

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
March 19, 2024  
9:07 a.m.

[9:07:16 AM](#)

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Olson called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 9:07 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Donny Olson, Co-Chair  
Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair  
Senator Click Bishop  
Senator Jesse Kiehl  
Senator Kelly Merrick  
Senator David Wilson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Lyman Hoffman, Co-Chair

ALSO PRESENT

Representative Tom McKay, Sponsor; Trevor Jepsen, Staff, Representative Tom McKay; Senator Scott Kawasaki, Sponsor; Riley von Borstel, Staff, Senator Scott Kawasaki; Angela LeFlamme, Legislative Liaison, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Randy Zarnke, President, Alaska Trappers Association; Dianna Leinberger, Natural Resource Manager, Division of Mining, Land, and Water, Department of Natural Resources; Tammie Perrault, Northwest Regional Liaison, Defense-State Liaison Office, U.S. Department of Defense; Lisa Slaba, Military Spouse and Project Manager, Young Professionals Council.

SUMMARY

SB 207      MILITARY AND VETERAN FAMILY HELP DESK

SB 207 was heard and HELD in Committee for further consideration.

HB 125 TRAPPING CABINS ON STATE LAND

HB 125 was heard and HELD in Committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Olson discussed the agenda.

#hb125

CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 125(RES)

"An Act relating to trapping cabins on state land; and relating to trapping cabin permit fees."

9:07:56 AM

Co-Chair Olson relayed that it was the first hearing for CSHB 125(RES).

9:08:23 AM

REPRESENTATIVE TOM MCKAY, SPONSOR, introduced himself and thanked the co-chairs for hearing the bill. He relayed that he was the chair of the House Resources Committee and the bill was sponsored by the committee. The legislation was a product of work with his office, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Alaska Trappers Association. He proposed that the bill would help trappers and help the trapping industry grow and be accessible to future generations.

Representative McKay recounted that the state had a rich history in trapping, and that for some, trapping had been a way of life for generations. He explained that trap lines that were long and desolate were hazardous unless there was shelter in the form of a small basic domicile known as a trapping cabin. He noted that it had been almost 40 years since the trapping cabin statutes had been change. The bill would update outdated statutes associated with receiving a trapping cabin construction permit, and incorporated permits for the use of existing trapping cabins on state lands. He cited that current statute did now allow for the department to issue permits for existing trapping cabins. The bill would close the gap so all permits would be issued under a single trapping cabin permit statute. The statute

would cover both the construction of a new cabin and the use of an existing cabin. He asserted that the bill would provide common sense reforms to the current trapping cabin permit statutes.

9:11:05 AM

AT EASE

9:22:48 AM

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Olson asked the bill was directed towards cabins that were built for trappers, or people other than trappers.

Representative McKay relayed that the cabins referenced were for all kinds of trapping, and were typically very remote. A person must establish having a trapline. He noted that the bill addressed existing cabins or cabins to be constructed.

Co-Chair Olson asked if there was a specificity to the types of traps used.

Representative McKay answered "no."

Co-Chair Olson asked who owned the cabins in question.

Representative McKay relayed that the trappers themselves would own the buildings.

Co-Chair Olson asked who paid for construction of the buildings.

Representative McKay answered that the trappers themselves paid for the construction.

Co-Chair Olson asked who owned the land.

Representative McKay answered that the state owned the land.

Co-Chair Olson asked if there was a lease hold on the lands.

Representative McKay relayed that there was a permit, which he thought would take the place of a lease.

[9:24:27 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman wondered about a revocation or termination of permits, and what assurances the state might have that a cabin site would be cleaned up and the cabin removed.

Representative McKay relayed that there was a possibility that if a permit was revoked, another individual could apply and be awarded a permit for the structure.

Co-Chair Stedman wondered what insurance the state (as landowner) would have that a site would be cleaned up and the cabin removed if there was a revocation of the permit. He thought the transfer mentioned by Representative McKay was another issue. He asked about the owner of the building and being forced to transfer ownership.

[9:25:36 AM](#)

TREVOR JEPSEN, STAFF, REPRESENTATIVE TOM MCKAY, thought the department could address the question about the end-of-life disposal of trapping cabins.

Co-Chair Olson considered the possibility of hazardous materials such as batteries being disposed of at the sites and wondered about liability.

Representative McKay deferred the question to DNR.

Mr. Jepsen discussed a presentation entitled "HB 125 - Trapping Cabin Construction Permit Reform," (copy on file). He spoke to slide 2, "Trapping Cabin Permit Process":

Trapping cabin permits currently issued under two statutes

AS 38.95.075 Permits for the Use of Trapping Cabins

AS 38.95.080 Trapping Cabin Construction Permits

Statutes create unnecessary confusion in permitting process and restricts DNR from permitting cabins under certain scenarios

Mr. Jepsen reiterated that trapping cabins were small basic domiciles along trap lines that were used for temporary shelter.

Mr. Jepsen reviewed slide 3, "AS 38.95.075 - Permits for the Use of Trapping Cabins":

- AS 38.95.075 states how the DNR issues permits for cabins that already exist
- Issue arises with cabins that have lapsed in ownership/use or have been abandoned
- DNR unable to issues new trapping cabin permits in these scenarios

Mr. Jepsen referenced slide 4, "AS 38.95.080 - Trapping Cabin Construction Permits":

- AS 38.95.080 authorizes the DNR issues permits for the construction of new trapping cabins
  1. The person must have an established trapline with proof of regular use;
  2. The person must have a trapline of sufficient length to justify the need for cabin construction
- 38.95.080 also outlines responsibilities of the department and additional requirements and restrictions for trapping cabin construction permits

Mr. Jepsen listed an active trapping license and pictures of furs, receipts, or tax returns as examples for established traplines with proof of regular use. He noted that "sufficient length" had been established on a case-by-case basis, and often related to a variety of factors including length of the trapline, weather, and geography.

Mr. Jepsen addressed slide 5, "HB 125 Highlights":

- HB 125 revises AS 38.95.080 (Trapping Cabin Construction Permits) to include all trapping cabin permit situations and repeals AS 38.95.075 (Permits for the Use of Trapping Cabins)
- Allows the DNR to permit existing cabins on state lands
- Updates application fee schedule and sets all related fees in statute
- Provides further clarity than current statute for issuing trapping cabin permits

- HB 125 was the result of the House Resources Committee working with DNR and the Alaska Trappers Association

[9:30:57 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman wanted to discuss non-exclusive use. He knew that Senator Bishop was a trapper. He pondered whether non-owners of cabins could use existing trappers cabins.

Representative McKay understood that a person could use a cabin if one was in fear for their health or safety and could seek shelter if one was in need of refuge.

Mr. Jepsen noted that the non-exclusive permits were for existing cabins that were not currently owned. He continued that DNR could issue multiple permits for existing cabins that were not owned. If a person was issued a building permit for a trapping cabin, a second permit could be issued for the cabin with the permission of the owner.

Co-Chair Olson asked if the permit would be for the use of the cabin rather than the construction.

Mr. Jepsen affirmed that if a person constructed and owned a cabin, DNR would have to seek permission to issue an additional user permit for the cabin.

Co-Chair Stedman thought the information was clear, and thought generally people did not have a problem giving use to facilities when people were in a position of need.

Senator Kiehl thought one underlying issue was that DNR had been looking at land leases for trapping cabins. He asked if the bill would prohibit DNR from seeking a land lease where there was a trapping cabin.

Representative McKay understood that all that was needed was a permit for the structure.

Mr. Jepsen relayed that the use of leases was not a concern of the bill, and that the primary point of the bill was to address existing cabins that DNR could not permit for use by Alaskans for trapping.

Senator Kiehl referenced FN2 from DNR, which referenced foregone revenue from cabin permits, but did not speak to

the potential loss from lease revenue. He considered that DNR could address whether it had been seeking leases, if the bill allowed it to continue, and what the revenue impact would be.

Co-Chair Olson asked if individuals were allowed to lock the cabins against those who might need access for emergency use. He asked if the cabins were normally locked.

Representative McKay answered affirmatively.

Co-Chair Olson asked how one could get a key to access a cabin in an emergency.

Representative McKay presumed a person would have to break the lock.

Co-Chair Olson wondered how a person could break a lock in adverse conditions.

Representative McKay thought the department might be able to address Co-Chair Olson's questions.

Co-Chair Stedman thought Co-Chair Olson had made a good point. He thought many cabins were not locked so that there was no reason to break a door or window.

Co-Chair Olson thought people or bears would access a building whether there was a lock or not.

[9:35:55 AM](#)

RANDY ZARNKE, PRESIDENT, ALASKA TRAPPERS ASSOCIATION (via teleconference), expressed his full support for the bill. He thought that the sponsor had done a good job in providing the background for the bill. He relayed that the current system DNR used to manage trapping cabin permits was developed in the 1980s, and was developed with the legislature, DNR, and the Alaska Trapper's Association. He recounted that there had been reports from members that they were unable to renew permits. It was found that there was a new interpretation within DNR related to the renewal of permits.

Mr. Zarnke continued that that association had attempted to resolve the issue without luck. Two years previously the association began collaborating with DNR. He pointed out

that some people had expressed concern that the permit procedure was made easier, there would be a proliferation of cabins. He contended that not every trapper needed a cabin and such an endeavor required a great deal of work. He estimated that there could be ten to twenty new applications in the first on to two years of implementation of the legislation. He expressed full support in the bill, and encouraged the committee to support the legislation.

Co-Chair Stedman was curious about the eventuality of DNR finding a "pirate cabin." He asked about DNR's reaction to a pirate cabin, compared to the federal government's reaction of burning the cabins down.

Mr. Zarnke referenced the Bureau of Land Management's history of destroying pirate cabins. He was not aware that DNR actively destroyed cabins. He relayed that part of the association's position on the issue was to seek individuals to take over the purview of cabins that were no longer in use. Additionally, the association was willing to send people on location for site clean-up if necessary.

[9:40:29 AM](#)

Co-Chair Olson relayed that before he was a legislator, he had considered the BLM's practice of destroying cabins to be abhorrent, particularly when the structures could be necessary in an emergency. He had taken great offense to the practice. He asked about the number of members in the association.

Mr. Zarnke noted that the total Alaska Trapper's Association membership was 1,200, 85 percent of which were in the state.

Co-Chair Olson asked if the members were qualified as outlined in the proposed legislation.

Mr. Zarnke relayed that the vast majority of the membership were active trappers. He noted that the association put out magazines and books, and some members belonged because they supported the trapping lifestyle.

Co-Chair Stedman was curious about the restrictions on using the cabins as a residence. He asked how the statute addressed the issue.

Mr. Zarnke deferred the question to the sponsor or DNR.

Mr. Jepsen relayed that statute barred the use of the cabins as a primary residence. He did not believe that DNR had a way to determine the status. He thought the department could provide more information.

[9:43:23 AM](#)

DIANNA LEINBERGER, NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGER, DIVISION OF MINING, LAND, AND WATER, DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES (via teleconference), explained that the proposed statute would primarily provide a way to authorize existing cabins after the original statute had become problematic over time. She noted that DNR could currently issue permits for new construction, but permit reissuance currently required that the applicant have been trapping since 1984.

Ms. Leinberger addressed removal of a cabin, and noted that there was a provision in the permit that stipulated that the permittee was responsible and "shall remove all improvements, personal property, and return the permitted area to clean and safe condition." In the event that the grantee failed to comply with the requirement, the person could be held liable for any and all costs incurred by the state to return the area to a clean and safe condition. If the cabin was abandoned, DNR could authorize a new trapper. She explained that most of the time, since the cabins were remote and along traplines, there was a new trapper that would seek authorization for the cabin. She relayed that there was not a significant issue of sites being left in poor condition.

Ms. Leinberger spoke to the issue of potential contamination of cabin sites, and relayed that the state would be the state would potentially be the responsible party since it was the underlying landowner and land manager. She noted that there was typically not a concern with contamination. She relayed that DNR did not often see the cabins used as a primary residence. She thought it would be difficult for DNR to enforce if a person was using a trapping cabin as a primary residence but would reach out to the individual. She mentioned concern that the cabins might be used for recreational purposes but emphasized that the cabins were trapping cabins mostly used for trapping purposes.

[9:46:54 AM](#)

Senator Kiehl referenced additional land use permits, and made note of several references in the backup related to trappers objecting to needing a land use permit in addition to a cabin permit. He asked if the bill effectively barred DNR from seeking a land permit in addition to a cabin permit.

Ms. Leinberger answered "no," and relayed that the purpose of the proposed statute was simply to allow DNR to issue permits for existing cabins. She continued that the department did not specifically issue leases for trapping cabins. While leases provided an interest in the land, it came with other requirements so permits had worked well for trapping cabins. She added that DNR issued permits for the use of state land. If a cabin were abandoned, it essentially would become the property of the state.

Senator Kiehl looked at page 4, line 20, which he thought prohibited a land use fee in addition to the trapping cabin permit. He wondered if an additional land use fee was standard for existing trapping cabins or not, and whether it was reflected in DNR's fiscal note.

Ms. Leinberger relayed that the provision was in statute due to a fee regulations that outlined fees for a variety of authorizations. There was concern in the trapping community that the fees were prohibited. The legislation would update the fee and ensured it was controlled by statute and not changed by fee regulations.

Senator Kiehl asked if DNR currently charge land use fees as a standard practice along with the trapping cabin.

Ms. Leinberger explained that there was one land use fee for the trapping cabin.

[9:50:11 AM](#)

Co-Chair Olson queried the length of the permit extension.

Ms. Leinberger answered that the permits were good for ten years.

Co-Chair Olson asked if there was a definition in place for abandoned cabins.

Ms. Leinberger relayed that DNR did not have a written definition for abandoned cabins in regulation. She explained that DNR would consider a cabin to be abandoned if it could not locate the owner.

Senator Wilson observed that the bill allowed for a person to have a 400 square foot cabin with a 90-foot garage. // He asked if there was a radius within which another permit holder could not build a cabin.

Ms. Leinberger stated that DNR typically used two miles as a boundary so that there was not multiple trapping cabins on the same trap line.

Senator Wilson asked if trappers were building cabins to be able to have ownership of trap lines without encroachment.

Ms. Leinberger relayed that the issue described by Senator Wilson had not come up.

[9:52:10 AM](#)

AT EASE

[9:52:40 AM](#)

RECONVENED

HB 125 was heard and HELD in Committee for further consideration.

#sb207

SENATE BILL NO. 207

"An Act creating the military and veteran family help desk in the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs; and providing for an effective date."

[9:53:00 AM](#)

Co-Chair Olson relayed that it was the first hearing for SB 207.

[9:53:31 AM](#)

SENATOR SCOTT KAWASAKI, SPONSOR, relayed that SB 207 would create a help desk for military service members, veterans, and families to learn more about the services Alaska had to

offer. He explained that transitioning to Alaska had challenges such as housing and education. He relayed that the bill would save military families time and reduce stress by streamlining service delivery. If passed, Alaska would be the third state to offer this service following Washington and Virginia. He spoke to the importance of easing the transition of military personnel to Alaska and increase retention rates. He commented that the military industry was a vital part of our state's economy.

Co-Chair Olson wondered how many other states had a help desk such as proposed in the bill.

Senator Kawasaki relayed that when the bill was drafted, there were two states that had recently passed a military help desk bill. Both states also had large active duty and veteran populations. He thought Alaska exceeded the two states in proportion of the population. He thought a number of other states were going in the same direction. He noted that the United States Department of Defense was in support of the concept.

Co-Chair Olson commented on the complexity of travel and child education, and thought a help desk would be beneficial.

[9:56:24 AM](#)

RILEY VON BORSTEL, STAFF, SENATOR SCOTT KAWASAKI, read from a prepared statement:

A key group that would benefit from this bill is the spouses of military members. Over fifty percent of military spouses participate in the labor market and about a third of military spouses work in occupations that require licenses. Occupational licensing varies state-by-state, and this legislation would create a one-stop shop to provide military spouses information in advance on how that licensing works in Alaska. Additionally, the desk would provide information regarding enrollment at the University of Alaska, childcare, education, shopping, and day-to-day life as an Alaskan.

In addition to the aid that this legislation provides to military spouses and dependents, the bill also aims to make it easier for our veterans and former military

members to return to Alaska should they choose to do so.

This bill has a fiscal note of \$94,500. Virginia and Washington, both of which have higher populations, have already shown this valuable service can be delivered with a single employee.

Senator Wilson asked if the department could fund a position in the budget without the need for legislation.

Senator Kawasaki relayed that there was a department representative present to answer questions.

Senator Wilson thought if it had worked well in other states, the legislature could just follow suit as a best practice.

Senator Kawasaki knew that the help desk position had required legislation in the state of Washington. He mentioned that he served on the Military Task Force for the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) had introduced a similar bill.

Co-Chair Olson noted that there was a representative from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs available to answer questions.

[9:59:45 AM](#)

ANGELA LEFLAMME, LEGISLATIVE LIAISON, DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS, explained that the legislation expanded the scope of what the department was currently doing. She explained that the Office of Veteran's Affairs was very small and had only five employees. She noted that taking on the additional responsibility as proposed would be most efficient to have an additional person to complete the expanded scope of work.

Senator Wilson understood the financial implications, but wondered if there needed to be a statute rather than just funding the department for the position.

Ms. LeFlamme could not speak to the intent of the bill sponsor, but knew that the proposed position expanded the scope of what DMVA was currently tasked to do. She thought the bill solidified the responsibility of the department

with regard to the position and what deliverables were in the legislation versus just helping when someone called.

Co-Chair Olson posed the question to the sponsor's staff.

Ms. von Borstel offered that just in many other instances, statutes could enforce accountability. In the case of the bill, the statute would enforce financial accountability. She thought by having the position in statute, it would show that the specific amount of money would be dedicated to the position within the department.

Ms. von Borstel spoke to a Sectional Analysis (copy on file):

Section 1

- Amends AS 44.35 to add Section .025; subsection (a) creates the help desk, subsection (b) outlines the duties of the help desk, and subsection (c) provides a definition of "family member" regarding who may access this service.

Section 2

- Provides an immediate effective date for changes proposed in this legislation.

[10:03:07 AM](#)

TAMMIE PERRAULT, NORTHWEST REGIONAL LIAISON, DEFENSE-STATE LIAISON OFFICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE (via teleconference), spoke in favor of the bill. She cited the over 20,000 active-duty military members and families stationed in the state. She relayed that the DOD supported the legislation, which had been successful in other states. She thought the small, proposed investment could make the difference between a military family member feeling like Alaska was a duty station versus feeling like it was a home. She reminded that with the state's large military population, it made a difference throughout the state.

[10:05:35 AM](#)

LISA SLABA, MILITARY SPOUSE AND PROJECT MANAGER, YOUNG PROFESSIONALS COUNCIL (via teleconference), spoke in support of the bill. She relayed that she was a military spouse currently stationed at Eielson Air Force Base in the Interior. She had been living in the state for almost three

years. She described struggles that came with relocating to the state, including finding information on schools, resources, health care, employment, and all of the needs involved in moving to a new place. She noted that military moved on average every two years, and that 21 percent of military spouses were unemployed. She thought the proposed position would allow for military spouses to become involved in conversations about moving to a new state.

Ms. von Borstel commented that the proposed help desk position would be a great amenity to military personnel living in the state.

SB 207 was heard and HELD in Committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Olson discussed the agenda for the following day.

#

ADJOURNMENT

10:09:26 AM

The meeting was adjourned at 10:09 a.m.