projects etc. She asked if alternatively, the funding would be held in an inflation line in the budget.

Co-Chair Johnson interjected that she did not want to see an inflation line in the budget and thought it would be unusual. Representative Hannan asked how the funding would "disappear into the budget." Co-Chair Johnson was unsure and thought it would be fairly easy to figure out where it would appear in the budget.

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Representative Ortiz asked how increased costs were affecting the budget. He asked if there was an opportunity costs if the legislature did not increase the budget. Commissioner Vincent-Lang had asked all of the DFG directors what would happen if inflationary costs were not addressed. He received a list of projects.

Co-Chair Edgmon observed that inflation affected the various departments differently. He deduced that the affects did not mirror what would typically be associated with the technical definition of inflation and inflationary

costs varied within the state. He referenced slide 14 and mentioned that as tier I and II employees vacated their jobs it was still getting more expensive for the department to do its job. He voiced that experienced workers were exiting all departments. Commissioner Vincent-Lang responded that the department also had significant costs in performing field work and agreed that all across the board costs were increasing.

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Co-Chair Johnson directed the subcommittee to look at the additional costs of inflation.

Ms. Jensen continued reviewing budget highlights on slide 16. She turned to slide 17 titled "FY 2025 Operating Budget Change Highlights Commercial Fisheries:"

Westward Region Fisheries Management Total Amount
Add Authority for Commercial Fisheries Projects
\$100.0 Other 1108 Stat Desig
Westward Region Fisheries Management Inflation \$ 75.0
UGF 1004 Gen Fund

Statewide Fisheries Management
Maintain Pathology Laboratory Services
\$35.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund
Maintain Mark, Tag, and Age Laboratory Services
\$50.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund

Statewide Fisheries Management Inflation
\$50.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund
Add Authority for Commercial Fisheries Projects
\$100.0 Other 1108 Stat Designated program Receipts

Alleviate Shortfall in Commercial Crew Member License Receipts
\$783.5 UGF 1004 Gen Fund
\$716.5 DFG 1201 CFEC Rcpts
\$-1,500.0 DFG 1005 GF/Prgm

Ms. Jensen reviewed the highlights on the slide. She 7 referenced an earlier question by Co-Chair Johnson and pointed to the last item related to the change in GF Program Receipts. She delineated that the item reflected a request for a fund swap to decrease GF Program Receipts by \$1.5 million and increase UGF by \$783 thousand and DFG

Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) receipts by \$715 thousand.

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Commissioner Vincent-Lang added that an unsustainable draw had been made from crew member licenses in a prior year and would be drawn down to zero unless rectified.

Representative Hannan asked for clarification regarding the draw on the crew member license fund. Commissioner Vincent-Lang responded that the draw was unsustainable compared to the amount collected. He reminded the committee that he had cautioned that other funding sources would be necessary if they wanted to move forward. Representative Hannan asked if the state was in charge of what the crew member licenses were sold for and whether he thought that the price of the license should be adjusted. Commissioner Vincent-Lang answered that prices were set via statute.

Co-Chair Johnson asked if there was currently a bill establishing the fees. Commissioner Vincent-Lang answered it had been discussed for a long time but not acted on.

Co-Chair Edgmon interjected that the last bill passed, HB 137 [HB-137-Hunt/Fish/Trap:Fees;Licenses;Exemptions, Chapter 18 SLA 16, 06/13/2016] in 2016 was the most recent bill that impacted DFG. Commissioner Vincent-Lang recalled that the general fish tax and crew member tax had not increased.

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Ms. Jensen reviewed slide 18 titled FY 2025 Operating Budget Change Highlights Sport Fisheries and Hatcheries:"

Sport Fisheries Total Amount
Replace Unnecessary Capital Improvement Project
Receipts to Support Existing Programs and Cover
Inflationary Costs:
\$1,100.0 Other 1024 Fish/Game
(\$1,100.0) Other 1061 CIP Rcpts.

Anchorage and Fairbanks Hatcheries
Sport Fish Hatcheries Utility Increases
**Due to increased utility rates and usage in both
Anchorage and Fairbanks, costs increased nearly \$0.5M

between FY 2022 and FY 2023 (49.6% for the Anchorage hatchery and 75.3% for the Fairbanks hatchery)
\$350.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund

Ms. Jensen remarked that another reason for the fund swap in the first item was federal dollars were expected to decrease \$1 million in the next fiscal year.

Representative Stapp looked at utilization on slide 18. He asked if the hatchery in Fairbanks was utilizing more power or if the 75.3 percent increase reflected increases in utility costs. Commissioner Vincent-Lang replied that the department had cut back on production at the Fairbanks Hatchery a couple of years ago and had recently increased production, which was reflected in the increase.

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Ms. Jensen turned to slide 19 titled "FY 2025 Operating Budget Change Highlights Wildlife Conservation:"

Wildlife Conservation Total Amount
Add Two Natural Resource Specialists (11-#019, 11-#020) for Statehood Defense in Federal Subsistence Board Arena \$300.0 Other 1007 I/A Rcpts.

Maintain Endangered Species and Marine Mammals Programs \$1,302.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund

Restore Authority for Pittman Robertson (PR) Match
**Maintains One-Time Increment from FY 2024
\$5,001.0 Other 1024 Fish/Game

Representative Hannan asked what I/A Receipts (Inter Agency) were and about the two new statehood defense positions on slide 19. She asked for further descriptions of the positions. Commissioner Vincent-Lang responded that managing wildlife populations that crossed between federal and state lands was critical for providing for a sustained yield over time. The two positions would interact with the federal subsistence board on how the federal regulatory system worked and inform the federal board about the wildlife data compiled by the state in order to foster cooperation towards the goal of sustained yield of stocks.

Ms. Jensen added that IA stood for interagency receipts, which would be paid by the Department of Law (DOL) for the item on slide 19.

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Representative Josephson asked for an example of something the federal subsistence board was regulating that the state objected to. Commissioner Vincent-Lang replied that there had been a federal subsistence board proposal restricting deer hunting in Southeast to only federally qualified users. The specialist would share deer population and use figures to argue whether such a restriction was necessary. Representative Josephson assumed that the subsistence board had its own data and felt otherwise. He asked if that was the point of contention. Commissioner Vincent-Lang answered that in almost all of the cases the state was the primary manager of the resource and had all the data. The specialists would coordinate the information with the federal subsistence board, which allowed the DFG biologist to continue their work. He also exemplified proposed hunting restrictions on the Northwest Alaska Artic Caribou Herd.

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Co-Chair Edgmon asked what statehood defense meant. Commissioner Vincent-Lang responded it meant to him that he was defending the rights of Alaskan subsistence users to participate in harvests when there was a surplus. Co-Chair Edgmon stated that as far as he knew there was no definition for statehood defense in statute nor regulation. He characterized it as a "term of art" or catchall phrase and felt it had become a "trigger" term. He was concerned with hiring biologists versus attorneys for statehood defense. He thought it was beneficial for the legislature to know how the statehood defense money worked its way from one agency to another. Commissioner Vincent-Lang replied that he thought statehood defense was a continuum.

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Co-Chair Johnson referenced statehood defense on slide 19. She guessed that part of the funding was for gathering data that DOL needed to make its case. Commissioner Vincent-Lang responded in the affirmative. He provided some examples.

Co-Chair Edgmon stated that he was not trying to be contentious regarding the issue. He mentioned SB 92 (State Ownership Of Submerged Land) in the House Resources Committee that expanded the definition of submerged lands and thought it would meet opposition on the House Floor. Commissioner Vincent-Lang mentioned an issue of defending subsistence rights on the Kuskokwim River.

Ms. Jensen continued with the remaining items on slide 19.

Commissioner Vincent-Lang added that DFG received more Pittman-Robertson funds and felt positive about using Fish and Game Funds as a match to avoid reversion of Pittman-Robertson funding.

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Representative Hannan asked if Pittman-Robertson funds could be used for invasive species work for wildlife and fisheries. Commissioner Vincent-Lang answered in the affirmative for wildlife, but it was less clear for fisheries.

Representative Hannan shared she continually heard concerns that the state was not putting enough time and research in invasive species. She asked if addressing invasive species was included in the DFG budget in areas, she was not aware of. Commissioner Vincent-Lang replied that fortunately they were able to plug many of the holes with federal funds. He stated that more could be done. He referenced a hatchery surcharge bill from the previous year that did not pass. He commented that DFG was finding unique ways of tackling the issue.

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Representative Cronk referenced Pittman-Robertson Funds. He asked if the funds could be used to help purchase a shooting range. Commissioner Vincent-Lang answered in the affirmative and added that his approach was to work with any entity that wanted a shooting range and finance it, but not operate it. He did not want the department responsible for maintenance or operation of the facility. In response to a question by Representative Cronk he replied that it could be an outdoor or indoor range, but it had to be open to the public for public use.

Ms. Jensen turned to slide 20 titled FY 2025 Operating Budget Change Highlights Statewide Support Services:"

Administrative Services Total Amount
Soldotna Lease Adjustment \$100.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund

Add Part-Time Program Coordinator 2 (11-#026) for Safety Program \$326.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund
\$78.2 Other 1007 I/A Rcpts.

Add Three Information Technology Positions (11-#021, 11-#024, 11-#025) for Help Desk \$91.4 UGF 1004 Gen Fund \$289.6 Other 1007 I/A Rcpts.

Boards of Fisheries and Game Board Support Travel
\$ 15.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund

Ms. Jensen elaborated that the first item was for leasing a building owned by the University of Alaska to house DFG seasonal employees. The current lease was terminated due to poor conditions in the building. She discussed the need for safety programs due to the varied field work of the department as well as the need for additional Help Desk staff.

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Ms. Jensen highlighted slide 21 "FY 2025 Operating Budget Change Highlights State Subsistence Research:"

State Subsistence Research Total Amount
Pittman Robertson Increased Projects
\$100.0 Other 1061 CIP Rcpts.

State Subsistence Research Inflation (Governor Amend)
\$205.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund

Support for Additional State Subsistence Research Projects (Governor Amend) \$210.0 Other 1061 CIP Rcpts.

Ms. Jensen addressed slide 22 titled "FY2024 Operating Budget Supplemental Commercial Fisheries:"

Southeast Region Fisheries Management Total Amount Add Authority for Pacific Salmon Commission Northern Fund Projects \$300.0 Other 1108 Stat Desig.

Statewide Fisheries Management Maintain Pathology
Laboratory Services \$35.0 UGF 1004 Gen Fund

Align Authority for Commercial Fisheries Projects
\$100.0 Other 1108 Stat Desig.

Co-Chair Johnson asked for the total amount for supplemental items in the governor's amended budget. Ms. Jensen responded that it was only the items listed on slide 22 and 23.

Commissioner Vincent-Lang interjected that the department had a very modest supplemental request.

Presented slide 23 titled "FY2024 Operating Budget Supplemental State Subsistence Research:"

State Subsistence Research Total Amount
Support for Additional State Subsistence Research
Projects \$210.0 Other 1061 CIP Rcpts.

Moved to slide 24 titled "Issues/Concerns:"

Defending Against Federal Erosion of State Management
Authority

Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection
Act Challenges

Recruitment and Retention

Vessels and Aircraft Maintenance and Replacement

Maintaining Sustainable Fisheries and Opportunities

Bering Sea Crab Research Funding

Coastal Western Alaska Salmon Fisheries

Intercept and Bycatch

Federal Fisheries/Upper Cook Inlet Salmon Fishery

Implementation of the Pacific Salmon Treaty

Invasive Species

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Representative Josephson cited the Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act challenges on slide 24. He wondered whether the state ever concurred with a claim. Commissioner Vincent-Lang answered in the affirmative and indicated that the state agreed with the extremely low population of North Pacific Right Whales and would never question its listing as an endangered species. Representative Josephson asked what the state was doing to aid right whales. Commissioner Vincent-Lang answered that the department was trying to work with the National Marine Fisheries Service to get an accurate count of right whales' sightings in the waters off the South Aleutians and the Bering Strait in order to develop a reasonable and prudent management regime to prevent interactions. He discussed DFG's approach when dealing with endangered species listings using research and working with agencies to help them make reasonable and prudent decisions.

HB 268 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 270 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Johnson reviewed the schedule for the following day.

ADJOURNMENT

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The meeting was adjourned at 3:03 p.m.