

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE

March 1, 2024

3:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Click Bishop, Co-Chair
Senator Cathy Giessel, Co-Chair
Senator Bill Wielechowski, Vice Chair (via teleconference)
Senator Scott Kawasaki
Senator Forrest Dunbar
Senator Matt Claman

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator James Kaufman

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 199

"An Act relating to access roads; relating to state land; relating to contracts for the sale of state land; relating to the authority of the Department of Education and Early Development to dispose of state land; relating to the authority of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities to dispose of state land; relating to the authority of the Department of Natural Resources over certain state land; relating to the state land disposal income fund; relating to the sale and lease of state land; relating to covenants and restrictions on agricultural land; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 171

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

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 199

SHORT TITLE: STATE LAND: DISPOSAL/SALE/LEASE/RESTRICT

SPONSOR(s) : RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/22/24 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/24 (S) TRA, RES, FIN
02/13/24 (S) TRA AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
02/13/24 (S) Heard & Held
02/13/24 (S) MINUTE(TRA)
02/20/24 (S) TRA AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
02/20/24 (S) Moved CSSB 199(TRA) Out of Committee
02/20/24 (S) MINUTE(TRA)
02/21/24 (S) TRA RPT CS 1DP 4NR NEW TITLE
02/21/24 (S) DP: KAUFMAN
02/21/24 (S) NR: KIEHL, WILSON, MYERS, TOBIN
02/21/24 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
02/21/24 (S) Heard & Held
02/21/24 (S) MINUTE(RES)
03/01/24 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

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
02/16/24 (S) Heard & Held
02/16/24 (S) MINUTE(RES)
03/01/24 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

JOHN SONIN, representing self

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 199.

LEONARDO WASSILIE, representing self

Nenana, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 199.

MORGAN ALDRIDGE, representing self

Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 199.

KATIE ROOKS, Policy Analyst

Southeast Alaska Conservation Council

Prince of Wales, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 199.

THOMAS PEASE, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns about SB 199.

ADAM CUTHRIELL, representing self
Girdwood, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 199.

STACEE KLEINSMITH, representing self
Chugiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 171.

DAVID EGELSTON, representing self
Thorne Bay, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 171.

ELLEN HANNAN, representing self
Craig, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 171.

KEN VORISEK, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 171.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:31:07 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CLICK BISHOP called the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Wielechowski, Kawasaki, Dunbar, Co-Chair Bishop, and Co-Chair Giessel. Senator Claman arrived thereafter.

[3:32:15 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN joined the meeting.

SB 199-STATE LAND: DISPOSAL/SALE/LEASE/RESTRICT

[3:32:16 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 199 "An Act relating to access roads; relating to state land; relating to contracts for the sale of state land; relating to the authority of the Department of Education and Early Development to dispose of state land; relating to the authority of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities to dispose of state land; relating to the authority of the

Department of Natural Resources over certain state land; relating to the state land disposal income fund; relating to the sale and lease of state land; relating to covenants and restrictions on agricultural land; and providing for an effective date."

[3:32:19 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP opened public testimony on SB 199.

[3:33:03 PM](#)

JOHN SONIN, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 199. He said he represents civilized humanity and expressed his belief that in order to remain civil, people must have the ability to tend to themselves. People's wellbeing requires a stable system, which cannot adequately function under a capitalistic structure. Alaska, a place long known for its stability, is now facing instability due to the pursuit of profit through private control. The current system demands energy but fails to give back, ultimately destabilizing itself. He stated his belief that public lands are the last hope to slow down the system's breakdown as society ages, but the situation is worsening. He urged prioritizing preserving and conserving public lands, while resisting the push for privatization driven by capital interests. In essence, leasing or disposing of public lands is detrimental to the well-being and sanity of humanity.

[3:36:20 PM](#)

LEONARDO WASSILIE, representing self, Nenana, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 199. He expressed opposition to the utilization of public resources by private interests. The U.S. was founded on the principle of public land ownership. He highlighted the significance of land as a shared resource utilized by communities to contribute to local economies. Selling public lands to private parties goes against the intended purpose. He expressed hope that concerns regarding external control over significant state resources are acknowledged. This type of mechanism facilitates external control, leading to corporate dominance over public resources. He emphasized the importance of considering the impact of outside interests on local communities.

[3:39:00 PM](#)

MORGAN ALDRIDGE, representing self, Soldotna, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 199. She expressed concerns about the consequences of making public land available. She said the disposal of public lands may not align with the constitution and could compromise transparency.

3:39:54 PM

KATIE ROOKS, representing self, Prince of Wales, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 199. She said she has worked in every level of government and now works for a regional non-profit. She expressed concerns about SB 199, which she believes would expand government authority regarding the disposal of public lands by allowing two additional state departments, the Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Transportation (DOT), to directly sell or lease public lands to private entities for commercial development. Currently, these departments are limited to government-to-government transactions, but the bill would remove this requirement. SB 199 would also extend lease terms by ten years, potentially reducing monthly payment rates. This would favor industry at the expense of Alaska's interests, while the state should be recouping all it can from wealthy industrial owners and operators. The bill would also permit the sale of public land at 30 percent below fair market value under the guise of using best-interest findings. However, best-interest findings are already grossly misused in the state. She cited Prince of Wales as an example, which has demonstrated the misuse of best-interest findings through timber sale among other issues. The bill would expand the commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) authority to identify and reclassify public lands for sale to commercial developers. She argued that this undermines the public land and resource management process and prioritizes the interests of commercial buyers over Alaskans. Classifications like 'Wildlife Habitat' and 'recreational settlement' would lose their significance, as the state could alter public lands without considering public input or longstanding classifications.

3:42:05 PM

THOMAS PEASE, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified with concerns about SB 199. He expressed concerns about Section 3 under SB 199 and said the provision outlines how the DOT would dispose of land. He urged the committee to remove this section from the bill considering its potential for misuse of public resources. Section 3 grants unlimited authority to the Commissioner of DOT to dispose of public land if the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) does not act within 45 days, without spelling out a process or placing restrictions on the DOT commissioner. He emphasized that any responsible land disposal process should prioritize the highest and best use of the resource, requiring transparency, fairness, and competitiveness. However, Section 3 of SB 199 would grant sole authority to the

DOT commissioner, a political appointee, while excluding public involvement entirely. He noted the absence of maps or an inventory of DOT lands that are available to the public, which would be useful for understanding the potential impact of the legislation. He questioned the necessity of changing the current DOT land disposal process since the department is primarily intended for road development rather than land disposal, whereas DNR employs professional land managers. He concluded by urging the committee to omit Section 3 from SB 199.

[3:44:35 PM](#)

ADAM CUTHRIELL, representing self, Girdwood, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 199. He said SB 199 poses a risk to Alaska and its public lands. SB 199 would jeopardize significant economic revenue for the state, impacting activities including hunting, fishing, and tourism.

[3:45:42 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP closed public testimony.

CO-CHAIR BISHOP held SB 199 for future consideration.

SB 171-RESIDENCY REQ: HUNTING, TRAPPING, FISHING

[3:45:45 PM](#)

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

[3:45:55 PM](#)

CHAIR BISHOP opened public testimony on SB 171.

[3:46:30 PM](#)

STACEE KLEINSMITH, representing self, Chugiak, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 171. She expressed appreciation for collective knowledge, experience, and the ability to collaborate on issues. However, emphasized concerns about the way SB 171 was written. She said while she understands the legislative intent, there is an absence of quantifiable evidence regarding the harm it aims to address. As currently drafted, the bill's unintended consequences would personally affect her, as she would no longer qualify for the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD). She shared her family's health challenges, which required significant recovery time, but were not deemed excusable under the PFD criteria. SB 171 would classify her as a non-resident, leading to real and unintended consequences. She stated that others might also find

themselves in similarly unfortunate circumstances and urged the committee to put brakes on the progression of SB 171.

3:49:09 PM

DAVID EGELSTON, representing self, Thorne Bay, Alaska, testified in support of SB 171. He said he spent over thirty years in law enforcement, primarily enforcing state and federal laws and regulations surrounding fish, wildlife, and environmental statutes. He opined that fish and wildlife should be prioritized for feeding residents before they are shared with outsiders. Non-residents are allowed to partake and harvest resources, they should follow regulations, respect Alaska's ways when harvesting resources, and pay for the privilege as they do in other states. This bill would not change the residency status for current Alaskans, who can retire and temporarily leave the state but would remain residents as long as PFD requirements are met. He expressed concerns about vacationing residents potentially abusing the system and stealing resources. He highlighted examples including the potential for non-residents to falsify residency to obtain more salmon than legally allowed in the state. These individuals have an advantage in obtaining big game and often take advantage of systems harvesting those resources. The financial cost to Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) amounts to hundreds of thousands of dollars per year. SB 171 would impose no costs on the state but would bring in a significant amount of revenue for state resources. He suggested that residency requirements should be clear. While non-residents cannot be forced to act ethically, those who unethically navigate the system could be held responsible through legal action.

3:51:36 PM

ELLEN HANNAN, representing self, Craig, Alaska, testified in support of SB 171. She said she has been following the House version of SB 171 and noted that the Senate version includes provisions for permanent licensing. She referenced the potential savings outlined under SB 171, which would benefit the state by improving law enforcement capabilities and assisting new residents in obtaining federally qualified user status for subsistence benefits. Clarifying residency requirements through the PFD is long overdue.

3:52:48 PM

KEN VORISEK, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 171. He said residency in Alaska is clearly defined in statute, which requires one's intent to maintain residency in the state, to attempt to return, and to not claim

residency benefits in any other state. SB 171 recategorizes residency in a hierarchy format by placing additional terms on the state residency law and requires an individual to remain in the state for a certain amount of days before accessing fish and game resources. The bill only adds additional terms to bona fide residents like himself, whose retirement plans depend on the ability to access these resources. He noted that he spends time hunting in other states. SB 171 is a commercial grab on Alaska's resources and implies that residents do not have equal access. All residents should be treated equally as long as legal residency requirements are met. He raised concerns about the potential for enforcement challenges under SB 171, where individuals might qualify for the PFD but face obstacles in meeting hunting license prerequisites, or vice versa. He urged the committee to prevent this bill from progressing.

[3:56:27 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP closed public testimony.

CO-CHAIR BISHOP held SB 171 in committee.

[3:57:20 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Bishop adjourned the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting at 3:57 p.m.