

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

April 8, 2024

3:31 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. 164

"An Act making certain veterans eligible for a lifetime permit to access state park campsites and facilities without charge; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSSB 164 (RES) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 253

"An Act establishing a big game guide concession area permit program on land in the state; relating to the duties of the Big Game Commercial Services Board, the Board of Game, the Department of Fish and Game, and the Department of Natural Resources; requiring the Board of Game to establish an initial big game guide concession area; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

D

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 164

SHORT TITLE: STATE PARK PERMITS FOR DISABLED VETERANS

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(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  
03/11/24 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205  
03/11/24 (S) Heard & Held  
03/11/24 (S) MINUTE(RES)  
03/15/24 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205  
03/15/24 (S) Heard & Held  
03/15/24 (S) MINUTE(RES)  
04/08/24 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 253

SHORT TITLE: DNR BIG GAME HUNTING PRGRM/PILOT PROJECT  
SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) KAUFMAN

02/21/24 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
02/21/24 (S) RES, FIN  
04/03/24 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205  
04/03/24 (S) <Bill Hearing Canceled>  
04/08/24 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 248

SHORT TITLE: BIG GAME COMMERCIAL SERVICES BOARD  
SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) BJORKMAN

02/21/24 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
02/21/24 (S) RES, FIN  
04/08/24 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

**WITNESS REGISTER**

RICKY GEASE, Director

Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation

Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Invited testimony for SB 164.

EMMA TORKELSON, Staff

Senator James Kaufman

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the sectional analysis for SB 253.

SAM ROHER, President

Alaska Professional Hunters Association (APHA)

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented on SB 253.

JASON BUNCH, Chairman  
Big Game Commercial Services Board  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions related to SB 253.

RYAN SCOTT, Director  
Division of Wildlife Conservation  
Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions related to SB 253.

CHRISTY COLLES, Director  
Division of Mining, Land, and Water (DMLW)  
Department of Natural Resources (DNR)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions related to SB 253.

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

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Sponsor of SB 248.

Sylvan Robb, Director  
Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing  
Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development  
(DCCED)

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions related to SB 248.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:31:29 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 Dunbar, Kaufman, Claman, Wielechowski, Co-Chair Giessel, and Co-Chair Bishop. Senator Kawasaki arrived thereafter.

#### **SB 164-STATE PARK PERMITS FOR DISABLED VETERANS**

[3:32:47 PM](#)

**CO-CHAIR BISHOP** announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 164 "An Act making certain veterans eligible for a lifetime permit to access state park campsites and facilities without charge; and providing for an effective date."

He stated the committee received two amendments.

3:33:09 PM

CHAIR BISHOP solicited a motion.

3:33:12 PM

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI moved to adopt Amendment 1, work order 33-LS0985\S.8, to SB 164.

33-LS0985\S.8

Bullard

3/22/24

**AMENDMENT 1**

Page 1, line 2, following the first occurrence of "and":

Insert "the parking and restrooms of developed"

Page 1, lines 6 - 7: 4

Delete "developed campsite and facility"

Insert "developed facility parking and restroom and developed campsite"

Page 1, lines 8 - 9: 8

Delete "campsite and a developed facility with developed parking and rest rooms [CAMPSITE]"

Insert "campsite and the parking and restrooms of a developed facility"

Page 1, line 10:

Delete "A" 14

Insert "The department shall automatically renew a"

Page 1, line 11: 17 Delete "does not require renewal"

Insert "every five years upon receiving confirmation of the permit holder's 19 mailing address"

Page 1, line 12, following "or": 22

Insert "the parking or restrooms of a developed"

Page 2, line 5:

Delete "July 1, 2024"

Insert "January 1, 2025"

[3:33:13 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP objected for purposes of discussion.

[3:33:25 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI stated that Amendment 1 was developed in collaboration with DNR. The amendment introduces slight modifications to the bill.

[3:33:42 PM](#)

At ease

[3:34:21 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP reconvened the meeting; he announced invited testimony regarding Amendment 1 to SB 164.

[3:34:26 PM](#)

RICKY GEASE, Director, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Anchorage, Alaska, invited testimony for SB 164. He stated he was available for questions or background information as needed.

CO-CHAIR BISHOP asked if DNR worked with the bill sponsor on Amendment 1 to SB 164.

[3:34:42 PM](#)

MR. GEASE replied that is correct.

[3:34:45 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP asked if DNR supports Amendment 1.

MR. GEASE replied yes.

[3:34:49 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP removed his objection; found no further objection and Amendment 1 was adopted.

[3:35:03 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP solicited a motion.

[3:35:07 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN moved to adopt Amendment 2, work order 33-LS0985\S.7, to SB 164.

33-LS0985\S.7  
Bullard

**AMENDMENT 2**

Page 1, line 11, following "renewal.":

Insert "Upon request, the department shall provide the disabled veteran with up to three copies of the permit issued under this subsection for the veteran to use in a 3 vehicle used by the veteran."

[3:35:09 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP objected for purposes of discussion.

[3:35:21 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN spoke to Amendment 2. He explained that Amendment 2 aims to provide greater flexibility for disabled veterans with vehicle permits. The amendment acknowledges that while veterans may drive an RV to a campground, they might prefer to use a different vehicle, such as a car, for activities like hiking. The proposal would allow disabled veterans to have a permit sticker that can be used on more than one vehicle.

[3:35:50 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR raised concerns about potential misuse of permits intended for disabled veterans. He specifically highlighted the risk of permits being retained or misused after a vehicle is sold or transferred, as well as the possibility of unauthorized use by individuals outside the intended beneficiary group, such as family members. He asked for the sponsor's perspective on mitigating these risks and emphasized the importance of ensuring that benefits remain tightly controlled within the veterans' community.

[3:37:02 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN addressed the challenge of balancing the prevention of permit misuse or "leakage" with making the process straightforward for veterans. He questioned whether it is more important to prevent misuse, such as a nephew or someone other than the veteran using the permit, or to prioritize making it easy for veterans to access the permits they need. Amendment 2 leans toward prioritizing the veteran, allowing them to request permits for multiple vehicles. For instance, a veteran could request one permit for an RV and another for a car they use to access hiking areas. He emphasized preferring a system that accommodates veterans' needs over strict enforcement, acknowledging that perfect enforcement may not be achievable. He

suggested that it would be best to avoid situations where a veteran must transfer a single permit between vehicles, which could be inconvenient.

[3:38:10 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR expressed interest in hearing Co-Chair Giessel's opinion. He said he was considering a conceptual amendment to the amendment to change the number of permits from three to two. He noted that the example provided described two permits instead of three and suggested that two permits, being more than one, seemed like a logical compromise.

[3:38:28 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL said she wanted to build on what Senator Dunbar had already articulated, expressing the same concern about misuse. She questioned why the permit couldn't hang from a rearview mirror, like a handicap hanging permit, which can be moved from vehicle to vehicle. She suggested that the veteran could receive one portable permit.

[3:38:56 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said he thought DNR had been asked about this previously. It was mentioned that if a veteran needed an additional permit, one would be provided under current law. He was curious about this, and suggested Mr. Gease share the department's opinion.

CO-CHAIR BISHOP asked Mr. Gease if he could answer the question and address the suggested option of a hanging tag.

[3:39:29 PM](#)

MR. GEASE stated that if the legislature agrees, a hanging rearview mirror tag could be created to transfer between vehicles instead of a windshield decal. He suggested providing a day-use parking permit similar to an annual pass. He opined that issuing three decals creates unnecessary redundancy. He also recommended offering veterans one decal and one hanging tag.

CO-CHAIR BISHOP asked Senator Wielechowski to restate his question.

[3:41:11 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI recalled that Mr. Gease had testified that the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) currently works with individuals in similar situations without requiring additional language. He questioned whether Amendment 2 was necessary.

[3:41:29 PM](#)

MR. GEASE replied yes and said DNR understands the intent and importance of the program. He confirmed that if there were specific needs for a veteran, the department would work with them directly.

[3:41:44 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI stated that although the department does not appear opposed to Amendment 2, it seems unnecessary because the department is already assisting veterans who request an additional permit.

[3:41:52 PM](#)

MR. GEASE replied that said DNR currently provides those services to veterans. He stated his belief that with Amendment 1, DNR can accommodate veterans on a case-by-case as needed bases to receive permits for two vehicles.

[3:42:31 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN withdrew Amendment 2. He stated he agrees that a hanging permit is a better option and that DNR expressed its ability to handle the change.

[3:43:02 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP solicited a motion.

[3:43:07 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL moved to report SB 164, work order 33-LS0985\S, as amended, from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note(s).

[3:43:20 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP found no objection and CSSB 164(RES) was reported from the Senate Resources Standing Committee.

[3:43:29 PM](#)

At ease

[3:45:45 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI joined the meeting.

**SB 253-DNR BIG GAME HUNTING PRGRM/PILOT PROJECT**

[3:45:58 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 253 "An Act establishing a big game guide concession area permit program

on land in the state; relating to the duties of the Big Game Commercial Services Board, the Board of Game, the Department of Fish and Game, and the Department of Natural Resources; requiring the Board of Game to establish an initial big game guide concession area; and providing for an effective date."

[3:47:00 PM](#)

SENATOR KAUFMAN speaking as sponsor of SB 253 paraphrased the following sponsor statement. He added that until 1988 commercial guide use of all land in Alaska was limited by a state-run program. He said that in simplest term the challenge is to manage a finite resource with a potentially infinite demand:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Sponsor Statement for SB 253 version B**

*"An Act establishing a big game guide concession area permit program on land in the state; relating to the duties of the Big Game Commercial Services Board, the Board of Game, the Department of Fish and Game, and the Department of Natural Resources; requiring the Board of Game to establish an initial big game guide concession area; and providing for an effective date"*

[3:47:21 PM](#)

SENATOR KAUFMAN continued paraphrasing the sponsor statement for SB 253:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Senate Bill 253 seeks to solve a long-standing problem on state lands by implementing a constitutionally sound concession program to limit the number of commercial hunting guide operations on state lands in Alaska. While federally managed lands in Alaska have successful hunting guide concession programs, there is no process by which the commercial use of state land is allocated. With no limits on the number of commercial hunting operations, the status quo continues to drive overcrowding and localized wildlife resource overutilization. This program is narrow in scope to hunting guides and does not limit Alaskan resident hunters or any other subset of the hunting community.

For years, in problem areas around the state, chronic overcrowding and overutilization have resulted in decreasing incentives for guides to act as stewards of our public trust resources. The current unregulated situation incentivizes guides to aggressively "race for the game" thereby decreasing quality of experience for guided clients, increasing conflicts between commercial users, and disadvantaging the general public (resident hunters, subsistence users, private property owners) who would not be limited by this bill. The status-quo also increases difficulties and costs for the enforcement of wildlife laws.

From January to October 2023, the Guide Concession Program Workgroup (formed by the Big Game Commercial Services Board) conducted a comprehensive process that included public meetings, a thorough review of numerous past proposals, consideration of the successful elements of the federal concession programs, and robust public consultation with licensed guides, residents, other stakeholders, and various state agencies. Public input played a crucial role in shaping the recommendations throughout the Workgroup's process. The concession program proposed by SB 253 is modeled after the Workgroup's conclusions and recommendations.

Specifically, SB 253 establishes a big game guide concession program on state lands, aiming to add tools to improve wildlife conservation, reduce conflicts and encourage a professional guide industry. The key features of the program include a competitive process that ensures qualified individuals and new entrants to the market are selected; 10-year concession duration that requires all applicants (including incumbents) to compete for each concession area on an even playing field every cycle; carefully crafted transferability conditions; heightened ability for state enforcement of wildlife laws; and an equitable fee structure that will allow the state to adequately maintain the program.

This legislation represents a balanced, well-considered approach to address the challenges in commercial big game hunting on state lands. The passage of this bill will put in place a proven

mechanism to improve the quality of hunting on state lands to the benefit of all Alaskans.

[3:51:08 PM](#)

EMMA TORKELSON, Staff, Senator James Kaufman, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented the sectional analysis for SB 253:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Sectional Analysis for SB 253 version B**

*"An Act establishing a big game guide concession area permit program on land in the state; relating to the duties of the Big Game Commercial Services Board, the Board of Game, the Department of Fish and Game, and the Department of Natural Resources; requiring the Board of Game to establish an initial big game guide concession area; and providing for an effective date"*

Section 1: Amends the duties of the Big Game Commercial Services Board (BGCSB) in AS 08.54.600(a) to authorize their role in the establishment of big game guide concession areas.

[3:51:43 PM](#)

MS. TORKELSON continued the sectional analysis for SB 253:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Section 2: Creates new section AS 16.05.262 empowering the Board of Game (BOG) to oversee the process of determining which game management units or subunits will adopt a big game guide concession area permit program.

Requires a proposal be first submitted to the BOG nominating a game management unit or subunit for the guide concession program. After a public comment period, the BOG in consultation with the BGCSB, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Department of Fish and Game (DF&G), may approve that proposal. Their approval process must take into consideration that establishing the area supports the conservation and management of the state's land and big game resources, aids the enforcement of big game hunting laws, and is in the public interest. If the BOG

approves an application, they will determine the number of full and limited concession area permits that will be granted in a given big game guide concession area.

Further, section 2 prohibits the combination of more than three existing guide use areas into a single big game guide concession area and includes definition references.

Section 3: Creates new section AS 38.05.022 empowering the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to administer the implementation of the big game guide concession area permit program on land approved by the BOG.

Outlines that the overarching goals of the guide concession program are to encourage long-term minded conservation, enhance customer experience, reduce user conflicts, and ensure responsible, professional, economically guiding industry.

Establishes the features of the guide concession program permits:

1. All permits are awarded an open, public, and competitive process.
2. A guide may not hold more than three concession permits at a time.
3. Permits are valid for 10 years.
4. Permits may not be extended or renewed without the same open, public, and competitive process.
5. Permits may be transferred to another individual based on conditions set in regulation that are consistent with the overarching goals of the guide concession program.
6. If the terms of statute or regulation are violated, permit may be suspended or revoked after the permit holder has been given written notice and opportunity to be heard.

[3:54:33 PM](#)

MS. TORKELSON continued the sectional analysis for SB 253:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Section 3 further empowers the DNR, in consultation with the BOG, DF&G, and BGCSB, to adopt the necessary regulations including the qualifications for full and limited concession permits, process for issuing the permits, and the collection of fees; grants DNR or their designee the authority to enforce the terms of this program; allows DNR to keep confidential any proprietary, commercial, and financial information provided by concession permit applicants; and includes definitions.

Section 4, Uncodified Law: In order to establish the first big game guide concession area and permit program, the BOG will select one game management unit or subunit that would most benefit from the implementation of the guide concession program.

Section 5, Uncodified Law: Transitional language allowing the guide concession program to extend to new game management units and subunits after the first one has been implemented for at least three (3) years.

Section 6: Sets an immediate effective date.

[3:55:55 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP announced invited testimony for SB 253.

[3:56:21 PM](#)

SAM ROHER, President, Alaska Professional Hunters Association (APHA), Anchorage, Alaska, offered a brief historical perspective on guiding in Alaska. He explained that guiding in Alaska is the state's original value-added tourism industry, with a long history of licensure and area regulation. The first hunting guides were indigenous Alaskans, miners, and trappers. The first Alaska hunting guide license was issued in 1909 under the Taft administration to Andrew Bird of the Kenai Peninsula. By the 1920s, guiding was well established in Alaska, and during the territorial days, guides were required for non-residents to hunt all big game species. After statehood, hunting guide licensure was re-established, with Andy Simon receiving the first registered guide license in the 1960s. In the 1980s, the legislature implemented guide requirements for various species, including Dall sheep, brown and grizzly bears, and mountain goats.

[3:58:01 PM](#)

MR. ROHRER moved to slide 3 and spoke to an economic study conducted in 2019. He said that a 2019 economic study conducted by the McDowell Group found that big game guiding brought nearly \$92 million in total economic output to Alaska. Of this, almost \$58 million was new dollars to the state, including multipliers. Hunting guides spent over \$50 million with Alaskans and Alaskan businesses to support their operations. He said 59 percent of this, or nearly \$30 million, was spent in rural areas of Alaska on wages, food, fuel, supplies, and jobs. The guiding industry directly employs 13,180 people in Alaska. This means that for every third guided hunter who comes to Alaska, one new job is created for an Alaskan. Additionally, 85 percent of registered guides reside in Alaska, making hunting guide businesses overwhelmingly Alaskan-owned.

[3:59:00 PM](#)

MR. ROHRER moved to slide 4 and spoke to public sector benefits. He said that in 2019, approximately 100,000 hunting licenses were sold in Alaska, with 3,090 of those licenses being sold to guided non-resident hunters. Some people mistakenly believe that Alaska is being overrun by guides and their hunters, but in reality, guided hunters make up only three percent of the hunters in the field. Despite this small percentage, these three percent of hunters contribute significantly, responsible for over 30 percent of the annual revenue for ADFG's fund. However, the issue is not just about money.

[3:59:37 PM](#)

MR. ROHRER moved to slide 5 and spoke to non-monetary community benefits. He said that, in addition to the economic impact, there are important non-monetary community benefits as well. Over 220,000 pounds of game meat is shared with Alaskans by hunting guides and their clients each year, with an estimated value of over \$2.5 million. Of those 220,000 pounds of shared meat, more than 165,000 pounds is distributed in rural Alaska.

[4:00:08 PM](#)

MR. ROHRER moved to slide 6 and spoke to the state of Alaska Guide Area regulation from 1959 - 2024.

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **State of Alaska Guide Area Regulation (1959-2024)**

The State of Alaska regulated the establishment of guide areas thru the 60's, 70's, and 80's.

Congress deferred to this State regulatory scheme when ANILCA was enacted in 1980.

During the first 8 years of ANILCA implementation, the federal agencies deferred to the State guide area program and honored those State authorizations/permits to guide on federal land units.

In 1988, the Alaska Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the State guide area system as inconsistent with the Equal Use provisions.

New State legislation was drafted in 1989-1990 per the Court ruling but the legislation was not passed.

The National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) took regulatory steps to create a federally administered guide area program (concessions) on NPS Preserve lands and FWS Refuge lands (1992-94).

[4:01:02 PM](#)

MR. ROHRER moved to slide 7 and listed ways to ensure a healthy hunting guide industry:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **Healthy Hunting Guide Industry Policies**

- High quality, well managed wildlife populations
- ADFG
- Alaska Board of Game
- Strong Wildlife Enforcement
- Wildlife Troopers
- Stewardship based partnership with land managers
- USFWS
- NPS
- USFS
- ANCs
- Alaska Mental Health Trust X DNR X BLM
- Professional Licensing Regulations Promoting Ethical and Professional Standards
- Big Game Commercial Services Board

[4:01:48 PM](#)

MR. ROHRER moved to slide 8 and described the APHA problem statement:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**APHA Problem Statement SB253**

**Entitlement-**

"Alaska's DNR lands make up approximately 50 percent of all lands open and available to guide hunters in Alaska. Currently any person holding a guide license is entitled to access DNR lands. Unlimited numbers of hunting guides who have multiple game violations, histories of conflict with residents or have been denied access to operate on regulated public or private lands are still allowed to set up shop on state DNR lands. Even responsible and ethical state land guides must "race for the game" to produce opportunities for their clients. Entitling commercial hunting operations to DNR lands (1988- 2024) is a failed policy"

[4:02:20 PM](#)

MR. ROHRER noted that the policies in place for some state lands often make it challenging to manage hunting operations in many areas of the state. He explained that APHA believes entitling commercial hunting operations to unlimited use of DNR lands, a policy in place from 1988 to 2024, has been a failed policy.

[4:02:38 PM](#)

MR. ROHRER moved to slide 9 and described a potential solution:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**APHA Position Statement SB253**

**Stewardship-**

"The APHA supports empowering the DNR to limit the number of hunting guides on state lands. The APHA supports the findings of the Guide Concession Program Taskforce (GCPT). We believe this program builds on the successful USFWS and NPS programs and will ultimately be more successful in promoting stewardship and fostering a professional and sustainable hunting guide industry than the federal programs. The GCPT's

focus on consultation with ADFG, the BGCSB and reliance on already existing public processes will work to keep this program focused on stewardship, professionalism and sustainability.”

[4:03:52 PM](#)

JASON BUNCH, Chairman, Big Game Commercial Services Board, Anchorage, Alaska, stated that the board had been hearing increasing complaints about congestion and conflict on state lands, decreasing game populations, and stress on businesses. They also saw challenges in decision-making, law enforcement issues due to limited staff, and the high cost of investigations related to state land users. The final catalyst for action came when two long-standing residents, who rarely attended commercial service meetings, testified about conflicts and too many guides in their areas. This prompted the board to establish a work group to address citizens' complaints. After being appointed to lead the work group, he began by looking at investigations, as it was an easy way to gather data. The review revealed that the cost of investigations was primarily tied to activities on state lands. He then compared the requirements for state land use with those on federal lands, which use concession programs to limit the number of guide outfitters in a specific area. Such programs reduce congestion, conflict, and the burden on state agencies, while also increasing conservation efforts and reducing costs for the licensing program. With the support of the commissioners of ADFG, DNR, and the Department of Commerce, he said he formed the work group, which included representatives from various relevant agencies and organizations.

[4:08:33 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH said the group began by educating themselves through meetings with the Park Service, the Forest Service, and other relevant entities. After these initial meetings, they organized their efforts and used a 2013 DNR proposed concession program as a roadmap. The group's goal was to develop an updated concession program that balanced conservation, stewardship, resident opportunities, economic value, and the viability of small businesses. The group acknowledged that any imbalance in these components would negatively impact the others. The work group continued to vet ideas through public comment and worked on a detailed timeline for their efforts.

[4:10:52 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH said that the third meeting involved written comments, helping those engaged understand the purpose of the work group. Following that, they held two public comment sessions—one in

Fairbanks and another in Anchorage—both incorporating Zoom for those unable to attend in person. Additionally, they completed nine meetings via Zoom, providing regular opportunities for public comment, totaling 16 meetings in all. Version B of SB 253 represents the work group's recommendation, which aims to establish a system similar to the successful concession programs on federally managed lands since the mid-90s but improved. This version includes input from various boards and agencies involved in big game commercial services and will be implemented through a robust public process.

[4:12:13 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH detailed the four-step process:

Step 1: A proposal to implement a concession within a specified area is generated by any interested person. The Board of Game will notify the relevant agencies to prepare for comment on the proposal at the region's next regularly scheduled meeting.

Step 2: The Board of Game, along with ADFG, the Big Game Commercial Services Board, DNR, and the public, will review the proposal in a public setting.

Step 3: An advisory committee, established under the Board of Game, will set the necessary criteria and address key questions, such as how many guide outfitters should be allowed in the area, how many should be limited or full, what the boundaries should be, and how many clients should be allowed. The committee will also determine what species can be hunted, among other details.

Step 4: Once the necessary answers are determined, DNR will publicize the offerings, make a decision, and issue a concession permit.

[4:14:48 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH explained that said that Steps 1 and 2 take place under the Board of Game, whose main role is to conserve and develop Alaska's wildlife resources. This includes establishing seasons, areas for taking game, setting bag limits, and regulating methods of take. The Board is also involved in setting policy and direction for wildlife management and making allocation decisions, with the Department of Fish and Game responsible for management based on those decisions. He noted that it seemed appropriate for the Board to be involved in these initial steps. Step 3 involves an advisory committee, which is recommended to help lift the decision-making burden from the Board of Game. This committee, a volunteer board, includes

agency representatives and industry experts who help establish necessary criteria. This process allows for shared knowledge and ensures accurate decisions by distributing the workload among various parties. Step 4 takes place with DNR, as the Work Group concluded that DNR is the appropriate agency to administer the concession program. All successful concession programs are managed by the land manager, and previous programs like the one from the 1980s, which was overturned, were overseen by Commerce. The state Supreme Court decision indicated that DNR should be the managing agency for a program that limits the number of hunting guides on state land.

[4:15:15 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH said that a significant difference between the proposal they used as a roadmap and the current proposal is that this bill takes a problem-area approach rather than applying a statewide solution. It involves consultation with all affected agencies and boards and ensures a transparent public process. The proposal also provides for new entry into the industry, empowers DNR, and includes provisions for enforceability.

[4:15:50 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP thanked him for the detailed information.

[4:16:00 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether SB 253 could impact hunting opportunities for resident hunters.

[4:16:07 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH replied that the proposal would positively impact resident hunters. He compared the situation to federal lands, where hunting guides often assist resident hunters who have drawn a tag or need help with logistics. He described how guides provide support when resident hunters face challenges, such as running out of gas or having communication issues. By facilitating coordination and offering assistance in the field, he believes the program would benefit residents, especially in areas where guides operate.

[4:17:08 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether the proposed changes would affect the number of tags available or hunting opportunities for resident hunters.

[4:17:16 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH explained that the impact on resident hunters would vary by region due to the diverse methods used to allocate tags

across the state. In areas where there is a drawing but no allocation for either residents or non-residents, he believes the proposed changes would increase the likelihood for residents to win a tag. Additionally, there would be more wildlife available for residents to harvest.

[4:18:01 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked how this might affect the total number of game harvested in the state, if at all.

[4:18:08 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH mentioned that he needed to think about the question further. He explained that the impact on the total number of game harvested is difficult to assess because the focus is on addressing problem areas in the state. For example, in areas with high winter mortality of sheep, the concessionaire and ADF&G could collaborate to ensure responsible management, aligning hunting activities with the available wildlife population in those regions.

CO-CHAIR BISHOP invited a representative from ADGF to respond.

[4:19:28 PM](#)

RYAN SCOTT, Director, Division of Wildlife Conservation, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG), Juneau, Alaska, explained that the impact on the number of animals available for harvest could either increase or decrease, but the tools are in place to manage that. He pointed out that drawing permits and quota systems can regulate the number of animals harvested. He believes the effect will balance out, allowing for closer management of the harvest while still ensuring sustainable wildlife conservation and maintaining quality hunts, in line with the legislation's intent.

[4:20:42 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked for a general overview of how big game guide permits and tags are currently issued to both non-residents and residents, and how those processes might change. He anticipated that changes would occur as a result of the proposed legislation.

[4:20:56 PM](#)

MR. SCOTT explained that the process for issuing big game guide permits and tags is not expected to change significantly. Currently, harvest opportunities are distributed through various methods:

- General season harvest tickets for animals like deer,
- Registration permits used for populations being closely monitored,
- Drawing permits (lottery-based) that are available to both residents and non-residents.

Non-residents have broad access to hunt throughout the state for all big game animals, and residents also have the same opportunities. Some areas set specific allocations for residents and non-residents, which can affect the distribution of permits. Overall, hunting permits are available through offices, online, or specific locations, and the process remains flexible across different methods.

[4:22:24 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether the ability for the Board of Game to establish big game guide concession areas will impact resident hunters. Specifically, he wanted to know if this change might increase, decrease, or have no effect on opportunities for resident hunters to hunt.

[4:22:44 PM](#)

MR. SCOTT clarified that he is not on the Board of Game and does not make the decisions about allocations. He expressed confidence that Board will carefully consider the impact on resident hunters in each case when making decisions.

[4:23:11 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP suggested discussing a specific area in Fairbanks, such as Unit 20A in the Alaska Range, where there is significant competition among guides. He pointed out that there are perhaps up to 20 guides in the area, and no one, including resident hunters, seem to be benefiting from the situation. He proposed using this as a hypothetical example to help clarify how the legislation could address such issues and assist in answering Senator Wielechowski's previous questions.

[4:24:07 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH explained that Unit 20A in the Alaska Range has two factors contributing to its overcrowded guiding situation: easy logistics and being a popular hunting area. The ease of access allows guides to operate without significant upfront costs, making it an attractive area for new or smaller businesses versus more distant areas which require barging or flying in gear, supplies, etc. plus transport in and out. Additionally, it is considered "backyard" land for many local guides who are familiar with the area, leading to a large number of guides in

the region. Limiting the number of guides in such an area could help alleviate congestion, providing more opportunities for resident hunters. Reducing the number of guides to a smaller group would likely improve the quality of the hunting experience for both residents and non-residents. The overcrowding in Unit 20A has made it difficult for hunters to experience a sense of remoteness or solitude, which many hunters desire.

[4:27:05 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI asked whether the Board of Game already has authority to limit the number of participants in a specific area, like Unit 20A, without the need for additional legislation.

[4:27:18 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH explained that the work group's objective was to ensure a balance between conservation, stewardship, resident opportunities, economic value, and small business viability. He noted that while the Board of Game could establish limits in Unit 28, such as through a drawing system, this would introduce uncertainty for guides. Under a drawing system, guides would not know in advance how many permits they would secure each year, making it difficult for them to plan and invest in their businesses. This uncertainty would affect their ability to train guides, update gear, and maintain business operations. Therefore, a just drawing system could negatively impact small business viability.

[4:28:58 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked how concession permits will be awarded, specifically whether it will be through bidding, a lottery, or another method.

[4:29:15 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH explained that the specific method for awarding concession permits is still being worked out, as this is just the initial stage. However, they recognized the need to allow for new entry. The 2013 proposed concession program suggested two types of concessions: an unlimited concession, where a guide could offer services for multiple species in an area, and a limited concession, which could restrict certain species if populations were low, or allow for predator control.

[4:30:47 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP asked if, based on what he just explained, the current draft would meet the necessary requirements of the "Owsichek test" and withstand a lawsuit.

[4:31:13 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH replied that the department believes it would and offered to have a lawyer from the APHA's address that legal question.

[4:31:31 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said he was uninterested in hearing from a lawyer and expressed concerns about several key aspects of the proposed concession system. He first worried that if the permits were opened for bidding, wealthier guide businesses or organizations might outbid and crowd out smaller, local operators. Additionally, he raised concerns about whether there would be a preference for resident guides in these areas. In contested regions, he questioned whether the system could disadvantage smaller operators. He also expressed concerns that the proposed system, which could grant permits for up to 10 years, might result in long-term losses for some businesses, potentially creating "losers" in the process.

[4:32:12 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH acknowledged that his concerns were discussed within the work group. He suggested addressing each of the concerns one by one to clarify their approach and asked Senator Wielechowski to repeat his question.

[4:32:23 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked for clarification regarding residential preference.

[4:32:28 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH replied that clarified that the work group did not discuss residential preference because he was unsure if it would be lawful and would need to seek legal counsel on the matter.

[4:32:41 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI expressed his belief that residential preference could be implemented if there was a compelling state interest, which he suggested the state does have.

[4:32:47 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH reiterated that the work group did not cover that topic.

[4:32:51 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI expressed concern that if the Board of Game or DNR decided to award concessions to the highest bidder, it

could result in small operators being crowded out by those with more financial resources, potentially making it difficult for smaller businesses to compete.

[4:33:07 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH explained that the workgroup discussed the issue of bidding extensively, particularly because the Park Service uses a bid process, but they decided against it. The concern was that a high bid could create a situation where the guide outfitter would need to kill more animals to cover the high fees, which he considered counterproductive. He emphasized that permits would be issued to individuals, not corporations, though that still wouldn't eliminate potential concerns. He also mentioned that they considered a model similar to the DNR proposal, where the guide outfitter would pay a land fee (e.g., \$850 for a base camp and two spike camps for a year, with a limit of 14 days) that is already established. Additionally, there could be a fee specific to certain species, like \$500 for a particular species, so it would generate an equitable return to the state.

[4:34:40 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI expressed his concern about smaller operators getting crowded out.

[4:34:50 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH drew an analogy to his own living situation in Kodiak, explaining that just like there is limited space on the beach for homes, the finite resources available for guiding also need to be managed to avoid depletion. He emphasized the importance of limiting access to resources to ensure sustainability. He expressed enthusiasm for the idea of limited permits being issued through a draw, noting that when all guides have similar experience and business models, it can be difficult to choose the "best" candidate for a permit. A random draw would ensure equal opportunity for everyone who meets the minimum requirements. He pointed out that the concession system wouldn't be implemented statewide but would apply to congested areas. If a guide chooses to operate in a highly congested area, ADFG would need to accept the potential loss of opportunity as part of their decision. There are many other less congested areas in the state where guides could still operate without conflict, and it would require more effort to explore and provide services in those areas.

[4:37:22 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked for clarification regarding the fiscal notes, expressing confusion about why the program would require

additional funding and staffing. They noted that the program seems to create a more limited entry system with fewer guides, but the actual management of wildlife, including the number of animals harvested, appears to remain the same. He questioned why this would require more money and staff, especially since it seems easier to track a limited number of guides with concessions compared to an unlimited number.

[4:38:18 PM](#)

MR. SCOTT explained that the department struggled with the fiscal note but provided context based on their experience with the 2013 DNR program. He noted that on the front end, the department would need to collect and manage various data, such as harvest effort, population status, and available species, to determine what is harvestable. While managing a single subunit, like Unit 19C, might not be overly difficult, expanding the program statewide would be a significant challenge due to the large number of participants and the complexity of different species. This potential scale-up would require considerable additional resources, which contributed to the need for more funding and staffing, as reflected in the fiscal note.

[4:40:13 PM](#)

CHRISTY COLLES, Director, Division of Mining, Land, and Water (DMLW), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Anchorage, Alaska, answered questions related to SB 253. She explained that similar to ADFG, DNR does not have the capacity to run the new program without significant additional resources, especially in the initial stages. Developing the program would require creating regulations, application processes, and scoring criteria. Since the program is not intended to be based on high bids but on qualifications, dedicated staff would be necessary to manage the regulation process and develop the program. As the program grows, these staff members would continue to oversee and manage its operations.

[4:41:20 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR suggested that the implication is laissez-faire.

[4:41:44 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI asked whether the Concession Advisory Committee would be responsible for setting the limits on the number of guides and the species allowed, or if those responsibilities would still fall under the Board of Game.

[4:42:17 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH replied that the Board of Game holds the allocated authority. He explained that questions regarding species limits would likely go through the Board of Game. However, the Concession Advisory Committee would function similarly to local, specific-area biologists for species like moose, bears, and sheep. The committee would analyze historical harvest data, perform due diligence, and attempt to forecast sustainable practices. For example, they might consider scenarios such as how many guides could be supported in a region and what harvest limits should apply. These considerations would need to be formalized in regulations. While this approach reflects the intended vision, the specifics of how it would be implemented are still under development.

[4:43:30 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI asked about the situation concerning Game Management Unit 20A and the Tanana Chiefs Conference, noting that they have long requested potlatch ceremonial permits for moose, which are limited. He inquired what would happen in cases where permits are frequently denied due to a lack of moose. He questioned whether such circumstances would also result in guides losing opportunities during that particular time or season. He directed the question to Director Scott for clarification.

[4:44:11 PM](#)

MR. SCOTT replied that the department has tools and strategies to monitor moose populations and manage harvest opportunities. In the specific case of antlerless moose, the department works hard to ensure availability for ceremonial permits, as it is a priority. However, he noted that if a moose population declines significantly—as seen in certain areas like 20A—such declines would affect all stakeholders, including residents and guides. The Board of Game takes resident opportunities seriously and considers mitigation strategies to allocate resources fairly. The department can adjust harvest quotas, permit numbers, and other mechanisms as needed to respond to population changes. Still, in cases of severe population decline, everyone would feel the impact, regardless of the method used to distribute opportunities, such as harvest tickets, drawing permits, or registration permits.

[4:45:56 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP held SSSB 253 in committee.

[4:46:08 PM](#)

SENATOR KAUFMAN expressed gratitude to the committee and all participants involved in the development of SB 253. He explained that his interest in sponsoring the bill arose after recognizing the extensive work already undertaken to address a significant issue. He highlighted a pattern within the legislature of addressing timely and pressing challenges, such as energy production, transmission, and ADFG management. While the bill may not be a complete solution, it represents a strong starting point for tackling a complex problem, thanks to the expertise and dedication of those involved. He expressed appreciation to legislative legal, particularly Alpheus Bullard, for his exceptional work in processing and drafting the bill based on the substantial amount of information provided.

**SB 248-BIG GAME COMMERCIAL SERVICES BOARD**

[4:47:26 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 248 "An Act relating to an executive administrator for the Big Game Commercial Services Board."

[4:47:55 PM](#)

SENATOR JESSE BJORKMAN, District D, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, noted that the board is highly active and performs its duties well but requires additional support to function efficiently. Currently, the board shares staff with marine pilots, which creates challenges. The proposed Executive Administrator would be dedicated to the board, bringing expertise in Alaska's guiding industry to process paperwork, complaints, applications, and other specialized tasks unique to big game commercial services. He likened the necessity of this role to the expertise provided by seasoned guides in their specific areas, such as the Roher family, who are well-regarded for their knowledge and commitment in Alaska. He emphasized the importance of having a dedicated professional to ensure the board can effectively fulfill its mission, much like how a guide provides invaluable local knowledge to their clients. He noted that the position was previously included in the budget as a one-time item, and SB 248 seeks to make it a permanent statutory role to ensure ongoing support for the board's operations.

[Original punctuation provided.]

**SENATE BILL 248  
SPONSOR STATEMENT  
Big Game Commercial Services Board**

Senate Bill 248 adds an executive administrator to the Big Game Commercial Services Board. The addition of such a position would support the Board as they look at the licenses they oversee, including registered guide-outfitters, master guide-outfitters, and transporters. An Executive Administrator assigned to this Board would be a complex job that requires the employee to work with multiple departments, generate reports, and assist Investigative Services and the Department of Public Safety in investigations.

The lack of this position is felt whenever a new individual comes in to fulfill these responsibilities as a licensing examiner. Being a licensing examiner has become a bit of a steppingstone position, and each turnover requires training from the ground up. This has led to some administrative errors that were highlighted in the recent audit of the Board. While the Board has been sharing an executive administrator with the Board of Marine Pilots, it has not fully resolved the issues, as both boards need much more than half of that person's time. This bill seeks to address those issues by providing a position that would encourage consistency in support of the Board and its functions.

The Big Game Commercial Services Board plays an important role in the management of commercial game hunters in the interest of the State's wildlife resources. Thank you for your consideration of this legislation.

[4:50:59 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI asked for clarification regarding the current arrangement in which the Board Administrator is shared with the marine pilots. He inquired about the role and functionality of an Executive Administrator in the current setup, noting that this question might be better addressed by Sylvan Robb, Director at the State of Alaska, Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing, who could provide insights into the operations of various boards and commissions. He wondered about the workload handled by the Big Game Commercial Services Board compared to other boards or commissions. He questioned whether the board processes a relatively small number of transactions per day compared to others, which might handle significantly more. He asked why this board warrants a dedicated Executive

Administrator, and why similar roles might not be justified for other boards or commissions.

[4:51:54 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN stated that he would provide some initial input on the matter but encouraged the group to also hear from Chair Bunch and Director Robb. He emphasized the unique nature of guiding and the specific regulations governing the guide industry. He explained that the most critical need for the Executive Administrator position is for someone who is an expert in these regulations and statutes. This expertise is essential because the role may also involve investigative duties at times. He reiterated that the position deserves its own dedicated role due to the complexity of the guide industry.

[4:52:55 PM](#)

SYLVAN ROBB, Director, Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing, Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development (DCCED), answered questions related to SB 248. She explained that there are already six Executive Administrators for other boards, as well as a Marine Pilot Coordinator who is currently providing part-time staffing for the Beginning Commercial Services Board. She highlighted the need for an Executive Administrator for this board due to the large volume of work and the unique nature of the tasks. The board administers 29 different examinations, including those for game management units and licensing requirements. The board also works to keep these exams current and score them, which is a significant amount of work. In addition, licensees under this board have reporting requirements, such as submitting health records and activity reports, which adds to the workload. This board also oversees transporters, further increasing the amount of work involved. The need for an Executive Administrator is to provide professional-level support for these complex tasks, which go beyond the capabilities of the Marine Pilot program and require a higher level of board support.

[4:55:04 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP asked Mr. Bunch whether he believes that the proposed position under SB 248 is warranted.

[4:55:14 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH discussed the challenges of serving on a board, particularly the Guide Board, where members often have limited knowledge and must rely on each other to fill in gaps. Within the Guide Board, the two guides and two transporters work closely with the division, while the public seats and game

representatives provide checks and balances. However, with only two guides and two transporters, it can be difficult to know everything, which is why the Executive Administrator position is so crucial. This position provides consistent support, understanding the history and complex statutes and regulations of the guide industry, which are reportedly among the most complicated. He pointed out that the current position of License Examiner, which was created two years ago, was a low-paying job filled by people without knowledge of the statutes or regulations. This role was essentially a steppingstone for other state jobs, leading to frequent turnover. Over the five and a half years he served, he personally trained six License Examiners, despite his own limited knowledge, which added considerable strain. He emphasized the need for an Executive Administrator with expertise to prevent further inadequacies in the program, as highlighted in board audits. After borrowing an Executive Administrator from the Marine Pilot Program, the board saw improvements in efficiency and accuracy. However, the Marine Pilot Program is now overburdened, with its Executive Administrator stretched too thin, so it's time for the Guide Board to have its own dedicated Executive Administrator.

[4:59:42 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP held SB 248 in committee.

[5:00:11 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Bishop adjourned the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting at 5:00 p.m.