

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 10, 2023

3:30 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Click Bishop, Co-Chair  
Senator Cathy Giessel, Co-Chair  
Senator Bill Wielechowski, Vice Chair  
Senator Scott Kawasaki  
Senator James Kaufman  
Senator Forrest Dunbar  
Senator Matt Claman

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 10

"An Act providing for trapping licenses for active members of the Alaska National Guard and military reserves without charge; making sport fishing, hunting, and trapping permanent identification cards available to certain disabled veterans without charge; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED SB 10 OUT OF COMMITTEE

OVERVIEW: ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME (ADF&G)

- HEARD

OVERVIEW: DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 10

SHORT TITLE: HUNTING/TRAPPING/FISHING: DISABLED VETS

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) KIEHL

01/18/23 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/9/23  
01/18/23 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS

01/18/23 (S) RES  
01/27/23 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205  
01/27/23 (S) Heard & Held  
01/27/23 (S) MINUTE (RES)  
02/10/23 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

#### **WITNESS REGISTER**

MARK RICHARDS, Executive Director  
Resident Hunters of Alaska  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 10.

DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Commissioner  
Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an overview of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and added to the overview of the Division of Wildlife Conservation.

RYAN SCOTT, Assistant Director  
Division of Wildlife Conservation  
Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an overview of the Division of Wildlife Conservation.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CO-CHAIR CLICK BISHOP** called the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Wielechowski, Dunbar, Kaufman, Claman, Co-Chair Giessel, and Co-Chair Bishop. Senator Kawasaki arrived during the course of the meeting.

#### **SB 10-HUNTING/TRAPPING/FISHING: DISABLED VETS**

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**CO-CHAIR BISHOP** announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 10 "An Act providing for trapping licenses for active members of the Alaska National Guard and military reserves without charge; making sport fishing, hunting, and trapping permanent identification cards available to certain disabled veterans without charge; and providing for an effective date."

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SENATOR KIEHL, District B, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 10, introduced himself.

[3:32:02 PM](#)

CATHY SCHLINGHEYDE, Staff, Senator Jesse Kiehl, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, introduced herself.

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CO-CHAIR BISHOP stated that this was the second hearing and the intention was to hear public testimony and look to the will of the committee.

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CO-CHAIR BISHOP opened public testimony on SB 10.

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MARK RICHARDS, Executive Director, Resident Hunters of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska, stated that he was representing over 3,200 members throughout the state in support of SB 10. He described it as an oversight that trapping wasn't included in the original legislation that granted a free hunting and fishing permanent ID card to disabled veterans. He thanked Senator Kiehl for introducing the bill to rectify the oversight. He noted that the department previously indicated it did not believe this would result in the loss of any revenue. The fiscal note is zero.

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CO-CHAIR BISHOP found no one else who wished to comment, and he closed public testimony on SB 10.

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SENATOR GIESSEL moved to report SB 10, work order 33-LS0150\A, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

CO-CHAIR BISHOP found no objection and SB 10 was reported from the Senate Resources Standing Committee.

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At ease

#### **OVERVIEW OF THE ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**

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CO-CHAIR BISHOP announced an overview of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

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DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Juneau, Alaska, introduced himself.

[3:37:22 PM](#)

JOSEPH FELKL, Legislative Liaison, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Juneau, Alaska, introduced himself.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG stated that compared to other states, Alaska has a unique statutory and constitutional foundation for fish and game management. Art. VIII of the state constitution talks about natural resources and the sustained use principle. Title 16 defines the functions of the commissioner. It reads:

(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.

He said that is how the department provides for subsistence and commercial fishing. He read the department's mission statement:

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 reviewed the department's three core services, the first of which is management. The department manages fish and game resources, provides hunting, fishing, and trapping opportunities, and preserves the state's right to manage its resources. Management also includes conserving and improving habitat and access.

The department also has a program built around stock assessment & research. This is the foundation for how resources are managed and it includes the use of fish weirs, krill surveys, the fish ticket database, sonars, aerial surveys, intensive management assessments, and the genetics and pathology laboratories.

Customer Service & Public Involvement is the third core service. This is where improvements are made to information and education services and the processes of the boards of fish and game,

regulations, licensing and permitting. He noted that it is unique to Alaska, that any resident can submit a proposal on how they'd like to see fish and game resources managed. The department also has an entire section devoted to getting people involved in hunting and fishing.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG stated that slides 4-5 and outline the legislature's return on its investment in the department. He paraphrased the following:

#### **Return on Investment**

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game turns a \$240 million dollar investment (of which \$65 million is GF) into a return of over \$12.5 billion.

#### **Economic Value of Commercially Harvested Alaska Seafood (2019)**

- Directly employed 62,200 workers, more than any other industry in Alaska
  - Largest private sector employer in Alaska
- Contributed \$163.2 million in fish taxes, fees, and self-assessments which help fund state, local and federal government
- Alaska seafood contributed an annual average of \$5.7 billion in economic output to the Alaska economy
- Alaska exported 2.2 billion pounds of seafood each year, returning over \$3 billion in 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**

- Replacement value of the wild food harvest of communities outside non-subsistence areas is estimated between \$170-\$340 million and \$227-\$454 million for all Alaska communities (2017)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG opined that the legislature was getting more than a simple return on its investment in the department.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG displayed slide 7 and named and described the duties of each member of the department's leadership team. This team consists of the commissioner, two deputy commissioners, an administrative services director, a legislative liaison, a special assistant, one director each for commercial fisheries, sport fish, and wildlife conservation, and an executive director for each the Board of Game and the Board of Fisheries who also oversee the 70-80 advisory committees structured under these boards.

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CO-CHAIR BISHOP requested a map that shows the locations of the advisory committees.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG agreed to provide the information and noted there was a budget request to hold a joint board meeting to decide the structure of the advisory committees.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG finished the discussion of the leadership team with a description of the Habitat and Subsistence Research sections. He noted that both lead positions were vacant. He explained that he chose not to fill those director positions at a \$200,000 cost because the department would have had a commensurate cut to the permitting or subsistence research staff.

CO-CHAIR BISHOP commented that he'd talk to him about the subsistence director in Finance.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that the department was going to lose \$200,000 one way or the other and he thought it was better to keep permitting biologists and subsistence research staff as opposed to hiring a director who didn't do that work.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG continued to explain that the subsistence research section was defined in statute. It collects research data that informs the boards of fish and game about customary and traditional uses of fish and game and the amounts necessary for subsistence. They participate in the board process as decisions are made about commercial, sport, and other uses to determine the impact on customary and traditional practices.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG noted the two affiliate organizations housed within the department. One is the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) and the other is the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill (EVOS) Trustee Council.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG reviewed the department's FY2023 Authorized Budget. He paraphrased the following:

**FY2023 Authorized Budget**

- 230,865.3 million
- 819 permanent full-time positions
- 598 permanent part-time positions
- 5 non-permanent position

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG conveyed that about one-third of the budget comes from federal funds, about one-third is from undesignated general funds (UGF), and one-third comes from either designated general funds (DGF) or "other." He noted that most of the department's "other" funding was from the fish and game fund, which was created and protected in the constitution. It is funded through the sale of hunting and sport fish licenses and may only be used to benefit sport hunters and sport fishers. Those monies are used for federal matches.

By component, the Division of Commercial Fisheries is the largest, but the Division of Wildlife Conservation was catching up quickly. The Division of Sport Fisheries is third largest and is followed by Support Services. Subsistence and habitat are both relatively small.

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SENATOR CLAMAN asked whether the department was having trouble with recruitment and retention.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied the budget has grown but the number of PCNs has remained relatively stable, which is causing stress. Staff are being asked to do more work. The department hired a company to do a survey of workforce development issues and one thing that was clear is that the department will need more PCNs if the budget increases.

SENATOR CLAMAN asked if there were vacancies in current positions.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered yes and some of those vacant positions are difficult to fill at the salary that's offered. The department is looking at the things it can do to make certain positions more attractive including telework so people can live where housing is more affordable.

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SENATOR KAWASAKI joined the committee.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG displayed slide 8 and explained that the Office of the Commissioner provides policy and oversight. It has a budget of \$1.2 million and six permanent fulltime positions. The Office of the Commissioner directly participates in the Pacific Salmon Commission, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, the Board of Fisheries, the Board of Game, and it coordinates involvement in a range of other boards and commissions.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG discussed the Division of Commercial Fisheries and its contribution to the department mission as outlined on slides 9 and 10. The division manages subsistence, commercial, and a section of the personal use fisheries statewide by following the principles of sustained yield. The division ensures conservation is based on sound science and implements regulations to provide commercial fisheries statewide. The budget is \$82 million, half of which is UGF. He noted the increase in federal monies in the budget the last several years through the Pacific Salmon Treaty and other programs. The designated general funds in the budget are primarily from test fish receipts. The division is staffed with 301 permanent full-time positions and 387 permanent part-time positions.

The major fisheries the division manages are salmon, herring, shellfish, groundfish, dive fisheries, and personal use/subsistence fisheries. The division houses five management regions throughout the state. These are Southeast, Central, Westward, Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK), and Statewide. Two fisheries scientists are also housed in the division. One is for salmon research and the other is for groundfish and crab research. The genetics, pathology, and mark, tag, and age laboratories do ground-breaking research and stock assessments to inform fisheries management. Federal fisheries coordination staff and Pacific Salmon Treaty staff as well as the statewide aquaculture planning and permitting program are housed in the division.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG discussed the Division of Sport Fisheries and its contribution to the department mission as outlined on slides 11 and 12. The division manages sport and recreational fisheries. It has a fisheries research program with one scientist. The division oversees the two hatcheries in Fairbanks and Anchorage. He noted that 85 percent of these hatcheries were paid for with nonresident surcharge fees. The division also operates the fish habitat program that is tasked with restoration of habitats damaged due to urbanization. The division runs a communication and outreach program that informs the public about how and where to fish. The budget is about \$51 million, there are 177 permanent full-time positions, and 128 permanent part-time positions. Most of the money for this division is federal with match from fish and game bond funds.

The major fisheries in the Division of Sport Fish are salmon, most freshwater fisheries, groundfish, and personal use fisheries. The division primarily manages personal use fisheries for the Upper Cook Inlet and Copper River. The division houses management regions in Southeast, Southcentral, and the Interior; sport fish hatchery operations; one chief fisheries scientist; the department's Invasive Species Program; and the Sport Fish Access Program, both motorized and non-motorized. The division also houses the Dingell-Johnson Act program that requires 15-20 percent of the money collected go to providing increased access opportunities for fishers statewide.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG discussed the Division of Wildlife Conservation and its contribution to the department mission as outlined on slides 13 and 14. The core services are to maintain opportunities to hunt, trap, and view wildlife throughout the

state. The total budget is close to \$64 million and there are 231 permanent full-time positions and 50 permanent part-time positions. He noted that this division doesn't need a large seasonal workforce. The budget is primarily funded with federal dollars with department match and a small amount of UGF. The UGF is critical because it funds examination of species that may be listed under the Endangered Species Act. He cited an example of the petition to list bumblebees in Alaska. When the division looked into this, it found that the species was not in Alaska. This work, which was funded with UGF, kept that species from being listed in the state.

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CO-CHAIR BISHOP asked whether shooting ranges like the one in Fairbanks that offers youth activities would fall under the first bullet for core services.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered yes. He continued to explain that the Division of Wildlife Conservations' major activities are the management of hunting and trapping statewide, management of special areas as directed by the legislature, and participation in Board of Game processes. As currently structured, the division houses management regions in Southeast, Southcentral, Interior/Northeast Arctic, Central/Southwest, and Western/Northwest Arctic, and one chief wildlife scientist. To Co-Chair Bishop's question, he said the division houses the Shooting Range Program statewide and specifically mentioned the range in Juneau, the Rabbit Creek Range in Anchorage, and the indoor range in Fairbanks. The division also houses the ANILCA/State Defense Program, the Threatened, Endangered, and Diversity Program, and the Marine Mammal Program.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG turned his attention to the Habitat Section and its contribution to the department mission. Its major activities include Title 16 and special area permitting, the cataloging of waters important for spawning, rearing, and migration of anadromous fish, and having a liaison in the Pipeline Office. It is a \$6 million program with 37 full-time biologists primarily doing permitting, two permanent part-time positions, and one non-permanent position. This Section is primarily funded with UGF. It's responsible for getting projects in the water in a way that doesn't disrupt anadromous fish. These are the people who look at dams and hydroelectric facilities in anadromous waterways to ensure the fish aren't disrupted. This section also houses management regions in

Southeast, Southcentral, and the Interior as well as area offices in Palmer, Kenai, and Craig.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG turned his attention to the Subsistence Research Section. This body collects the information to inform the customary and traditional practices and the amounts that the state must protect under its constitutional priority for subsistence. It has a budget of \$6.1 million with [19] permanent full-time positions, 22 permanent part-time positions, and two non-permanent positions. This group reviews the different proposals and informs the boards of fish and game about the impact they will have on subsistence.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG turned his attention to the Boards Support Section. It has a \$1.2 million budget and six full-time positions. This group facilitates the board process and ensures the public process where people can get involved. He noted the difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic, and conveyed that while business was conducted, it wasn't sufficiently involving Alaskans in the regulatory process. In-person meetings are once again the norm. The major activities include seven to ten in-person, multi-day regulatory meetings each year with a very involved and open public process. Two administrative staff and two publication specialists support these meetings.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG relayed that the Advisory Committee Support Section has a budget of \$0.6 million [and five permanent part-time positions]. It is primarily funded with UGF money. This section ensures that citizens and communities participating in the fish and game regulatory process have information timely so they're able to engage effectively. The advisory committees (AC) are not department driven; they self-form and self-elect members into the structure. For every board meeting, the impacted ACs attend, testify, and help the board find solutions. He said it's a good process for the voice of Alaskans to be heard.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG reviewed the Administrative Services Section. It has a budget of \$14.7 million, 39 permanent full-time positions that deal with budget surpluses, information technology services, capital construction, maintenance, office space, and workforce development.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG displayed slides 23 and 24 that highlight some of what happened last year. He relayed the following:

- All the subsistence fisheries were conducted. Early in the pandemic the department made the choice that it would not shut its fisheries or hunting. It wasn't easy for staff to be in the field to manage the fisheries, but they did it. Communities stepped up and found ways for processors to operate. Post COVID, the subsistence, commercial, and sport fisheries and hunts are vibrant.

- In-person Board of Fish and the Board of Game meetings have resumed.

- Permit operations were timely.

- The department is actively involved in lawsuits defending the state's right to manage its own resources.

- The department is actively involved in Endangered Species Act (ESA) issues and takes it very seriously when the federal government decides preemption of state management is necessary. He cited the example of ringed seals being listed as threatened based on a climate model that talks about a potential impact 60-100 years in the future.

- The long awaited mobile application to improve services for hunting and fishing in Alaska went live. Regulations can be accessed on a cellphone in the field or on the water.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG spoke to the following issues and concerns the department faces:

**Federal intrusion into state management authority:** He urged the legislature to consider adding money to the budget to fight for the state's authority to manage its fish and game resources.

**Reduced marine survivals of salmon and crab resulting in restricted or closed fisheries:** He conveyed that the capital budget has a request to expand the Marine Sciences Program to look at what's happening in the changing open ocean and how that's affecting salmon.

**Intercept and Bycatch:** These are huge issues. The governor created the bycatch taskforce to look at the question and issue recommendations. The recommendations in that report are being used to inform priorities at the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council and the Board of Fish and to design research projects going forward. He noted that bycatch means catching a prohibited species such as in a trawl fishery.

CO-CHAIR BISHOP advised that the committee would receive a review of bycatch at some point.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG explained that intercept refers to intercepting important fish in a mixed-stock fishery. This is an issue when subsistence needs aren't met. For example, subsistence needs for chum salmon aren't being met in the AYK drainage and those fish are being intercepted in fisheries along the South Peninsula. The department needs to understand how to minimize that intercept so it doesn't impact subsistence users. The department has a research program that collects genetic information to better inform board decisions about intercept.

**Poor winter survival affecting big game populations:** Snow depth has a large effect on moose and sheep populations, and the department has found that climate change is making it more difficult to conduct population surveys and get accurate cow-bull ratios.

**Food Security:** This became an issue during the pandemic and the task force that was formed to look at this made it clear that many Alaskans depend highly on fish and game resources. The department is looking at ways to expand food security with wild animal populations to compensate for potential supply chain interruptions.

**Urban wildlife management issues:** This is a growing concern. This winter a polar bear killed a mother and child in New Wales, a muskox gored an individual in Nome, Haines has dealt with wildlife problems, and moose and bears are an issue in Anchorage. The department is trying to take a strategic approach to address wildlife in urban areas where public safety is a more important factor than hunting opportunities.

**Impacts from Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act:** The department is receiving more requests

to look at incidental take statements. Polar bears are an example. The US Fish and Wildlife Service changed its model from observed takes of bears to one based on modeled outputs of take. The department is analyzing the assumptions of that model to ensure they're valid.

**Non-finfish mariculture:** The department contributed \$25,000 to the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Fund and is excited about the economic opportunities this type of mariculture offers.

**Invasive species:** This is a growing issue. European green crab have arrived in Metlakatla and the department is working with the Metlakatla Indian Community to ensure they don't expand further. With global shipping it's not possible to prevent the arrival of invasive species, but the spread can be controlled.

**Recruitment and retention issues:** This is something all departments are facing and working with the governor's office to find creative ways to address. He noted that many technicians can earn more working at Burger King than doing field work for ADF&G.

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SENATOR DUNBAR mentioned work in Anchorage to control the sale and spread of mayday/European bird cherry trees. He asked, 1) if it was a regulatory or statutory issue that the state wasn't updating the list of invasive species quickly enough and 2) what the best way was for concerned communities to interact with the department.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that ADF&G deals with species affecting fish and game, DNR deals with invasive species through the agriculture program, and DOTPF does hydroseeding on road projects, hopefully with native seeds. He said it's a complex issue and the department supported the legislation last year to create an invasive species work group as a first step to identify the different regulatory authorities and try to develop a strategic approach to control invasive species.

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SENATOR KAWASAKI asked him to speak to the interplay between the number of positions in the research section, other divisions or sections, and the budget items for Yukon Kuskokwim salmon that were red-lined last year.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said the capital project he was aware of that was vetoed was to look in-season at bycatch in the Bering Sea trawl fishery. That study is premature until the department can identify the unique genetic markers to make it possible to determine the origin of chum salmon in Western Alaska between the Kuskokwim River, Bristol Bay, the Yukon River, and Norton Sound. It was just too early to spend that money on that project.

He continued to explain that all divisions have research components and the number of those positions is probably larger than the number in the management program. Research is feeding information to the managers to make decisions. He estimated that for commercial fisheries, somewhere between 50 and 60 percent of those staff positions were associated with research.

SENATOR KAWASAKI asked if the existing budget had funding for that research and if the information would be available before the end of session this year.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered that the trawl industry is managed by the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) and it is evaluating an opportunity to look at trawl bycatch uses for chum salmon. The council has convened a task force for this purpose composed of user groups involved in the trawl industry, the Community Development Quota (CDQ) program, and inriver users. They are currently defining what a problem statement and a range of solutions look like, including the potential for a chum salmon bycatch cap and measures the fleet can take to reduce bycatch of coastal Western Alaska chum salmon. That will be taken up for action at the April NPFMC meeting.

SENATOR KAWASAKI clarified that he was asking whether anybody in the state was currently doing the research to identify the unique genetic markers that would make it possible to distinguish the origin of chum salmon in Western Alaska between the Kuskokwim River, Bristol Bay, the Yukon River, and Norton Sound. He pointed out that the \$5 million that would have gone to that research could have been used over a series of years. He wanted assurance that this wasn't destined to another task force.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that the ADF&G genetics lab and the federal lab were trying to identify the stock origin of those coastal Western Alaska fish. For some reason, chum salmon seem to stray more and don't distinguish themselves like Chinook

salmon. The fall chum salmon run in the Yukon River is the only exception. It is possible to distinguish between Pacific Northwest hatchery chum salmon and Asian chum salmon in the trawl fishery, but the only thing that can be determined about the rest is that they're from coastal Western Alaska.

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SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked what could be done legislatively to address the crashes in both salmon runs and the Bristol Bay crab fishery

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG restated that the ocean is changing and certain species are better at adapting than others. Cod and pollack are doing fairly well in the warmer Bering Sea whereas crab and chum salmon are not doing so well. Sockeye are benefitting from warmer fresh water in lakes, but the fact that they're returning smaller in size indicates they're stressed in the ocean.

He said it's not clear what's happening in the ocean but the Pacific Salmon Treaty Northern Fund and the North Pacific Research Board will provide the first snapshot. The state donated \$1 million to the National Year of the Salmon initiative and the department put people on NOAA and Canadian vessels in the eastern and central Gulf of Alaska. They collected information on salmon distribution in the ocean, what they were eating, their general condition, and genetics to try to determine where stocks were in the ocean. This information is still being analyzed but information from that work should be available next year. New surveys are also being designed to replace the International Year of the Salmon 2019 initiative since most of those programs have ended.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said it's important to recognize that Alaska can't do this alone because it doesn't have the ships. Federal partners are interested in modeling and using drones, but the department is trying to convince them to keep their ships on the water so the department can collect data and sample fish to evaluate their condition and what they're eating.

SENATOR KAUFMAN asked if there was anything the legislature could do to help the department get what it needs.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said any support the legislature can provide to encourage NOAA to keep its vessels in Alaska doing fishery surveys would be helpful.

SENATOR KAUFMAN asked if there was anything else.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG suggested supporting the marine science program in the capital budget and providing critically needed funds for statehood defense.

#### OVERVIEW OF THE DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

[4:37:43 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP announced an overview of the Division of Wildlife Conservation.

[4:38:25 PM](#)

RYAN SCOTT, Assistant Director, Division of Wildlife Conservation, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Juneau, Alaska, began the overview of the Division of Wildlife Conservation by reviewing an outline of his talk.

MR. SCOTT stated that the graph on slide 2 is intended to demonstrate how important Pittman-Robertson Funds are for the division. He pointed out that in the last few years the apportionment to the state rose quickly. Currently, this represents about two-thirds of the division's budget. This funding is expected to decline, but it's not clear when this will start and what it will look like.

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SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether the state was doing everything possible to maximize the receipt of Pittman-Robertson Funds.

MR. SCOTT replied that the division was optimizing the receipt of those funds.

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MR. SCOTT displayed a chart of the FY09 through FY22 sales of resident and nonresident hunting and trapping licenses as well as nonresident big game locking tags. It clearly demonstrates that nonresident license and tag sales represent a huge contribution to the fish and game fund. The resident contribution has been stable over this timeframe with a small but noticeable increase during the pandemic. He directed attention to the CY2022 data points on the right side of the slide and noted that the big game locking tag sales reflect that big game hunting in Alaska is world-renowned. It read:

**Resident:** CY2022 ~62,000 Hunting, Trapping,  
Combination Licenses (\$2.8M)

**Nonresident:** CY 2022 ~18,000 Hunting, Combination  
Licenses (\$2.6M)

**Nonresident:** CY 2022 ~15,400 Big Game Locking Tags  
(\$8.8M)

MR. SCOTT displayed slide 4 and explained that last year the division received a CIP for statewide wildlife game surveys. The division is in the process of preparing the five-year federal grant. He discussed the following allocations:

**FY2023 State Wildlife Game Surveys CIP:**

- Obligating \$9.3 Million towards survey and inventory through regional grants
- Obligated \$1.5 Million towards photocensus equipment in support of surveys
- Obligating \$1.1M for data management in support of surveys
- Obligating \$2.5M for equipment in support of surveys
- Obligating \$1.6M for storage of survey aircraft in Nome or Kotzebue

He reported that several years ago the division was asked to compile a list of the surveys that would be completed on an annual basis or every two to three years. In the spring of 2022, 34 surveys were outstanding statewide and 13 of those were completed by that fall; 12 of the remaining surveys are within the survey window and expected to be completed; and 9 surveys from the list were not completed. The factors contributing to that include weather, biological factors, and pilot and aircraft availability.

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MR. SCOTT displayed a list of reports categorized as wildlife technical publications and wildlife external publications. He directed attention to the URL at the bottom of the slide for the full reports.

MR. SCOTT displayed slide 6 and stated that part of what the division does is intensive management. He said the next few slides lay out the statutes and regulations that guide the

division and provide information about when and why certain work is done.

[4:48:56 PM](#)

MR. SCOTT advanced to slide 7, Understanding Predator Management. He explained that it provides basic information about the use of an intensive management plan. He turned to slide 8 and relayed that it depicts the division's intensive management website. He directed attention to the table at the bottom that identifies the game units with predator control programs that are Active, Inactive, Expired, and Other. He noted there was a new control program for Unit 17 to help the Mulchatna caribou herd. He also anticipated looking at the 40-Mile caribou herd and the 40-Mile country for intensive management and expanded predator control. Through the Board of Game the division recently reauthorized five intensive management plans that will be used on an as-needed basis.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG added that the statute that guides intensive management includes developing the plan, presenting it to the Board of Game for approval, and implementing the plan following the strict standards that comply with the department's internal intensive management science plan. The Board of Game periodically reviews these science-based plans and reauthorizes them if they're working. He cited the example of the intensive management plan with predator control for the Mulchatna caribou herd that is infected with the disease called brucellosis. The population of caribou in the area is very low and the predator population is high. Predator control won't resolve the disease but it will reduce predation of the animals that survive brucellosis.

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MR. SCOTT directed attention to the table on slide 9 that provides a broad overview of the number of resident and nonresident hunts, the harvests, and the rates of success. He said the harvest numbers show that residents are taking more game than nonresidents. He noted that the data was aggregated and doesn't reflect the fact that harvest and success rates vary greatly by species, hunt, and location. He offered to follow up if there were hunt-specific questions. He also pointed out that the data near the bottom of the table for statewide antlerless moose hunts show that the lion's share of the hunts and harvest were by residents and that the success rates were very good. He stated that these hunts are used primarily to maintain moose populations to protect habitat, allow harvests along transportation corridors for public safety purposes, and to

provide more harvest opportunities for residents to get food. He noted that nonresidents may participate but only three people did and just one took an animal.

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MR. SCOTT directed attention to slides 10 and 11, Regional and Statewide Highlights. He made the following observations about a species or two per region.

**Region I Southeast:** Sitka black-tailed deer are the primary game species in this region and approximately 10,000 are harvested each year. The bag limits and season dates vary depending on the area. The populations are high and increasing in some areas, largely due to mild winters. The division recently worked through three federal subsistence board proposals for Sitka black-tail deer in Game Management Unit (GMU) 4 and none were adopted. They would have restricted access for non-federally qualified hunters even though deer populations are high.

**Region II Southcentral:** Dall sheep populations have declined 40-70 percent depending on the area. Snow depth is less a factor than rain layered between snowfalls that make it difficult for the animals to forage. Management continues to be full curl horn, ram only regulations, although some sheep hunts allow less than full curl. The department has launched multiple studies that focus on survival, growth, and health of seed populations statewide.

**Region III Interior and Northeast Arctic:** The information about Dall sheep in Region II is applicable to the Interior. Over the last several winters, about 20 percent of the moose population in the Fairbanks area and about 30 percent of the Delta bison have been lost. As a result, antlerless moose hunts in the Fairbanks area were not held this year and will not be held next year. Delta bison hunts were bull only, the hunt periods were reorganized, and the take per period was limited. Even so, about 61 bulls and 2 cows were taken. Interestingly, even with winter mortality, the population is within the best population objective. The concerns last year about bison on private property and grazing near the highway did not materialize this year. The department had received very few complaints.

CO-CHAIR BISHOP commented that he hadn't gotten any calls this year.

MR. SCOTT continued.

**Region IV Central and Southwest:** Both the Nelchina and Mulchatna caribou herds are in decline. As mentioned earlier, the Mulchatna herd is infected with brucellosis. Calf rates in both herds are very low and the number of cows delivering calves is also low. The Nelchina herd has declined about 40 percent the last several years and the calf numbers are low. Portions of GMU 13 are under intensive management and that's likely to be expanded. The Mulchatna population is about 12,000, which is a six percent decline from last year. Interestingly, of the two unique calving areas, the problems are centered on the western portion of Unit 17. The intensive management efforts will be focused in that area. An existing program is for wolves and that will be expanded to include bears this spring. The notion is to increase survival rates in the most vulnerable first week of life.

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**Region V Western and Northwest Arctic:** The Western Arctic caribou herd that is popular statewide, has declined to about 64,000 from 188,000 last year. Notably, adult survival in this herd is low so reproduction is lagging the other demographics of the herd. The rate of collared females that deliver calves is also low compared to expectations in an ungulate population. Work is underway to understand the reasons. Numerous Board of Game proposals are expected in coming weeks to limit harvest of this herd for all users. Restrictions are in place now and the federal subsistence board has closed areas to non-federally qualified hunters. Residents in the area are preparing to approach the Board to propose additional changes to ameliorate the situation.

**Statewide:** Hunting opportunities have been expanded to help people put food in their freezers and on the table. Surveillance of disease will continue, including for brucellosis in the Mulchatna caribou herd, highly pathogenic avian influenza, winter tick that is moving toward Alaska from Canada, and rabies.

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MR. SCOTT offered to answer questions.

CO-CHAIR BISHOP thanked him for the overview.

SENATOR KAWASAKI mentioned cultural permits for particular user groups and asked about the process for approval.

CO-CHAIR BISHOP mentioned potlatch permits.

MR. SCOTT replied there are a variety including potlatch and traditional funerary permits. He said those are primarily for feeding people and the department generally requests notification about when and where the cultural group wants to hunt so there can be a conversation about the hunting rules for the particular area. Cultural education permits require an application and are intended to allow the take of game animals to perpetuate a cultural tradition. The department requests a curriculum prior to those hunts and a report afterwards about such things as the number of participants and what the hide was used for. Moose, caribou, and deer are the primary species for these permits.

CO-CHAIR BISHOP thanked Commissioner Vincent-Lang and Mr. Scott for the presentations.

5:06:34 PM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Bishop adjourned the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting at 5:06 p.m.