

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE

February 16, 2024

3:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Scott Kawasaki

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW: DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE

- HEARD -

SENATE BILL NO. 168

"An Act relating to wrongfully seized game."

- BILL HEARING CANCELED -

SENATE BILL NO. 171

"An Act changing the residency requirements for sport fishing, hunting, and trapping privileges; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD -

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 171

SHORT TITLE: RESIDENCY REQ: HUNTING, TRAPPING, FISHING

SPONSOR(S): BJORKMAN

01/16/24	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/24
01/16/24	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/24	(S)	RES, FIN
02/16/24	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

JOHN BOYLE, Commissioner
Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview on the Division of Agriculture.

BRYAN SCORESBY, Director
Division of Agriculture
Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions about the Nenana-Totchaket Agricultural Project.

BRENT GOODRUM, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions about agricultural data.

SENATOR JESSE BJORKMAN, District D
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 171.

JOHN STURGEON, President
Alaska Chapter Safari Club International
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Invited testimony for SB 171.

TED SPRAKER, Chair
Alaska Board of Game
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Invited testimony for SB 171.

MIKE CRAWFORD, Chair
Kenai/Soldotna Fish and Game Advisory Committee
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Invited testimony for SB 171.

[3:30:44 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CATHY GIESSEL called the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Wielechowski (via teleconference), Kaufman, Dunbar, Claman, Co-Chair Bishop, and Co-Chair Giessel.

PRESENTATION: DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE

3:31:21 PM

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of an overview on the Division of Agriculture.

3:32:06 PM

JOHN BOYLE, Commissioner, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Anchorage, Alaska, mentioned that committee members had an opportunity to visit the Food and Farm Caucus and associated stakeholders to discuss agriculture in Alaska. Although agriculture is a small sector in the state's economy and sometimes gets overlooked, it is important for Alaskans and a vital function within DNR. He moved to slide 2 and presented photos of his family performing bee farming work to demonstrate the commonality of agricultural practices. He said the images symbolize who Alaskans were historically when the state produced over 50 percent of the food it consumed. Today, the production rate is in the single digits, However, he expressed his belief that the state has enormous potential. The agriculture industry comprises a wide spectrum of practices.

3:35:11 PM

COMMISSIONER BOYLE stated there are concerns everywhere in the country about the loss of agricultural land to development. Every year there are fewer acres for agricultural use as a result of the pressure of growing cities, expanding industries, and rising land values. However, Alaska is abundant with land that is available for agricultural purposes. Amongst most global jurisdictions, Alaska is in a great position to offer more opportunities to build and grow the agricultural industry.

3:36:08 PM

COMMISSIONER BOYLE moved to slide 3 and spoke to the two main agricultural goals in Alaska:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Goals

To grow agriculture in Alaska for:

- 1) Greater food security and independence for Alaskans, and
- 2) Jobs and value-chain benefits of a well-developed economic sector

COMMISSIONER BOYLE added that COVID-19 brought forth important lessons about the tenuousness of supply chains. He mentioned that during this time, the governor was contacted by the Port of Seattle-Tacoma regarding the potential need to shut down operations with the Canadian border, so access to Canada would have been temporarily restricted. He opined that Alaskans should be aware of their reliance on ports, roads, and constrained supply chains to bring food into the state, which create a vulnerability to pandemics, natural disasters, civil unrest, war, or other events that could impede reliable food delivery. He emphasized the importance of putting more land into the hands of existing or future farmers through projects like the Nenana-Totchaket Agricultural Project, as well as creating environments to lower costs.

[3:38:51 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BOYLE moved to slides 3 through 4 and spoke to agricultural data in Alaska. He stated there is no specific methodology or particular study that encapsulates the whole picture. However, data developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) includes Alaska cultural data every seven years. This list demonstrates that data:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Alaska Agricultural Data

- Federal government collects agricultural data nationwide - "Census of Agriculture"
- 2022 data released Feb. 13, 2024
- Voluntary survey
- Division will be comparing changes from last census (2017), evaluating new data
- Number of Alaska farms increased from 990 in 2017, to 1,173 in 2022
- Land in farms increased from 849,753 acres in 2017 to 869,852 in 2022
- Value of agricultural products sold increased from \$70.5 million in 2017 to \$90.9 million in 2022
 - Crops: \$29.6 million in 2017, \$39.7 million in 2022
 - Animal products: \$40.8 million in 2017, \$51.2 million in 2022

COMMISSIONER BOYLE said DNR recently received data for 2022 that included a voluntary survey from Alaskan farmers, which helps shape the state's worldview of agriculture. The study found that the response rates for this survey declined nationally from 72 to 61 percent in five years. DNR seeks to build out its datasets and better understand agriculture to develop a strategic map. Highlights include a market increase in farms and an increase in crops such as barley and dairy over the past few years. The data shows that economic demand for agricultural products and opportunities for Alaskan farmers are generally increasing. He advised the legislature to identify ways to foster growth in the sector.

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SENATOR CLAMAN asked if the \$90.9 million value accounts for the total quantity of imported products sold statewide given the majority come from outside of the state.

[3:43:17 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BOYLE deferred to Mr. Scoresby, the Director of Division of Agriculture, to respond to the question.

[3:45:00 PM](#)

BRYAN SCORESBY, Director, Division of Agriculture, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Palmer, Alaska, replied that \$90.9 million is the total volume of gross domestic agricultural product sold in-state, about \$40 million of that goes into the grocery market. He noted he would follow up in writing with additional detail.

[3:45:28 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL clarified that Senator Claman asked whether \$90.9 million compares the value of the lower 48 foods to products that are sold in Alaska.

[3:45:53 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN also inquired about other agricultural products such as livestock feed to understand food security in Alaska in totality.

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COMMISSIONER BOYLE replied he could follow up with specific data. He reiterated that Alaska produces less than ten percent of the food that the state consumes.

[3:47:17 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN recalled speaking with a restaurant owner who obtains pork from outside of the state because all the pork produced in Alaska is not enough to meet his customer's demands. He expressed the importance of local production but acknowledged it is a small percentage of the total in-state consumption.

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COMMISSIONER BOYLE moved to slide 6 and elaborated on data on Alaskan crops:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Alaska Crops

Crop type	Estimated acres
Grass hay	21,000
Barley	6,000
Oats	750
Wheat	350
Potatoes	150
Seed potatoes	35

COMMISSIONER BOYLE noted that vegetable crop data was not incorporated in this report. He stated the amount of summer sunlight makes crops sweeter. DNR averaged the estimated acres for oats and wheat over 11 years using Farm Service Agency data. It also estimated acreage for potatoes. There are additional non-hay acres that are not reflected on the list, so DNR estimates at least an additional eight thousand acres are used for foraging and to supply feed stocks in the state. He explained the multiple uses of certain crops to build value in the supply chain.

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SENATOR BISHOP asked why the available land acreage is not used in production.

[3:53:21 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BOYLE responded that the state has clearly developed several agricultural products over the years. He suggested that much of the underutilized agricultural land results from farmers who only grow enough product for what is guaranteed in sales. DNR wonders how to provide opportunities to farmers to ensure increased access to markets. Therefore, farmers would increase output to meet that demand.

[3:56:08 PM](#)

SENATOR BISHOP wondered what barriers exist to increasing crop production.

[3:57:12 PM](#)

MR. SCORESBY replied that there are several acres in between areas that are not currently in production. He stated only each landowner would know why their land is underutilized.

[3:57:38 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BOYLE moved to slide 7 and outlined the Nenana-Totchaket Agricultural Project:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Nenana-Totchaket Agricultural Project

140,000 acres of State land is being made available for agriculture over the coming decades

COMMISSIONER BOYLE added that this area was identified for agricultural development in the late 70s. He said it provides favorable access to key transportation routes and opportunities to move products to the market. A key bridge was built across the Nenana River, completed in 2020, plus a road that extends far out into the agricultural project. The first phase was made available for purchase in 2022 and DNR saw strong local and national interest in the 27 parcels offered, with the vast majority going to Alaskans.

[3:59:09 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BOYLE moved to slide 8 and elaborated on the Nenana-Totchaket Agricultural Project:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- First land sale in 2022 was highly successful, with 2,000 acres offered at sealed-bid auction and over the counter sales
- Saw strong local and national interest in the 27 parcels (24 were ultimately sold, mostly to Alaskans)
- Some farmers have already started clearing and planting their lots
- 2024 activity: reviewing terms, planning, continuing infrastructure and well drilling

COMMISSIONER BOYLE spoke to the first land sale of over one hundred acres, which in turn fostered the success of a sweet corn crop without other inputs. Climate change is causing longer crop seasons, so as Alaska warms and the growing season lengthens, the amount and types of crops grown will increase. Climate change therefore presents both challenges and opportunities. DNR delayed a subsequent sale this year to have time to strategically review land sales and agricultural uses.

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COMMISSIONER BOYLE stated his belief that the state has never proactively taken steps to enforce covenants. He said the state should ensure the proper steps are taken to make land available for farmers who are interested in agricultural uses. He opined that underutilized areas result from both a land supply issue and other factors. There's variability in environments and atmospheric patterns, so multiple factors should be considered to guarantee success before land is sold.

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SENATOR DUNBAR asked how maintenance is paid for on the long access road and whether the state or municipal government collect a property tax.

[4:05:20 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BOYLE replied with his understanding that there is no local taxation authority that collects a property tax in the Nenana-Totchaket area. He invited DNR's Deputy Commissioner to provide insight on maintenance agreements and obligations.

[4:05:57 PM](#)

BRENT GOODRUM, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Anchorage, Alaska, answered questions about the Nenana-Totchaket Agricultural Project. He said Ahtna, Inc., originally explored the Nenana-Totchaket area and established a pad for development activities. The Department of Transportation (DOT) reserved the first six or seven miles for road improvement work. DOT is also working to create the initial access road in Phase 1A of agricultural development. He offered to consult with the Department of Transportation (DOT) and report back to the committee with specific details.

[4:07:24 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL noted that Representative Himschoot is present.

[4:07:47 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BOYLE moved to slide 9 and spoke to 2023 initiatives:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Alaska Feed Grain Reserve Program
 - \$1 million investment, partnering with Alaska Farmers Cooperative in Delta Junction
- Access to markets; building bridges
- Plant Materials Center seed cleaning capacity, efficiency upgrades

COMMISSIONER BOYLE stated that an appropriate amount of staffing is important to support these projects. He expressed his belief that the congressional delegation does a fairly good job to bring agricultural dollars to Alaska even though compared to other states, Alaska receives less, on average. He said USDA has a substantial amount of funds that are available for farmers. Some programs including the Alaska Feed Grain Reserve program could provide more opportunities for barley and grain growers in Alaska, especially in Delta.

[4:09:15 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BOYLE moved to slide 10 and spoke to 2023 grant initiatives:

[Original punctuation provided.]

2023: Initiatives - Grants

- Micro-Grants for Food Security
 - Second launch this week
 - 915 recipients to date fed 42,500 people
- Local food purchase program
 - Farmers markets (and others) contracting with small and mid-sized farmers
 - Product distributed to under-served Alaska communities

COMMISSIONER BOYLE said there is a direct correlation between the dollars coming into the state and recipients who need grants. Federal micro-grants for food security top out at five thousand dollars per person and play an important role in ensuring food security for small farmers. These grants also support funding for greenhouses development, small-scale herding, livestock operations, and subsistence. DNR has roughly

\$2.2 million in grants this year and received dozens of applications. About 950 individuals were awarded, which in turn fed about 42,500 Alaskans.

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COMMISSIONER BOYLE conveyed that DNR's priority for these grant-administered programs is to consider rural areas, which face significant food insecurity. He stated that the Local Food Purchase Program has roughly \$1.5 million in funding and benefits both producers and clients. Funds are granted to the state and Tribal governments to purchase local food and support local or underserved producers. The program serves organizations such as food banks that reach underserved communities. He conveyed that DNR hopes these funds support the growth of food hubs, Tribal farming, and local farmers markets. A marked increase in farmer's markets has been seen. Markets enable urban Alaskans to take advantage of locally grown produce and Anchorage alone has several farmers markets throughout the municipality.

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COMMISSIONER BOYLE said the Division of Agriculture's seed cleaning capacity is essential, they are the only entity in the state providing this critical service. He stated that as farmers harvest crops, barley, or other seeds, they hope to retain a certain amount that could be planted in a subsequent year. However, undesirable plants or weeds can become intertwined and impact crop environments. Cleaning and processing seeds for farmers serves an important role for remediation and restoration work and DNR foresees an increase in these opportunities. When land is disturbed, it is important to attempt to restore it. He commented that natural seeds are costly and high in value.

[4:15:56 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BOYLE moved to slide 11 and spoke to strategic review methods:

[Original punctuation provided.]

2024: Year of Strategic Review

- Holistic look at Alaska agriculture
- Field visits
- Bringing Alaska agricultural policy leaders together
- Soliciting best-in-class expertise (Indiana, Utah, etc.)

- Pursuing strategic partnership with Purdue University Building collaborative relationships with Yukon and other provinces

COMMISSIONER BOYLE stated there is an opportunity to assess the status of agriculture in the state and consider policies. He stated he accompanied Director Scoresby to several farming regions across the state to meet with local farmers, including Alaska Dairy in Delta Junction. Efforts have been made over the past year to better understand what farmers need. He opined that bringing together various agricultural-related entities is a logical step to setting agricultural policy and building the agricultural community; each entity could focus on individual elements.

[4:20:35 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked if DNR would support the creation of a department of agriculture.

[4:21:00 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BOYLE conveyed that the governor's office is considering the option. He relayed that by creating a department, the overarching issue is elevated to the governor's level. He stated his belief that the desire to create a department centered on resourcing, adding more staff, and concentrating functions. The agricultural community has expressed interest in the development of a department. He shared his understanding that a department would entail a unique management philosophy.

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SENATOR DUNBAR asked for confirmation of his understanding that DNR has not taken a position and is currently reviewing the proposal with the governor.

[4:23:05 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BOYLE clarified that DNR is supportive of the idea but would like to think through the implications.

[4:23:18 PM](#)

SENATOR BISHOP said he understands farmers' desire for a one-stop-shop for business needs.

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COMMISSIONER BOYLE stated he has worked to solicit agricultural expertise. He said he traveled with the governor to meet with the Dean of Agriculture at Purdue University. UA has a working

relationship with the University of North Dakota (UND) and DNR is interested in building on university partnerships. Purdue University advises governments around the world, including Columbia, to help rebuild their agricultural systems. The university is interested in creating opportunities for its researchers and agronomists so they can come to Alaska to understand Northern agriculture. Conversely, it provides opportunities for Alaskan researchers to travel to Purdue. DNR seeks to foster those relationships and bring on strategic consulting from Purdue. In most other states, agriculture evolves naturally over time. Alaska has a unique opportunity to build the agricultural industry from the ground up through policy and the structuring of systems. DNR also seeks to build collaborative relationships with Northern sovereigns, which would be beneficial for research. He said he traveled with the governor to Yukon to discuss ways to expand agricultural opportunities in the North and leverage research.

[4:27:31 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BOYLE moved to slide 12 and listed goals for 2024:

[Original punctuation provided.]

2024 Goals

- Progress strategic review, collaborations with policy makers
- Dedicate resources where Alaska benefits most
- Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Grant
- Advance myriad opportunities: - Farmer Support Services program

COMMISSIONER BOYLE summarized that initiatives include getting resources into the hands of farmers, taking advantage of funding opportunities, and advancing programs to allow extension outreach.

[4:28:47 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BOYLE moved to slide 13 and explained challenges:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Challenges

- DNR
- Industry

- Market access
- High costs, high risk
- Infrastructure Labor
- Next generation Alaska farmers
- Research needs

COMMISSIONER BOYLE said many farmers have been farming in the state for decades but are nearing retirement. He suggested the state must consider ways to encourage youth to participate in the farming industry. There are potential tweaks to the CROP Act that would incentivize farmers to reduce risks through crop insurance or other avenues. Expanding opportunities and growing segments of the agricultural economy would help lower input costs for smaller farmers by making machinery or equipment less expensive and maintaining a larger supply stock. DNR will continue to work with agricultural partners in the state to identify those opportunities. He emphasized that research is one of the most critical needs for the state to reduce the burden on farmers. Much of that risk should be borne by the land grant university or the state to help identify the appropriate crops for development. He said he had the opportunity to see the University of Saskatchewan's experimental farm, which devotes a full suite of geneticists to develop new, adaptable crop strains that could survive in different climates and regions. Its geneticists worked to find the necessary genes to study radioactive material in wheat. This is important work and pays dividends to farmers. Once experimental farms demonstrate success, the benefits are disseminated to farmers and help grow communities. UA grew Camelina in conjunction with UND, but witnessed better crop success in Alaska. This seed oil could be used for multiple purposes and create opportunities for the state to produce biofuels. He expressed the value of ensuring UA is equipped with the necessary resources to conduct research.

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COMMISSIONER BOYLE expressed his appreciation for farmers and noted that farmers in Alaska have utilized the latest agricultural technologies, which reaffirms the state's capabilities of becoming food-secure.

[4:35:02 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL agreed that agriculture is important. She conveyed that a farmer in her district employs H-2A visa workers. With the mandatory increase in wages, he did not plant cucumbers last month knowing he could not make sales if he increased the cost to higher compensate workers. She said she

spoke with the governor, Senator Lisa Murkowski, and DNR to bring attention to this issue.

SB 171-RESIDENCY REQ: HUNTING, TRAPPING, FISHING

[4:36:36 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 171 "An Act changing the residency requirements for sport fishing, hunting, and trapping privileges; and providing for an effective date."

[4:36:49 PM](#)

SENATOR JESSE BJORKMAN, District D, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 171. He read the sponsor statement:

SB 171 Residency Req: Hunting, Trapping, Fishing

Ver. A Sponsor Statement

Senate Bill 171 Residency Req: Hunting, Trapping, Fishing aligns residency requirements for an individual to receive a resident hunting, trapping, or sport fishing license with the residency eligibility requirements to receive a Permanent Fund Dividend (AS 43.23). With the increased pressure on our limited fish and game resources, it is important to ensure that those who enjoy the increased bag and harvest limits associated with a resident license are, in fact, residents of the State of Alaska.

The current definition of residency is too broad and difficult to enforce. Currently, individuals can qualify for a resident license and be indefinitely absent so long as they meet the low threshold of intending to remain in Alaska, maintaining a domicile in Alaska, and not establishing residency elsewhere. Someone who is away from Alaska for most of the year can still qualify as a resident and have the same access to our finite fish and game resources as someone who lives in the state 12 months of the year.

Regrettably, some of Alaska's fish and game resources are not as robust as they once were. When there are fewer fish and game resources to go around it is that much more important to maintain sufficient resources for those who are full-time residents of the state and

reduced access for those who harvest fish and game in Alaska and then take the resource out of state. Allowing greater access to fish and game resources for year-round residents of Alaska will ensure that individuals and communities who depend most on the resource will have access.

SB 171 does not prohibit out-of-state hunters or fishermen from coming to Alaska to participate in the state's well-managed hunts and fisheries. Guided hunting and fishing industries are an important part of Alaska's economy. Under this legislation, visitors will still be able to obtain non-resident permits without additional restrictions. SB 171 ensures that those who qualify for a resident hunting, trapping, or sportfishing license are in fact residents of Alaska and are deserving of the increased bag and harvest limits that are the privilege of state residents.

[4:39:25 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP announced invited testimony.

[4:40:14 PM](#)

JOHN STURGEON, President, Alaska Chapter Safari Club International, Anchorage, Alaska, invited testimony for SB 171. He said the Alaska chapter is the largest among the Safari Club with over 1200 members. Last year, it won its fourth consecutive award. Alaska Chapter Safari Club supports SB 171, which would ensure only legitimate residents could obtain hunting and fishing licenses. By doing so, it would increase the number of non-residents hunting licenses, bring revenue into the state, and improve the management of fish and game.

[4:42:08 PM](#)

TED SPRAKER, representing self, Soldotna, Alaska, invited testimony for SB 171. He stated he was the former Chair for the Alaska Board of Game and as a wildlife biologist has spent over 50 years dealing with conservation and wildlife. He stated his belief that the state should establish a process to verify residency so residents can enjoy the benefits of the state. He compared the violation of residency requirements to speeding, wherein few people get caught. He stated he has seen at least six or eight large storage units that disappeared in the beginning of the summer and wondered if this was a result of non-residents leaving the state. Alaskan troopers have experienced difficulty proving residency for various reasons.

[4:45:09 PM](#)

MIKE CRAWFORD, Chair, Kenai/Soldotna Fish and Game Advisory Committee, Soldotna, Alaska, invited testimony for SB 171. He said he has been on the Kenai/Soldotna Advisory Committee for almost 20 years and has been active in the board process for Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG). He mentioned he spoke to several people about SB 171 and the only objections were regarding the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD). Some expressed that people who move out of state may take advantage of hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses. He suggested that Alaska should protect resources for its residents and tighten its rules.

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SENATOR DUNBAR noted the PFD currently allocates resources to identify non-legitimate applicants and asked whether the idea for SB 171 is to use PFD violations as evidence.

[4:49:08 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN replied that individuals could use evidence to prove they met PFD requirements. He stated when an animal is shot or hunted, troopers oftentimes review residency and dividend records. If residency is unproven, troopers conduct a deeper investigation, which is often complaint driven. He stated his belief that the residency standard is easier to enforce than the current domicile standard.

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SENATOR CLAMAN noted that constituents in his district may not qualify for the PFD or seek benefits. He asked if the same standards apply to meeting PFD requirements and obtaining a resident hunting license.

[4:51:11 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN replied that is correct.

[4:51:21 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP held SB 171 in committee.

[4:51:23 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Bishop adjourned the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting at 4:51 p.m.