

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE

April 10, 2024

3:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 272

"An Act relating to big game hunts for persons with physical disabilities; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED OUT OF COMMITTEE -

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S):

Board of Game

Jake Garner - Anchorage
James Baichtal - Anchorage

Board of Fisheries

Curtis Chamberlain - Anchorage

SENATE BILL NO. 248

"An Act relating to an executive administrator for the Big Game Commercial Services Board."

- MOVED OUT OF COMMITTEE -

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 272

SHORT TITLE: BIG GAME HUNTING BY PERSON W/ DISABILITY

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/18/24 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/24 (H) RES
01/29/24 (H) RES AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
01/29/24 (H) Heard & Held
01/29/24 (H) MINUTE(RES)
02/07/24 (H) RES AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
02/07/24 (H) Moved HB 272 Out of Committee
02/07/24 (H) MINUTE(RES)
02/09/24 (H) RES RPT 8DP 1NR
02/09/24 (H) DP: ARMSTRONG, DIBERT, MCCABE, SADDLER,
WRIGHT, BAKER, RAUSCHER, MCKAY
02/09/24 (H) NR: MEARS
03/14/24 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)
03/14/24 (H) VERSION: HB 272
03/15/24 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/15/24 (S) RES
04/10/24 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 253

SHORT TITLE: DNR BIG GAME HUNTING PRGRM/PILOT PROJECT

SPONSOR(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) SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE INTRODUCED -
REFERRALS
04/08/24 (S) RES, FIN
04/08/24 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
04/08/24 (S) Heard & Held
04/08/24 (S) MINUTE(RES)
04/10/24 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 248

SHORT TITLE: BIG GAME COMMERCIAL SERVICES BOARD

SPONSOR(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

04/08/24 (S) Heard & Held
04/08/24 (S) MINUTE (RES)
04/10/24 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

JAKE GARNER, Appointee
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the governor's appointee to the Board of Game.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Mr. Garner.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Mr. Garner.

JAMES BAICHTAL, Appointee
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the governor's appointee to the Board of Game.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Mr. Baichtal to the Board of Game.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Mr. Baichtal to the Board of Game.

CURTIS CHAMBERLAIN, Appointee
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the governor's appointee to the Board of Fisheries.

VIRGIL UMPHENOUR, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the confirmation of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

JAMES SIMON, representing self
Salcha, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the confirmation of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

GALE VICK, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the confirmation of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

FORREST BRADEN, Executive Director
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the confirmation of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

NANCY HILSTRAND, Owner
Pioneer Alaska Fisheries
Seldovia, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

CHARLIE LEAN, representing self, Unalaska, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

EVA BURK, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the confirmation of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

RACHEL DONKERSLOOT, representing self
Aniak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Mr. Chamberlain.

TERESE VICENTE, Programs Manager
Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
Bethel, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the confirmation of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

JACK REAKOFF, representing self
Wiseman, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on SB 253.

CABOT PITTS, representing self
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 253.

LYLE BECKER, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 253.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 253.

ROBERT FITHIAN, representing self
Hollis, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 253.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 253.

PHILIP SHOEMAKER, representing self
King Salmon, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 253.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:30:54 PM](#)

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

HB 272-BIG GAME HUNTING BY PERSON W/ DISABILITY

[3:32:23 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP announced the consideration of HOUSE BILL NO. 272 "An Act relating to big game hunts for persons with physical disabilities; and providing for an effective date."

[3:32:39 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP solicited a motion.

[3:32:46 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR moved to adopt Amendment 1, work order 33-GH2382\A.1, for HB 272.

[Original punctuation provided.]

33-GH2382\A.1
Bullard
4/5/24

AMENDMENT 1

Page 1, following line 3:

Insert a new bill section to read:

"* Section 1. The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to read:

LEGISLATIVE INTENT. It is the intent of the legislature that nothing in this Act affect a municipality's existing authority to manage and control municipal land, including regulating the discharge of firearms, to the extent a municipality has that authority."

Page 1, line 4:

Delete "Section 1"

Insert "Sec. 2"

Renumber the following bill section accordingly.

Page 1, line 14:

Delete "Section 2"

Insert "Section 3"

Page 2, line 1:

Delete "sec. 3"

Insert "sec. 4"

[3:33:00 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP objected for purposes of discussion.

[3:33:04 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR explained that the resources committee had passed a similar amendment to the Senate version of the bill, which included intent language developed with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). This language clarifies that municipalities retain their authority over the discharge of

firearms, including bows. He said the bill might lead to concerns that it could force hunting into areas like Kincaid Park, but emphasized that this is not the case. Local municipalities will continue to control firearm discharge regulations, ensuring their voice remains intact.

[3:33:51 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP removed his objection; finding no further objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

[3:34:03 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP solicited the will of the committee.

[3:34:07 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL moved to report HB 272, work order 33-GH2382\A, as amended, from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note(s).

[3:34:22 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP found no objection and SCS HB 272 (RES) was reported from the Senate Resources Committee.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)

BOARD OF GAME

BOARD OF FISHERIES

[3:34:37 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP announced the consideration of a governor's appointee, Mr. Garner to the Board of Game.

[3:35:20 PM](#)

JAKE GARNER, representing self, Appointee, Anchorage, Alaska, testified as the governor's appointee to the Board of Game. He stated that he is an Alaska Native from the rural village of Ouzinkie, a small village on Spruce Island located just north of Kodiak Island. He described growing up in a small cabin without electricity or running water and explained that, at the time, he didn't know what subsistence or sport hunting was. Hunting was simply a way of life for his family since there was no grocery store in the village. This way of life has continued for him, noting that most of the meat in his freezer today is hunted rather than store-bought. He said he supports his family through hunting, with everything he harvests making its way to their kitchen table. As he grew older and developed a career in the construction industry, he broadened his hunting experiences, traveling beyond Alaska to the Lower 48, Hawaii, and even internationally. No matter where he hunted, the core values

remained the same: sharing the experience and the harvest, being thankful, and giving back to family and the community, especially to elders. Although he grew up hunting and subsisting in rural Alaska, he now resides in Anchorage, Alaska's largest city. He noted that he is currently the President of Ouzinkie Native Corporation and a former vice president of Afognak Native Corporation. This background gives him a unique perspective that balances rural and urban hunting experiences with analytical thinking. He said his goal in pursuing a position on the Board of Game is to protect Alaska's wildlife resources for current and future generations. He mentioned that he has four grandkids, nieces, and nephews who all participate in outdoor activities. Well-managed wildlife populations make it easier for Alaskans to fill their freezers, and he is committed to ensuring these resources are preserved for generations to come.

[3:38:55 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI asked him about his willingness to serve on the Board of Game, acknowledging that it is a challenging position. He noted that the legislature is currently considering a bill relating to guide concession areas, which are common on many federal lands. He asked for his thoughts on the concept, even if not specifically about the bill.

[3:39:24 PM](#)

MR. GARNER said that the concept of guides and resources needs to be looked at in balance. He acknowledged that he wasn't speaking specifically about the bill but mentioned that he hopes to get involved with the Board of Game. There are multiple sides to every issue, and he has experience in arbitration and mediation, which allows him to hear both sides and take them into account. He expressed his belief that guiding as an economic resource for Alaskans needs to be considered, but also that subsistence hunting and fishing to feed families, especially in rural Alaska, must be taken into account. These two perspectives would guide his decision-making on specific issues. He noted that he couldn't say he is pro one side or the other, but he hopes to bring balance and perspective to such issues.

[3:40:49 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN joined the meeting.

[3:41:05 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP open public testimony on the appointment of Mr. Garner.

[3:41:36 PM](#)

MARK RICHARDS, Executive Director, Resident Hunters of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of Mr. Garner. He thanked Mr. Garner for being willing to serve on the Board of Game and for meeting with him and his board the other day to discuss his background and issues that come before the board. He mentioned that written comments of support had been sent to the committee. He said Mr. Garner comes from a subsistence background and has long been involved in wildlife management and hunting issues, particularly in Unit 8, where he has advocated for the people of Ouzinkie and the continuation of subsistence hunting opportunities. He expressed confidence that Mr. Garner would be a beneficial member of the Board of Game and that they look forward to working with him.

[3:42:33 PM](#)

JOHN STURGEON, President, Safari Club International Alaska Chapter, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Jake Garner. He mentioned that he is the President of Safari Club International, Alaska Chapter, and noted that the organization supports Mr. Garner for the Board of Game. He stated that Mr. Garner has an excellent background for the position, having lived in both rural and urban environments. He said Mr. Garner also has experience in subsistence hunting, guiding, and personal use, giving him a broad spectrum of experience that will allow him to make very good decisions on the Board of Game.

[3:43:26 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP closed public testimony on the appointment of Mr. Garner.

[3:43:31 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP announced the consideration of the governor's appointee Mr. Baichtal to the Board of Game.

[3:43:47 PM](#)

JAMES BAICHTAL, Appointee, Anchorage, Alaska, testified as the governor's appointee to the Board of Game. He said he lives on Prince of Wales and is humbled by the possibility of a position on the Board of Game. He described living in Thornton Bay, Alaska, on Prince of Wales Island, where he moved in 1990 to take a position as a forest geologist on the Tongass National Forest. He explained that he fell in love with Alaska and never left.

[3:44:18 PM](#)

MR. BAICHTAL said that after retiring from a 39-year career as a geologist and forest service engineer, he is currently the Alaska Regional Coordinator for the Mule Deer Foundation. He stated that he believes he has something to contribute to the Board of Game, emphasizing that he is a science-based advocate for the management of wildlife. He expressed support for the North American model of wildlife conservation, where wildlife resources are conserved and held in trust by all citizens of the state, as outlined in the Alaska Constitution. He mentioned his belief in a rural preference for big game and the capital shortage in certain areas, which he said is documented by science. He also believes that state residents should have a priority over non-residents for moose, caribou, and deer as a food source, while acknowledging that much of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's funding comes from non-resident hunting license fees. He emphasized the importance of balancing these issues. He stated he was an ADFG volunteer for 25 years helping graduate students with research projects on herding and tracking deer, bear, and grouse, as well as monitoring their mortality. He continues to volunteer for the Board of Game, specifically for studies on wolves. From 2000 to 2004 he served as the chairperson of the Eastern Prince of Wales Fish and Game Advisory Committee and was involved in the contentious decision regarding deer planting in 2005. Over the years, he has tried to stay informed on the issues facing wildlife management across the state, including both federal subsidies and state game management. He expressed strong advocacy for Sitka black-tailed deer, their habitat, and educating others about the species. He mentioned being an avid hunter. He said his passion is hunting and helping others learn about Sitka black-tailed deer. He expressed his belief that he can bring a rural perspective and a science-based approach to game management on the Board of Game.

[3:46:45 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI asked him if he is a registered geologist in Alaska, noting that it says he is a registered geologist in Oregon and a registered geologist hydrogeologist in Washington.

[3:47:05 PM](#)

MR. BAICHTAL replied that Alaska does not have a registration process for geologists; instead, it has to go through the AG unit registry. He explained that, as a federal geologist and not contracted in the state as a geologist, he has never pursued registration in Alaska.

[3:47:26 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI asked if he qualifies for the Alaska Permanent Fund dividend, given that he mentioned living on Prince of Wales Island.

[3:47:35 PM](#)

MR. BAICHTAL replied yes.

[3:47:36 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI asked whether he receives PFD benefits as well.

[3:47:38 PM](#)

MR. BAICHTAL replied yes.

[3:47:43 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked him what he sees as the biggest issues facing the Board of Game going forward. He expressed particular interest in his science background, asking if he has any disagreements with some of the science currently supporting policies from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Some studies have recently called into question certain practices, particularly regarding intensive game management, and asked for his thoughts on those issues or if he sees other issues as the main ones facing the board.

[3:48:32 PM](#)

MR. BAICHTAL explained that gathering information on wildlife populations is always going to be incomplete, but that one should do the best with the information available and make decisions based on that. He identified the biggest issue facing the Board of Game as the sharing of resources across the state, from both rural and resident perspectives, as well as the non-resident perspective. He mentioned that the perceptions surrounding the allocation of these resources will be a challenge. He expressed hope that with the best available information, decisions can be made that focus on science rather than emotion.

[3:49:28 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked him if he sees any gaps in the current science that might be contributing to difficulties in making allocation decisions or decisions that will ensure the sustainability of some of Alaska's resources. He agreed with the importance of basing decisions on science.

[3:49:52 PM](#)

MR. BAICHTAL replied that he would take the question to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and ask them what they see as gaps in the current science. He noted that, based on his experience, getting population estimates in the current environment is extremely challenging, particularly in areas such as estimating wolf populations. He acknowledged that there are likely other issues across the state, such as understanding how animals migrate, how populations are dispersed, and the balance between predators and prey. He expressed hope that the state of Alaska has the resources, staff, and expertise necessary to gather the best possible information to support decision-making.

[3:50:46 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR clarified that his father worked for ADFG for 30 years, so he doesn't have any issues with the department. He explained that he is simply always curious about these questions.

[3:51:00 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI requested his thoughts on utilizing intensive game management, specifically referring to the nearly 100 brown bears taken in southwest Alaska last year to address a downturn in the Mulchatna caribou herd. He expressed curiosity about how intensive game management compares to other methods for controlling herds.

[3:51:33 PM](#)

MR. BAICHTAL noted that he was not aware of or has not read the studies that supported the decision behind the intensive game management in Southwest Alaska. However, he expressed hope that any intense management program moving forward would be based on the best available science. He acknowledged that it is a very aggressive approach, but if it can be demonstrated that such measures are necessary to restore balance between predators and prey, he would support it.

[3:52:15 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI expressed appreciation for his scientific background.

[3:52:24 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP opened public testimony on the appointment of Mr. Baichtal.

[3:52:30 PM](#)

MARK RICHARDS, Executive Director, Resident Hunters of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of

Mr. Baichtal to the Board of Game. He mentioned that he is the Executive Director of Resident Hunters of Alaska and noted that the organization had a great meeting with Mr. Baichtal the other night with his board. He mentioned that Mr. Baichtal has long been involved in southeast Alaska wildlife management issues on both the state and federal sides. He noted that Mr. Baichtal has seen firsthand how weather, hunting, and logging impact game populations and that he is active in habitat restoration efforts, particularly with southeast deer populations. He expressed excitement about Jim's scientific background and mindset, believing it will be invaluable when discussing and deliberating on issues before the Board of Game.

[3:53:30 PM](#)

JOHN STURGEON, President, Safari club International Alaska Chapter, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Mr. Baichtal to the Board of Game. He said Alaska Safari Club International has reviewed Mr. Baichtal's resume and that he personally spoke with him. He described Mr. Baichtal as having a solid scientific background and noted that, as a representative from Southeast Alaska, he brings a strong science-based perspective to the Board of Game. He highlighted that he is a valuable asset and added that Mr. Baichtal's extensive volunteer work with ADFG demonstrates his dedication to wildlife management.

[3:54:24 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP closed public testimony on the appointment of Mr. Baichtal.

[3:54:36 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP announced the consideration of the governor's appointee Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

[3:54:48 PM](#)

CURTIS CHAMBERLAIN, Appointee, testified as the governor's appointee to the Board of Fisheries. He mentioned that he grew up living off the land in and around Aniak later attending high school in Bethel. He started commercial fishing on the Kuskokwim River at age 10 and continued every summer until the fishery collapsed in 1994. He explained that elders in his region encouraged the youth to leave for education and training, then return to help their communities, which led him to leave for college and law school. Growing up with this lifestyle, he developed a strong work ethic, which helped him achieve an AU national championship in judo in 2001 and earn a full merit scholarship to Michigan State University College of Law.

Professionally, he worked as a trial lawyer in Las Vegas, handling around 75 trials and arbitrations.

[3:55:50 PM](#)

MR. CHAMBERLAIN stated that after his children were born, he felt the need to reconnect with his culture and pass it on to future generations, which led to his involvement with the Kuskokwim Corporation's board of directors. His advocacy experience later brought him to his current role as an attorney at Calista Corporation, focusing on fisheries, corporate governance, and litigation. He also serves on the advisory panel for the North Pacific and Alaska Fish Commission. He shared his deep connection to Alaska's fisheries, recalling how every river seemed legendary, with thriving subsistence, sport, and commercial fishing industries. He described witnessing an abundance of fish in the waters, which fueled his passion to restore Alaska's fisheries to that state. He expressed a vision of full smokehouses along rivers and thriving fisheries, where communities sustain themselves through all three user groups. He emphasized that his litigation background would help the Board of Fish navigate difficult situations, noting that trial attorneys typically avoid going to trial because of the risks and long processes. He expressed his belief that a negotiated solution is always better, highlighting the need for all user groups to cooperate. Having lived through the collapse of subsistence, sport, and commercial fishing industries, he committed to bringing user groups together to find innovative ways to rebuild fisheries and ensure that fish can return to spawning beds. He opined that failure to maintain resources could lead to closures like the Yukon River's seven-year closure, where management could fall to outsiders or judges without proper experience. He expressed optimism about the progress made in recent meetings and reaffirmed his dedication to protecting Alaska's fisheries for all user groups and future generations. His ultimate goal is to restore Alaska's fisheries to their former bounty, ensuring that future generations can witness the same abundance of fish he experienced in his youth.

[3:58:58 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI expressed appreciation for his willingness to serve on the Board of Fisheries, acknowledging that it is a highly contested position. He brought up a recent discussion regarding hatchery fish and their potential involvement in downturns of wild stock fisheries around the state, particularly noting concerns about wild stock fisheries. He asked for Mr. Chamberlain's thoughts on this issue.

[3:59:31 PM](#)

MR. CHAMBERLAIN noted that he has been reading up on the issue of hatchery fish and their potential impact on wild stock fisheries, particularly following Dr. Ruggerone's articles, which he found concerning, although not directly on point. He mentioned being encouraged by some of the questions asked of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game at a recent Upper Cook Inlet meeting and looks forward to receiving those answers. At this point, he expressed his belief that the science is still evolving, but it remains deeply concerning. From a bioethics standpoint, he emphasized the importance of following the principle of "do no harm." He shared a comment he heard while attending a fisheries conference in Japan, where the head of the Sasakawa Foundation spoke about the idea that perhaps we are over-engineering our oceans. He acknowledged the importance of hatcheries to certain communities but noted that he does not take the issue lightly. The science is still evolving, especially concerning Alaska's hatcheries. He stated that undisputed facts indicate carrying capacity issues in the North Pacific, where Chinook salmon are returning smaller and earlier. He cited reports of salmon dying on the beaches of the Yukon and Cusco Crim Rivers with their eggs and milt still intact, indicating they lack the energy stores to reach their spawning beds. As a trial lawyer, he emphasized the importance of determining causation and weighing the science carefully. He prefers to operate thoughtfully and with precision, using a scalpel rather than a sledgehammer, to avoid collateral damage in finding solutions. While he has spoken up about the issue in the past, his instinct is to continue reading and hold off on making further comments until he fully understands the situation.

[4:01:58 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI having lived in interior Alaska, he noted that the Yukon King salmon situation has been ongoing for the last ten years, and now the region is seeing a similar problem with Yukon chum salmon, with no fishing and no smokehouses along the river for the past three years. He opined that this is creating a major cultural shift. He wondered about his thoughts on bycatch and the role it might play in the return of salmon.

[4:02:31 PM](#)

MR. CHAMBERLAIN replied that bycatch is an important factor. In 2021, the bycatch numbers were approximately 545,000 Chinook salmon, with a large portion coming from hatcheries, but a significant portion from western Alaska. In a year when the rivers were completely closed, that is alarmingly high. He

testified to this effect at the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council on behalf of Chignik. While he acknowledged that bycatch is outside the purview of the Board of Fisheries, he emphasized that, when managing the resource, it is crucial to consider all contributing factors to the decline of salmon populations. He stated that if there were a simple solution, it would have already been implemented. What is needed now, he said, is more advanced targeting systems to focus on the factors that can be controlled, as there are many factors beyond their control. He also expressed encouragement by the role the industry played at the recent North Pacific Fisheries Management Council meeting. He went in prepared for a tough discussion but was pleasantly surprised by how the industries worked together with tribal leaders to find a solution that, while not perfect, represented progress. He noted that while there is still much work to be done, substantial progress was made at the meeting earlier that week.

[4:04:54 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR noted that his resume lists Wasilla as his residence, but his application lists Anchorage. He wanted to know if he had moved recently.

[4:05:11 PM](#)

MR. CHAMBERLAIN replied that he may have made a mistake on his application. He explained that when he first became a resident of Alaska, he lived in Anchorage before purchasing a house in Wasilla, where he has lived since 2021.

[4:05:34 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR mentioned that he does not believe these appointments have a residency requirement. He asked him to address any potential conflict of interest concerns, given that he would still be in his current position and his resume indicates a strong interest in fisheries. He expressed interest in how he would manage any possible conflicts while serving on the board.

[4:05:52 PM](#)

MR. CHAMBERLAIN replied that while fisheries are an essential issue for Calista, it was his own decision to run for the Board of Fisheries, not theirs. He clarified that Calista did not ask him to run, and if they ever did, he would decline. He emphasized that, as a board member, his duty would not be to Calista but to the state of Alaska's, resources, and the future generations of Alaskans.

[4:06:26 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN asked if, in a situation where his position on the Board of Fisheries conflicted with Calista's stance on an issue, he would be comfortable making the decision he believes is right, even if it goes against what his employer might want.

[4:06:56 PM](#)

MR. CHAMBERLAIN replied that as an attorney, he is often required to consider situations where he must adopt positions he doesn't personally agree with. However, he emphasized that on the Board of Fisheries, his duty is to the resource, and he will always act in that capacity. If his position ever conflicts with Calista's, he said he would recuse himself if necessary and follow the professional rules.

[4:07:25 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN asked that during their earlier meeting, they discussed how, in the past, there was a perception that certain seats on the Board of Fisheries were designated for specific interests, such as sport fishing, commercial fishing, or subsistence. However, this distinction doesn't seem to be as strictly followed now. Given that Mr. Chamberlain's background spans across multiple industries, it's difficult to categorize him into just one of these groups. He asked how he would approach this issue and navigate the perception that board members should advocate for a particular interest group.

[4:08:04 PM](#)

MR. CHAMBERLAIN replied that he finds it difficult to classify himself as solely a sport fisherman, commercial fisherman, or subsistence fisherman, as he has been all three throughout his life. While he understands how things have traditionally been done, he also recognizes that those customs have contributed to the largest salmon crash in the state's history. He believes it's time to rethink the approach, as the fish are facing significant challenges. He emphasized the need for someone who can advocate for getting the fish into the rivers and spawning beds. He noted that he doesn't have a clear answer to the question but shared his honest perspective.

[4:09:28 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP opened public testimony on the appointment of Mr. Chamberlain.

[4:09:47 PM](#)

VIRGIL UMPHENOUR, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of the confirmation of Curtis Chamberlain.

He stated that he is currently a member of the Yukon River panel for the salmon treaty between the United States and Canada, having served longer than anyone else from the entire Pacific Salmon Commission since 1988. He noted that he is also a three-term member of the Board of Fisheries. He noted that he and Mr. Chamberlain have worked together at two Board of Fisheries meetings in the past year. Additionally, he mentioned being a member of the Fairbanks Social Game Advisory Committee, which also endorses Mr. Chamberlain. As a master hunting guide, he expressed support for both candidates for the Board of Game.

4:11:08 PM

JAMES SIMON, representing self, Salcha, Alaska, testified in support of the confirmation of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries. He stated that he is the former 14-year regional supervisor of ADFG and is calling to give his wholehearted support for Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries. He mentioned that he has gotten to know Mr. Chamberlain over the past two years, noting that he attends every fisheries-related meeting, regulatory meeting, and outcome. He stated that Mr. Chamberlain is very well-educated and believes that his experience as a former commercial fisherman, subsistence fisherman, and sport fisherman makes him an ideal candidate for the Board of Fisheries.

4:13:05 PM

GALE VICK, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of the confirmation of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries. She mentioned that she is speaking as a fisheries policy consultant and a 55-year resident of Alaska. She noted that she also chairs the Fisheries Subcommittee of the Fairbanks Board of Fish and Game Advisory Committee and facilitates a Bristol Bay AYK coalition weekly meeting. Both groups support the appointment of Kurt Chamberlain to the Alaska Board of Fisheries. She opined that Mr. Chamberlain has significant knowledge of Alaska fisheries across all sectors. She highlighted that his greatest asset is his ability to research issues thoroughly and carefully weigh evidence and testimony. She expressed her belief that he will be essential in helping groups work together and will be a champion for the health of salmon resources. The current crisis in the AYK regarding the decline of Chinook and coho salmon requires someone of Mr. Chamberlain's caliber to help the state navigate its way toward equitable solutions.

4:14:18 PM

FORREST BRADEN, Executive Director, Ketchikan, Alaska, testified in support of the confirmation of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries. He stated that he is the executive director of the Southeast Alaska Organization. He explained that the bar fleet his organization represents accounts for about half of the guided marine sport fishing activity in the state. He emphasized the importance of the Board of Fisheries process to their work and mentioned that they recently had an opportunity to meet with Mr. Chamberlain. He expressed full support for Mr. Chamberlain's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He remarked that Mr. Chamberlain has demonstrated qualities of a researcher and someone who thoroughly examines issues. He noted that Mr. Chamberlain has the analytical ability to grasp complex fishery concepts, which is essential given the depth of information and detail involved in the Board of Fisheries process. He highlighted his own background as both a commercial fisherman and a guided sport fisherman. He underscored the importance of having a balanced perspective across various fisheries, which he believes Mr. Chamberlain embodies. He also described Mr. Chamberlain as approachable, energetic, and committed to supporting the fisheries process. He opined that Mr. Chamberlain appears fair in his approach to addressing the needs of different fishers and that his thoughtful responses to a wide range of questions were reassuring. He encouraged the committee to forward Mr. Chamberlain's name and expressed hope to see him serve on the Board of Fisheries soon.

[4:16:06 PM](#)

NANCY HILSTRAND, Owner, Pioneer Alaska Fisheries, Seldovia, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries. She stated that she was speaking on behalf of Pioneer Alaskan Fisheries, a corporation established in the mid-1960s. She shared her extensive experience participating in the Board of Fisheries since 1982 and serving on the Homer Fish and Game Advisory Committee for 17 years. She noted that she has heard Mr. Chamberlain testify at the Board of Fisheries and other venues and found him to be thoughtful, balanced, and fair. She expressed strong support for his appointment to the Board of Fisheries, emphasizing his knowledge of fisheries issues and the resource itself. She remarked that Mr. Chamberlain conducts his own research to ensure that his decisions are informed by the best available information and guided by precaution, as directed by the Sustainable Salmon Policy. She highlighted Mr. Chamberlain's excellent background and experience.

[4:17:16 PM](#)

CHARLIE LEAN, representing self, Unalaska, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries. He stated that he is a retired Fish and Game biologist specializing in commercial fisheries. He noted that he has also worked as an OSM manager in Northwest Alaska and, more recently, as a staff biologist for the CDC group. Additionally, he serves as the chair of the advisory committee and participates in working groups focused on AYK salmon. He highlighted the unprecedented collapse of AYK salmon, which he described as a matter of great concern to their advisory group and committee. He said he first met Mr. Chamberlain over a year ago during work with the Board of Michigan and was impressed by Mr. Chamberlain's ability to quickly absorb information and learn. He emphasized that Mr. Chamberlain's background in law and his understanding of the public process are particularly valuable, as they form the foundation of the Board of Fisheries and the Board of Game. He stressed the importance of ensuring that the process is fair and adheres to established precedent and regulations, expressing confidence that Mr. Chamberlain would uphold these principles.

[4:19:01 PM](#)

EVA BURK, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of the confirmation of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries. She stated that she works for the Yukon River Tribal Fish Commission, representing 43 tribes along the Yukon River. She expressed the commission's support for Mr. Kurt Chamberlain's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. She highlighted Mr. Chamberlain's diverse background and his ability to equitably weigh the needs of various groups while prioritizing the health of the fishery. She noted her experience engaging with Mr. Chamberlain in both the Board of Fisheries and North Pacific Fishery Management Council processes. She noted that she serves as the tribal representative on the advisory panel to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. She commended Mr. Chamberlain for engaging with all stakeholders and user groups during these meetings. She remarked on his commitment to staying for the duration of meetings and listening to public testimony to fully understand how fishery policies affect users. She stated that Mr. Chamberlain's legal background is particularly valuable, especially given the current challenges in rebuilding salmon runs, which are critical to communities across Alaska. She expressed confidence in Mr. Chamberlain as an excellent candidate for the Board of Fisheries and expressed her belief that he would do a great job.

[4:20:58 PM](#)

RACHEL DONKERSLOOT, representing self, Aniak, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Mr. Chamberlain. She stated that she serves as the trade policy advisor for the Lake and Peninsula Borough and was providing testimony on behalf of the borough. She explained that the borough encompasses 17 communities spanning the Alaska Peninsula, the Lake Iliamna area of Southwest Alaska, and Bristol Bay. She conveyed the Lake and Peninsula Borough's strong support for the nomination of Mr. Kurt Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries. She highlighted Mr. Chamberlain's legal background and his previous service and engagement in fisheries management processes, both of which she described as significant assets to the board. She noted that his participation in state and federal fisheries management processes has consistently been fair, professional, and well-informed. She emphasized Mr. Chamberlain's upbringing and expertise in the Kuskokwim region as valuable contributions to the board's efforts to address the ongoing challenges facing Alaska's fisheries.

[4:22:16 PM](#)

TERESE VICENTE, Programs Manager, Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Bethel, Alaska, testified in support of the confirmation of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries. She stated that she was calling from Bethel in her capacity as the program manager for the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, which represents the 33 tribes of the Kuskokwim drainage in fisheries research, monitoring, and management. She conveyed the commission's support for Mr. Chamberlain's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. She emphasized that Mr. Chamberlain is a born-and-raised Indigenous fisherman from the region and echoed the sentiments of others in support of his nomination. She highlighted his ability to balance information and prioritize the use of the best available science, including traditional knowledge. She highlighted Mr. Chamberlain's significant expertise in fisheries across all sectors, particularly in addressing the declines of salmon in the Arctic, Yukon, and Kuskokwim regions, which she believes should be a top concern for the Board of Fisheries. As a tribal citizen well-versed in tribal resource management, Mr. Chamberlain is likely to foster stronger relationships between the board, tribes, and knowledge holders. This relationship-building would support robust dialogue and decision-making within the board. She expressed eagerness to work with him in this capacity.

[4:23:32 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP closed public testimony on the appointment of Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

[4:23:42 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP solicited a motion.

[4:23:44 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL moved Jake Garner and James Baichtal, appointees to the Board of Game and Curtis Chamberlain appointee to the Board of Fisheries, be forwarded to a Joint Session of the legislature for consideration.

Board of Game

Jake Garner - Anchorage

James Baichtal - Anchorage

Board of Fisheries

Curtis Chamberlain - Anchorage

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL reminded members that signing the report(s) regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects individual member' approval or disapproval of the appointees; the nominations are merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

SB 253-DNR BIG GAME HUNTING PRGRM/PILOT PROJECT

[4:24:23 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 253 "An Act relating to a big game guide commercial concession permit program on land in the state; establishing a big game guide commercial concession area pilot project; and providing for an effective date."

[4:24:30 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP opened public testimony on SB 253.

[4:24:59 PM](#)

JACK REAKOFF, representing self, Wiseman, Alaska, testified on SB 253. He stated that his father was a hunting guide and that he had participated in guiding from the age of 13 until he was 32. He said his father held guide use areas established in the early 1970s, but when those areas fell out of compliance, he chose not to operate with a registered guide license due to concerns about guiding in areas with high competition, particularly on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. He emphasized the importance of SB 253, especially given the current challenges with sheep populations, which he noted are at all-time lows since statehood, partly due to deep snow and rain

events. Federal lands, such as national parks and U.S. Fish and Wildlife preserves, already have selection processes to limit competition among guides, and he argued that guide use areas are a superior solution to the current system. The central Brooks Range, specifically units 24A, 25A West, and 26B West, are problem areas where resident hunters face significant competition from guides. He stated that the lack of a structured selection process for guides results in unsustainable hunting practices, as there is little incentive to conserve game when multiple guides compete for the same resources. SB 253 would address these issues by enabling the Board of Game and advisory committees to better manage game resources for sustainability on BLM lands. He added that the bill would benefit resident hunters, non-resident hunters, and the guiding industry by increasing credibility and acceptance in problem areas while ensuring the conservation of quality animals. He proposed a selection process for guide use area permits that would prioritize Alaska resident guides and avoid a system where permits can be bought or sold. He suggested the following criteria for the selection process:

- Guides should be scored based on factors such as game violations, employment of unqualified assistant guides, and instances of taking sub-legal animals with clients.
- A five-year period should be considered for addressing any violations.
- High-scoring guides meeting the same standards should be entered into a draw to ensure fairness, similar to the system used for hunting permits.

He opined that guide use permits should not be sold or transferred to guides who fail to meet high standards, ensuring that the system prioritizes sustainability and fairness.

[4:29:34 PM](#)

CABOT PITTS, representing self, Palmer, Alaska, testified in support of SB 253. He stated that he is a registered contracting guide holding three Federal National Park Service permits, as well as state land authorizations and BLM permits. He compared the benefits of a guide concession program on federal lands to the current system on state lands, with a focus on how resident hunters might benefit. Concession programs provide significant advantages because concession holders are responsible for the long-term management of their designated areas. This vested interest encourages sustainable practices and collaboration with local authorities, area biologists, and user groups. Concession contracts often include plans to limit interactions with other

users in the field. When such interactions occur, concession holders have established protocols to ensure appropriate and respectful responses. Inappropriate actions or conduct can result in severe consequences, such as permit revocation or losing competitiveness in future concession renewals. These responsibilities and oversight mechanisms provide a structured framework that benefits resident hunters by reducing competition with other commercial users and enhancing resource management. Concession programs, compared to the current system on state lands, offer overall benefits for both the resource and resident hunters due to the vested interest and accountability inherent in the program.

[4:31:44 PM](#)

LYLE BECKER, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 253. He stated that a guide concession plan would address issues that a drawing system could not resolve. A drawing system would not raise the standard of professionalism among guides operating in a given area. Instead, it would allow any licensed guide to submit applications for an area and potentially increase the number of individual guides competing, even with fewer hunters in the field. This approach would reduce opportunities for training and recruitment into the guiding industry, ultimately harming its long-term health. He noted that a drawing system could increase competition among guides for applicants without incentivizing higher professional standards. It would fail to encourage guides to develop better operations plans, reduce conflicts in the field, or maintain clean records free of violations. A drawing system would instead motivate guides to lower the cost of their hunts to attract more applicants, resulting in clever marketing strategies rather than sustainable practices. This, he argued, would diminish the overall value of the resource. He highlighted the benefits of a guide concession program, which would establish clear professionalism standards that all participants must meet. A concession program would allow guides to engage in long-term planning for their businesses. In a drawing system, guides cannot predict who they will be taking hunting in future seasons, making long-term financial planning difficult. The lack of long-term vision in a drawing system would reduce the value of the resource, as guides might lower rates to attract applicants, contrary to the state's values of maximizing the resource's value. A guide concession program, by contrast, would promote professionalism, sustainability, and better resource management.

[4:34:20 PM](#)

MARK RICHARDS, Executive Director, Resident Hunters of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 253. He stated that the primary purpose of SB 253 is to limit the number of guides on state lands. He explained that the intended results of the legislation would include a reduction in the number of guides and their non-resident clients in the field, a reduction in non-resident wildlife harvests, and a decrease in crowding and conflicts among user groups. The legislation, as it stands, would have several unintended consequences. One such effect would be a loss of revenue to the Division of Wildlife Conservation due to reduced non-resident licenses, tag fees, and matching Pittman-Robertson funds. He also highlighted the potential for a reduction in viable guide businesses. While the primary goal of the legislation is to reduce the number of guides in the field on state lands and limit non-resident hunting opportunities in problem areas, the bill would not achieve these goals. SB 253 would mandate that the Board of Game establish an initial concession area in a known problem area, which would displace existing guides to other state land areas. This would not reduce the number of non-resident hunters or their harvest in the problem areas, as the board would still allow unlimited non-resident hunting in other areas. The legislation, as written, could exacerbate the problems in other areas and would not guarantee those areas would be addressed. Any guide concession program needs to address all known problem areas simultaneously. He also pointed out that the legislation lacks detailed provisions on how the program would operate and criticized the vague language regarding the transferability of concessions, which he argued could lead to unconstitutional practices. He highlighted the added burden SB 253 would place on the Board of Game, as it would require extending meetings and increasing the responsibilities of board members to regulate guides, a task not currently within their purview. He stated that the current fiscal note does not accurately reflect the real costs, and there is no plan for how the state will recover startup costs. As written, SB 253 fails to address the root problems and continues to allow the Board of Game and the Big Game Commercial Services Board to neglect their duties. He expressed hope to work with Senator Kaufman and staff to address these concerns.

[4:37:36 PM](#)

ROBERT FITHIAN, representing self, Hollis, Alaska, testified in support of SB 253. He stated that he has a long history of personal involvement, including leadership roles within Alaska's professional guide, mining, ranching, conservation, and subsistence arenas. As a professional guide with over 40 years

of experience conducting family-operated hunts in the upper Kuskokwim region on state lands, he emphasized his strong support for SB 253. He also served as a chair for the Federal Concession area for several years. He said from 2008 to 2013, he chaired the DNR Land Subcommittee within the Big Game Commercial Services Board, where they held numerous hearings and work sessions throughout Alaska. He explained that the bill reflects the historic efforts aimed at accomplishing what should have been done many years ago. He outlined several key benefits of SB 253:

- The bill provides a conservation-based framework.
- It ensures consumer protection and enhances the effectiveness and stability of ADFG and the Board of Game.
- It reduces enforcement costs and provides more effective law enforcement.
- The bill will not create long-term costs for the state, as it will be self-funded through user fees.
- It promotes long-term sustainability for the guide industry and offers new entry opportunities without reducing them.
- It mandates stewardship of state lands and reduces social conflicts among subsistence hunters, resident hunters, and non-consumptive users.
- It provides better accountability for the activities occurring on DNR-managed lands and promotes economic stability and job growth.

He urged the committee to move forward with SB 253, stating that it is a proven program compared to existing federal models and will provide positive revenue for the state. He opined that this important action should have been taken years ago.

[4:40:31 PM](#)

JOHN STURGEON, President, Safari Club International Alaska Chapter, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 253. He stated that the program proposed under SB 253 is a pilot initiative that will eventually be expanded across the state. He noted that the federal government has a similar program, which he believes is beneficial for the guiding industry, as it provides certainty for guides and their clients, particularly out-of-state clients. This program is a good business move for the state of Alaska, as it offers guides and clients the assurance of when and where hunting is possible. He also expressed support for the program's potential benefits for resident hunters, as it will reduce the number of guides operating in certain areas, thereby reducing conflicts. The program could lead to higher quality hunting experiences, as

guides working in designated areas will have a vested interest in managing the land carefully. He compared the program to the federal system, stating that similar programs are successful in ensuring that guides treat the land responsibly and adhere to laws. Additionally, these guides take a personal interest in preventing overhunting to ensure the sustainability of game for future years. He expressed hope that it will eventually be implemented statewide.

[4:42:07 PM](#)

PHILIP SHOEMAKER, representing self, King Salmon, Alaska, testified in support of SB 253. He stated that he has been guiding for 44 years, beginning in an era when the state regulated guide access. He noted that while the system was not perfect, it effectively managed and limited the number of guides, regulating their impact on wildlife. However, a recent decision dismantled that system, which led to an influx of guides, many from out of state, who were less concerned about the resources or local residents. This situation resulted in guides rapidly depleting game in certain areas, only to move on to new regions without regard for sustainability. SB 253 is a reasonable attempt to address these issues. He emphasized that SB 253 would require guides operating on state-managed lands to adhere to high personal standards and be restricted to specific areas. This, he believes, would both preserve and protect wildlife resources while providing better hunting opportunities for clients, as well as local and subsistence hunters. The legislation aligns with proven guide concession programs already managed by federal agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and BLM. These programs encourage guides to form strong relationships with local communities, including village councils and subsistence hunters, and to take responsibility for the areas in which they operate.

[4:44:46 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP closed public testimony on SB 253.

[4:43:48 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP held SB 253 in committee.

SB 248-BIG GAME COMMERCIAL SERVICES BOARD

[4:43:50 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."

[4:43:56 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP opened public testimony on SB 248; finding none, he closed public testimony.

[4:44:21 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP solicited a motion.

[4:44:24 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL moved to report SB 248, work order 33-LS1251\B, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[4:44:39 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR BISHOP found no objection and SB 248 was reported from the Senate Resources Standing Committee.

[4:45:24 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Bishop adjourned the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting at 4:43 p.m.