

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
February 24, 2025
1:36 p.m.

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CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Josephson called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 1:36 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Neal Foster, Co-Chair
Representative Andy Josephson, Co-Chair
Representative Calvin Schrage, Co-Chair
Representative Jamie Allard
Representative Jeremy Bynum
Representative Alyse Galvin
Representative Sara Hannan
Representative Nellie Unangiq Jimmie
Representative DeLena Johnson
Representative Will Stapp
Representative Frank Tomaszewski

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

Doug Vincent-Lang, Commissioner, Department of Fish and Game; Bonnie Jensen, Administrative Services Director, Department of Fish and Game.

SUMMARY

HB 53 APPROP: OPERATING BUDGET; CAP; SUPP

HB 53 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 54 APPROP: CAPITAL/SUPPLEMENTAL/FUNDS

HB 54 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 55 APPROP: MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET

HB 55 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

OVERVIEW: FY26 DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME BUDGET

Co-Chair Josephson reviewed the meeting agenda.

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HOUSE BILL NO. 53

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and loan program expenses of state government and for certain programs; capitalizing funds; amending appropriations; making supplemental appropriations; making reappropriations; making appropriations under art. IX, sec. 17(c), Constitution of the State of Alaska, from the constitutional budget reserve fund; and providing for an effective date."

HOUSE BILL NO. 54

"An Act making appropriations, including capital appropriations and other appropriations; making reappropriations; making appropriations to capitalize funds; and providing for an effective date."

HOUSE BILL NO. 55

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and capital expenses of the state's integrated comprehensive mental health program; and providing for an effective date."

^OVERVIEW: FY26 DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME BUDGET

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DOUG VINCENT-LANG, COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME, remarked that legislators should be confident that the funds being allocated to the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) were being spent in the best interest of the state. He introduced the PowerPoint presentation "Alaska Department of Fish and Game FY2026 Budget Overview" dated

February 24, 2025 (copy on file). He began on slide 2 and gave an overview of the statutory and constitutional mandates that governed DFG. He explained that the department was embedded in the state constitution, which was unique for a state agency. He noted that sustainability was also embedded in the constitution and was included in the department's statutes. He stated that the department's role was to manage, protect, maintain, improve, and extend the fish, game, and aquatic plant resources of the state in the best interest of the economy and general well-being of the state. He relayed that the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) and Board of Game (BOG) were in place to assist the department in balancing its goals.

Mr. Vincent-Lang continued to slide 3 and explained that the first element of the department's mission was management, which included providing opportunities to utilize fish and game resources, expanding existing programs, and developing new programs to increase harvest opportunities. He added that the department protected and improved habitat and access to fishing and hunting opportunities, worked to optimize participation in the activities, and sought to improve harvest outcomes. He stated that the department also protected the state's sovereignty to manage fish and wildlife resources.

Mr. Vincent-Lang added that the second part of the department's core services was stock assessment and research. He explained that management could not occur without an understanding of the resources being managed. The purpose of stock assessment and research was to ensure sustainability and maintain harvestable surpluses of fish and game resources. He noted that the department employed a wide array of tools, including sonars, weirs, aerial counts, and submersibles to assess ocean resources. He relayed that the department remained open to new techniques for assessing fish and wildlife resources.

Mr. Vincent-Lang shared that the final core service was public service and public involvement. He explained that the department worked to enhance public communication, provide information to customers, and involve the public in the management of fish and game resources. He noted that other states did not have the same level of public involvement as Alaska. There were more than 70 advisory councils throughout the state that advised the boards on management decisions. He stated that any person in Alaska

could submit a proposal to BOF or BOG regarding how the individual wanted resources to be managed. He stressed that the heightened levels of access and involvement in Alaska were unique.

Co-Chair Josephson shared that although he had managed to win a number of elections to become a legislator, he had once run for his local advisory board and had not been elected. He asked whether the local advisory boards had rule-making authority for their respective regions and whether the boards needed further authority to implement rules.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the local advisory boards had authority over a few specific areas. He explained that the local boards could eliminate antlerless moose hunts, could comment on any proposal submitted, and could submit comments to BOF and BOG. He stated that the rule-making authority of the boards was limited. He understood that Co-Chair Josephson was likely referring to trapping regulations, and he explained that municipalities had recently won a court case in the Alaska Supreme Court granting the authority to restrict trapping in certain instances for public safety reasons. He relayed that the department had a distinct public notice and outreach process and it managed licensing and permitting for participation in fishing, hunting, and trapping. He emphasized that the department not only encouraged public involvement in resource management but also promoted active participation in using the resources. The department offered loaner programs for fishing rods, crab fishing instruction for first-time participants, and ice fishing clinics held throughout the winter in different regions of Alaska.

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Mr. Vincent-Lang continued on slide 4 and introduced the department's leadership team. He stated that there were two deputy commissioners that reported to him. He relayed that Deputy Commissioner Rachel Baker was responsible for issues outside of Alaska's jurisdiction, specifically the 3-to-200-nautical-mile zone. He stated that Ms. Baker represented him on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and she was currently engaged in addressing the issue of chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea. He noted that Ms. Baker had recently participated in a contentious

meeting in Anchorage related to the development of a proposal that could restrict chum salmon bycatch in a corridor where Western Alaska chum salmon were frequently caught. He relayed that Deputy Commissioner Ben Mulligan handled internal state matters, such as the department's relationship with the Federal Subsistence Board, BOG and BOG, and he also oversaw the Habitat Section.

Mr. Vincent-Lang relayed that Ms. Bonnie Jensen was director of the department's Division of Administrative Services (DAS) and Mr. Joe Felkl was the department's legislative liaison. He also introduced Ms. Shannon Mason as the newly hired special assistant for communications. He stated that Mr. Forrest Bowers was the Acting Director of the Division of Commercial Fisheries, Mr. Israel Payton was the Director of the Division of Sport Fish (DSF), and Mr. Ryan Scott was the director of DSF. He continued that Ms. Kristy Tibbles served as the executive director for BOG and Mr. Art Nelson served as the executive director for BOF. He added that the department was close to hiring a new director of the Subsistence Division and anticipated final approval by the end of the week. He explained that the Habitat Section had been downgraded from a division to a section approximately eight years ago and that Mr. Mulligan now oversaw the section.

Representative Jimmie asked for confirmation that there had not been a subsistence director for the three years in a row.

Mr. Vincent-Lang replied that when he became commissioner, he decided not to fill the director positions for the Habitat Section and Subsistence Division because the positions were moved outside of the department. He stated that if he had rehired the directors, the department would have had to absorb the cost, which was not a good option. He indicated that the legislature added money to the department's budget last year to hire a subsistence director and the department had been recruiting for the past six months. He stated that the department was close to hiring someone for the role.

Representative Jimmie asked what happened to the money that was allocated for the position while it was not filed.

Mr. Vincent-Lang stated that the money was allocated to the Subsistence Division.

Representative Jimmie asked who had been leading the division in the absence of a director.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that he had been leading the division.

Representative Jimmie asked how much time Mr. Vincent-Lang had spent performing the duties of a subsistence director.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the division had a deputy operations manager who had been responsible for the financial duties. He stated that he had led most of the involvement in terms of policy discussions at BOF and BOG.

Representative Jimmie asked for more information on the active recruiting efforts. She asked how much time per week had been spent on the efforts and what the process looked like.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that a job offer had been made and that the department was waiting to hear back.

Co-Chair Josephson followed up on the second part of Representative Jimmie's question and asked how much time Mr. Vincent-Lang had spent performing the duties of the subsistence director.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that it was hard to estimate because subsistence was a priority for the state. He estimated that he had spent 30 percent of his time on subsistence-related matters. He stressed that the Subsistence Division was defined in statute and it was not a management division, but was in place to collect scientific information to be utilized by other departments.

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Representative Stapp asked if there was anything else that the legislature had asked the department to fund that had not been funded.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that he believed the department was on the right course to accomplish all of its goals. He relayed that the problem was not that the department did not want to fill the subsistence director position, but that it was looking for the right person. Many of the first

people he had contacted for the position had thought that the position involved opening and closing fisheries. The division needed a director with the knowledge and experience to navigate the science behind customary and traditional uses. He stated that he believed the department had found the right person.

Representative Allard asked whether the department had conducted interviews for the position and how many interviews had been conducted in recent months.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that he had spoken with approximately five to seven people. He thought that the committee would be pleased with the person he had chosen.

Co-Chair Josephson asked whether there were funds budgeted for a Habitat Section director in the event the department decided to hire one.

Mr. Vincent-Lang stated that the money had been removed in his first year as commissioner and it had never returned. He confirmed that there was no money in the budget for a director.

Co-Chair Josephson understood that there had been some concern about the lack of the director but that the commissioner was not requesting funding for the position.

Mr. Vincent-Lang confirmed that he was not asking money for the position.

Representative Jimmie asked what the salary was for the Subsistence Division director.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that it was about \$145,000.

Representative Jimmie asked for confirmation that the position had been vacant for about three years.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the legislature had approved the hiring of a director in the current fiscal year. The decision to hire a director had not been made in the past.

Co-Chair Foster asked if the money was still in the budget and if it accumulated over time.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the money had been in the budget since July 1, 2024, and had not been in the budget before that date. He explained that the department had been unable to hire for six months, meaning that six months of salary remained within the budget. He confirmed that the funding was still housed within the Division of Subsistence.

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Representative Galvin recalled seeing the director position in the department's organizational chart three years ago and she had inquired about it at that time. She recalled being told that the position was not needed and that the commissioner had been fulfilling the role himself. She asked why the position continued to appear in presentations. She thought that the inclusion meant it was part of the budget.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that in the past, the department had downgraded the Subsistence Division to a Subsistence Section. He explained that the department still had functional responsibilities under state statute to collect subsistence information. He confirmed that he had fulfilled the director role in the past and he had informed the committee at the time that he did not want to hire a director without funding in the budget. He explained that hiring a director without dedicated funding would have required the department to eliminate two subsistence resource specialist positions due to the cost of salary and benefits. He confirmed that he felt comfortable hiring a director now that the legislature had provided the funding.

Representative Hannan asked when the director positions had been eliminated.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the positions had been removed in 2018, when the governor [Governor Mike Dunleavy] was first elected.

Representative Hannan asked for confirmation that both the Director of Subsistence and the Director of Habitat positions had been vacant in 2018 and that the commissioner had chosen to eliminate the director positions in order to retain division staff.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded in the affirmative.

Representative Jimmie asked for a full explanation the duties of the subsistence director. She asked what duties the commissioner had been performing in place of the director.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that a director typically managed the division. He explained that the DFG's three major divisions each had hundreds of employees, while the habitat and subsistence divisions each had only a few dozen. He stated that the smaller size influenced his early decision not to fill the director position. He emphasized that hiring a director would have necessitated the termination of two staff members. He shared that a director primarily served to manage the personnel within a division, manage the functions related to research and subsistence, and oversaw the development of comments submitted to BOF and BOG when the boards considered regulatory proposals. The director also answered questions related to subsistence and the use of subsistence resources during board deliberations. He explained that he felt comfortable fulfilling the director's responsibilities because he attended most of the BOF and BOG meetings. He also reviewed the board's comments after the comments were submitted. He added that he was less involved in conducting the actual subsistence research, as the department employed a subsistence research director who reviewed research plans and surveys.

Representative Jimmie apologized for any confusion and requested a clear explanation of the specific subsistence duties that the commissioner had taken on when he assumed the role of director.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the duties involved overseeing the division, managing its finances, managing its personnel, and managing its functions. The functions included conducting research, securing funding for the research, and developing regulatory comments for BOF and BOG.

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Mr. Vincent-Lang advanced to slide 5 and relayed that when he first became commissioner, he asked his staff whether the department was using the state's funds wisely. He emphasized the importance of evaluating return on

investment (ROI) and explained that the department's analysis showed that a \$250 million investment generated an annual return of more than \$14 billion. He noted that approximately \$70 million of the investment consisted of general funds. He thought that department was successfully turning the resources it received into significant value. The proposed budget included new funding for fisheries and wildlife management and included no funding reductions. The new funding included allocations for vessel and aircraft maintenance, restoration of commercial fisheries, and support for surveys, assessments, and fisheries enhancement activities. He stated that the department would have dedicated maintenance funding for the first time, which was an addition he had requested for several years.

Mr. Vincent-Lang advanced to slide 6 and explained that the department was organized into seven different budget components. He directed attention to the facilities operation and maintenance components. He stated that the two components were new and had been implemented across all major divisions. He indicated that the structural change would help the department address specific component needs in compliance with AS 37.07.020(e), which required the costs to be presented separately.

Mr. Vincent-Lang continued to discuss the DSF budget component which was shown in yellow at the top left of the slide. He stated that DSF was the third largest division in the department. In 2024, the Anchorage Hatchery, Fairbanks Hatchery, and Southeast Hatchery components were created and separated from DSF, though the hatcheries remained under the management of the division. He stated that the division was heavily funded by U.S. Department of Fish and Game (USDFG) funds and was responsible for managing Alaska's recreational fisheries. He added that the division also oversaw in-river personal use fisheries across the state.

Mr. Vincent-Lang then described the Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) component, shown on slide 6 in green. He stated that it was the second largest division and that its budget covered two primary elements: wildlife conservation and hunter education public shooting ranges. He stated that wildlife conservation was also supported by USDFG funds and was responsible for managing and enhancing opportunities for hunting, trapping, and wildlife viewing. He noted that staff in DWC also managed three public shooting ranges and

provided hunter education programs throughout the state to support the development of new hunters and promote safe and ethical hunting practices.

Mr. Vincent-Lang continued to describe the Statewide Support Services component, shown in gray. He stated that the section included the Commissioner's Office, the Division of Administrative Services (DAS), BOF, BOG, advisory committees, the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, and facility maintenance components. He explained that each component served different functions. The Commissioner's Office provided policy direction, budgetary oversight, and supervision of department divisions and programs. He relayed that DAS provided administrative support to all divisions. He explained that BOF, BOG, and the advisory committees supported the boards' regulatory processes and informed the public on how to participate in those processes.

Mr. Vincent-Lang directed attention to the Habitat Section, shown in brown on the right side of the slide. He stated that the section performed a variety of duties, including the review of development projects and the issuance of permits under Title 16 for activities affecting fish-bearing waters.

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Mr. Vincent-Lang explained that he was the only commissioner in the state who had Title 16 authority over development activities in anadromous waterways. He did not think any other commissioner in the U.S. held such authority either. He shared that he had the significant responsibility to ensure that any development in anadromous waterways protected and conserved fish and game resources.

Mr. Vincent-Lang continued that the light blue section represented the Division of Subsistence. He clarified that it was now a division, although it had previously been a section. He stated that the division conducted research and was not a management division. He explained that its mission was defined under AS 16.05.094, which directed staff to scientifically gather, quantify, evaluate, and report information about customary and traditional uses of fish, game, and wildlife resources.

Representative Galvin noted that the commissioner had mentioned federal funding several times and it appeared that federal funds supported a significant portion of the department's work. She asked whether there were concerns about changes to federal investments in Alaska and whether the commissioner anticipated needing to request additional state funding to compensate for any reductions.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that he had concerns. He stated that approximately one-third of the department's budget was composed of federal funding. He explained that much of that funding was relatively secure, such as from the Dingell-Johnson Act and Pittman-Robertson Act. However, other sources were being monitored closely, such as marine mammal funding. He anticipated that federal agencies might tighten their budgets, retain more funding internally, reduce block grants to states, and potentially increase overhead rates. He emphasized that the department was monitoring the situation carefully.

Representative Hannan remarked that there was a limited budget for invasive species and she hoped that grants were helping. She noted that there was an increasing presence of both aquatic and terrestrial invasive species. There were large wild cats arriving in Alaska from Canada via major rivers and she pointed out that cougars were not listed as a species that could be hunted. She was concerned about the benefits and disease risks associated with the influx of such species. She asked where invasive species work was being conducted within the department and if additional resources were needed.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that most aquatic invasive species work was conducted by DSF and was funded through a combination of federal and Dingell-Johnson grants. He shared that wildlife species work fell under DWC. He explained that the department had experienced fewer issues with terrestrial invasive species, though one example involved mule deer entering from Canada. He stated that BOG had authorized the harvest of mule deer as long as the carcass was returned to Alaska. The department wanted to improve accountability regarding the movement of the animals and the potential introduction of ticks from Canada. He relayed that the urgency of the threat depended upon the animal. For example, the department was still assessing the spread of green crab. He acknowledged that eradication of green crab was likely unrealistic but

efforts were being made to minimize the impact of the crabs through various strategies.

Representative Bynum expressed concern about marine mammal predation on nearshore invertebrates in Southeast Alaska. He asked which section of the department would be responsible for monitoring the mammals and what funding allocations were being dedicated to both monitoring and studying the impacts on communities.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that marine mammals had originally been under state control until the passage of the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). He stated that the state had lost management authority, although it retained a trust responsibility. For example, the state had full management control of sea otters prior to the passage of MMPA and it had chosen to reestablish sea otters in Southeast Alaska. He stated that the intention had been to manage the otters as a functional part of the ecosystem. However, the federal government assumed authority following the passage of MMPA.

Mr. Vincent-Lang explained that MMPA required optimal sustained population of sea otters and rather than the established population of 20,000 to 40,000 sea otters across Southeast, the MMPA called for a population closer to 120,000. The requirement had made significant impacts on fisheries and other resources along the southeast coast. He explained that the department had made several unsuccessful attempts to amend MMPA to restore the concept of managing sea otters as a functional part of the ecosystem. He expressed hope that the new federal administration might provide another opportunity to address the issue. He did not think it was effective to manage a single species at the expense of the broader ecosystem. He emphasized that management should encompass the entire ecosystem to support the long-term viability of all species.

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Representative Bynum asked if the department was independently pursuing efforts to revisit the MMPA or whether efforts would involve collaboration with the Department of Law (DOL).

Mr. Vincent-Lang replied that he had been reaching out to the State of Washington, which had expressed interest in

resolving the issue due to significant marine mammal predation on several listed salmonoid species returning to the Columbia River. He stated that Oregon had also shown interest. He stated that DFG was seeking partnerships to address the issue. He agreed that DOL would play a role because of the overlap between the Endangered Species Act and MMPA. He relayed that DFG alone could not address the challenges with federal agencies and was instead addressing the challenges through the courts.

Representative Bynum indicated that he intended to follow up offline and requested that any information that could assist the legislature in supporting the department be provided to the committee.

Mr. Vincent-Lang added that the last time he attempted to revise MMPA, he received approximately 50,000 emails. He described it as a highly sensitive subject involving a wide range of stakeholders.

Mr. Vincent-Lang continued to the Division of Commercial Fisheries (DCF) on slide 6, which consisted of four regional components and one statewide component. He relayed that the four regional components were the Director's Office, Administrative Support Staff, Information Technology, and all laboratories, including the Pathology Lab and the Genetics Lab. He stated that the Genetics Lab had been established approximately 15 years ago and had become a world-class facility performing cutting-edge research. He added that other states were now emulating the work Alaska had pioneered. He acknowledged that challenges remained in understanding chum salmon but he expressed confidence that the department would resolve the challenges.

Mr. Vincent-Lang relayed that the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) would present its own budget and the following budget tables would not include CFEC's budget. He explained that the DFC managed the state's commercial fisheries and most of its subsistence and personal use fisheries. He turned the presentation over to DFG's administrative service director to review the budget details.

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BONNIE JENSEN, ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME, introduced and relayed that she would provide a department-level overview of the budget and explain the proposed changes included in the governor's FY 26 budget request. She continued to slide 7, which compared overall funding in the governor's proposed FY 26 budget to prior years. She stated that the next slides would address the details of the increases. She highlighted that there was a notable increase from FY 25 to FY 26 because the department received funding and authority increases in unrestricted general funds (UGF) of approximately \$1.4 million to cover salary, retirement, and health insurance costs. She reported that federal authority increased by about \$1 million, and federal fish and game funds increased by \$750,000. She added that other funding sources also received increases based on position budgeting, but the aforementioned increases were the most significant.

Ms. Jensen stated that the large increase in the "other" category was primarily due to expanded interagency authority for new facility maintenance components within DAS. She explained that the authority would allow DAS to receive rental payments from all divisions and use the funds to pay rent for both state-owned and non-state-owned facilities.

Representative Stapp asked what the total increase in UGF was.

Ms. Jensen responded that it was roughly \$1.4 million.

Representative Stapp asked how many positions were budgeted in the department.

Ms. Jensen responded that there were 1,140 positions.

Co-Chair Josephson asked for an explanation of the jump in federal management and previous actuals shown on slide 7. He assumed that it was related to wildlife conservation and sport fisheries.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the Pittman-Robertson funds for DWC had substantially increased because of increased firearms sales. The department had also secured additional federal funding for the Yukon River through earmarks supported by U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski's office. He added that new funding had also been received under the Pacific

Salmon Treaty to address mitigation efforts in Southeast Alaska.

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Ms. Jensen continued to slide 8 which provided a breakdown of allocations by line item. She stated that the column showing the difference between FY 25 and FY 26 included the governor's amended budget request, personal service increases, and line item adjustments. She emphasized that the increase in personal services was primarily due to salary increases, while the increase in the services category was attributed to new interagency receipt authority for facility components.

Representative Stapp noted that the insurance adjustment appeared to amount to approximately \$1,000 per position, assuming all positions were filled. He remarked that the cost seemed considerably higher than what other departments had requested for similar insurance premium adjustments. He asked why the department's number would be substantially higher than that of other departments.

Ms. Jensen responded that the figure was not exclusively for insurance but also included salary and other adjustments. She stated that she would need to review the change records to provide additional details.

Representative Stapp requested that the department break down the number and provide that information to the committee.

Ms. Jensen confirmed that she would follow up with the information.

Mr. Vincent-Lang added that most of the increase stemmed from an 8.5 percent salary increase under the Supervisory Unit agreement. He explained that the increase had been included in the governor's request. He clarified that the department was requesting only one new position and that the remainder of the personnel budget remained status quo, aside from the salary and union contract adjustments.

Representative Galvin understood that there was a significant increase in the services line from FY 24 to FY 26, amounting to approximately 66 percent growth. She asked if there had been a change in the definition of the

services category or a change in the department's accounting practices. She also asked for clarification on the distinction between "services" and "personal services."

Ms. Jensen responded that approximately \$8 million of the increase from FY 25 to FY 26 was due to interagency receipt authority. She stated that other changes would require a more detailed review.

Mr. Vincent-Lang recalled that during the transition from FY 24 to FY 25, the legislature had an extensive discussion about the placement of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill (EVOS) program within the department. He stated that the program had ultimately been reabsorbed into the department. He recalled that \$20 million was distributed to various entities conducting research. He noted that he would follow up to confirm the accuracy of the figure but believed that it was accurate as of three or four years ago.

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Representative Hannan asked for a summary of the guidance provided by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) regarding how interagency receipts for maintenance and operation were to be handled. She clarified that she was not asking for the full OMB directives, only a summary that explained why approximately \$8 million now appeared in the budget differently.

Ms. Jensen responded that the department had to present the expenditures separately, which required the creation of a new component. She explained that the department had created multiple new components, some within separate results delivery units (RDU), to account for labor, trades, and crafts positions. She stated that the positions had to be moved into the new components while remaining within their respective divisions. She noted that all payments for rental facilities could now be processed through a single component within DAS. She explained that the process allowed DAS to collect payments from other divisions, issue rent payments from one component, and facilitate a more transparent budget process.

Mr. Vincent-Lang commented that Representative Galvin's earlier question about the difference between personal services and services had not been answered. He explained that personal services referred to personnel housed within

DFG, which corresponded with line 100 of the department's budget. The services category referred to contracts issued by the department.

Ms. Jensen continued on slide 8. She clarified that the department was adding two positions and cutting one, which contributed to the increase in UGF.

Ms. Jensen advanced to slide 9 which provided a visual breakdown of the department's funding sources. She explained that the largest funding source was federal funding, which was shown on the left side of the slide. Federal funding accounted for 35 percent of the overall budget and consisted of both competitive and non-competitive grants. The second largest funding source was classified as other and made up approximately 33 percent of the budget. She relayed that UFG represented 28 percent and included general fund match. The smallest source was designated general funds (DGF) at 4 percent, which included commercial crew license fees and test fish revenue. She stated that the pie chart on the right side of the slide further detailed the breakdown of the other funding source. She noted that fish and game funds constituted a significantly higher share at 48 percent, followed by interagency receipts at 31 percent. She added that statutory designated program receipts, capital improvement project receipts, EVOS funds, and interagency oil and hazardous waste funds represented smaller portions of the other category.

Mr. Vincent-Lang continued on slide 10 and explained that the department also received federal Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson funds generated by excise taxes on fishing licenses, hunting gear, guns, and ammunition. He noted that the programs had been created by the U.S. Congress approximately 70 years ago to help rebuild fish and wildlife populations, which had been decimated at the time. He explained that in order for states to access the funds collected from the excise taxes, states were required to provide a guaranteed match of 25 percent against the 75 percent federal contribution.

Mr. Vincent-Lang stated that Alaska had chosen to meet the requirement by dedicating the Fish and Game Fund (FGF) as its match source. He clarified that funds for FGF were generated through sales of hunting and fishing licenses, tags, and related revenues. The department had utilized a

successful model since statehood in collecting fish and game resources using FGF as a match. He stated that the voters of Alaska had amended the state constitution to dedicate FGF as a funding source, which made it one of the few dedicated funds in the state. He emphasized that it had been a successful model in terms of fish and game management and that all 50 states benefited from it.

Mr. Vincent-Lang explained that the purpose of the Pittman-Roberston program was to restore, conserve, manage, and enhance wild birds and wild mammals and their habitats. He stated that public use and access to wildlife resources was also a goal. There was a large program that built new boat launches, access points, and waysides to get hunters into the field, which included hunter education development and shooting ranges. He noted that the funds were distributed based on apportionment and Alaska received the maximum apportionment because it was a large state. He clarified that although Alaska did not have as many people as other states, it still received a 5 percent match due to its size. He added that later slides would show that fisheries funding had remained relatively stable, but funding for hunting had increased substantially.

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Co-Chair Josephson asked for confirmation that Pittman-Robertson funds could not be used for intensive management.

Mr. Vincent-Lang replied that the funds generally were not used for intensive management because there were significant constraints on how the funds could be used.

Co-Chair Josephson asked why the constraints were in place.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that federal agencies had different management criteria for federal lands and conducting intensive management on federal lands was an entirely different process than the process for state lands. He explained that almost all intensive management programs were carried out on state lands under state authority. Federal funds could be used to collect baseline data to inform intensive management activities, but the actual implementation of intensive management was funded through a surcharge on hunting licenses that the legislature had approved.

Co-Chair Josephson recalled that the surcharge had originated from a bill by former State of Alaska Representative Dave Talerico approximately ten years earlier. He asked if the surcharge was the only funding source used for intensive management.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the department could use either the surcharge or FGF.

Co-Chair Josephson asked if the funds were considered constitutional funds.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded in the affirmative. He explained that the department primarily used the intensive management surcharge for most intensive management activities.

Co-Chair Josephson understood that BOG was considering adding sheep to the list of prey species for which an intensive management program could be launched. He asked if his understanding was correct.

Mr. Vincent-Lang replied that BOG was considering adding sheep because sheep populations were in poor condition statewide. He stated that the board was looking for ways to rebuild sheep populations more quickly but had not yet reached a conclusion. He noted that almost all current intensive management programs were focused on caribou or moose.

Mr. Vincent-Lang moved to slide 11 which detailed the Dingell-Johnson program. He relayed that the program focused on fish and was intended to support fish management and restoration. He noted that the 75 percent federal and 25 percent state match applied.

Mr. Vincent-Lang proceeded to slide 12, which addressed FGF. He stated that the department had dedicated FGF in order to guarantee the required 5 percent match for the federal surcharges. He asserted that the state had secured a dedicated funding source for fish and game management and fulfilled its constitutional responsibility for sustainable management. There had been no costs to the state in terms of general fund match for DWC or DSF, which he described as an impressive success. He added that diversion of the funds was prohibited and that doing so would result in the loss of access to Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson funds.

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Representative Jimmie remarked that many Alaskans loved to hunt and that she was an active hunter as well. She noted that in her district, residents paid fees for hunting licenses and tags but had difficulty accessing the areas where they intended to hunt. She explained that some residents in her district, District 38, could not afford the expense of traveling four hours upstream by river. She asked how the department could assist her district in improving hunting access, especially for those living far from hunting grounds.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that he had spoken with the president of the Calista Corporation earlier that morning and many of the same issues had come up, including competition for resources near communities. He could not close areas around communities, as that was a BOG decision. However, he had discussed with the Calista Corporation how to develop a proposal for BOG that would allow for preferential access for Alaska residents versus non-residents in certain waterways. He noted that the proposal had already been implemented in the Togiak area and that the department would assist Togiak through the process. He reiterated that he could not take such actions unilaterally but noted that he could close other hunts to provide for the subsistence priority when it was not being met. He clarified that it depended on whether the area in question was federal or state land. For example, some of the land in the Kuskokwim region was in the Yukon Delta.

Representative Jimmie relayed that in her district, when hunting was not permitted there were problems with moose populations growing and entering villages, which put residents at risk. She emphasized that Alaska Native residents should have the right to hunt when possible, especially when nothing would be wasted. She asked how the department could help.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the department maintained open and closed seasons for moose hunting. He stated that moose hunting was typically closed during calving periods and reopened after mating had concluded. Hunts were sometimes opened outside of normal seasons for ceremonial purposes. He emphasized that the department was cautious about not overharvesting the moose population. If an extended season was requested for a specific purpose, the request would have to go through the BOG process.

Representative Jimmie asked for clarification that if a moose entered a village and appeared to be a threat, residents could not take action and shoot the moose. She asked if the only option was to call DFG and ask what to do.

Mr. Vincent-Lang replied that an animal could always be killed in defense of life and property. He stated that if an individual were threatened, the individual had the right to take the animal. However, he explained that the animal could not be kept for personal use and had to be surrendered to the state.

Representative Jimmie asked for confirmation that meat could not be kept by the individual who shot the animal, even if the animal had posed an immediate threat in the village. She asked whether the meat had to be sent into the department, despite the high cost of air freight and time.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the meat had to be surrendered to the nearest DFG office or protection office. He stated that the meat would most likely be donated to a local food pantry.

Representative Jimmie asked why Alaska Native people could not keep the meat.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that he understood the concern and stated that the law had been written to prevent individuals from claiming they had taken an animal in defense of life and property as a pretext for hunting out of season. He affirmed that the state prioritized protecting life and property and that animals taken under such circumstances were typically redirected for public benefit through local food pantries to avoid waste.

Representative Jimmie relayed that she had more questions but appreciated the response.

Mr. Vincent-Lang commented that the department wanted to avoid people in Anchorage shooting moose in defense of life and property and then keeping the moose.

[2:28:18 PM](#)

Representative Stapp thought that Representative Jimmie had made a good point. He stated that residents in communities such as Quinhagak or Tuluksak had to travel several hours upriver to get to a DFG office or freight office. He stated that although he lived in Fairbanks and understood there was nuance to the situation, it seemed unreasonable to tell someone in Quinhagak that they had to wrap up the meat and air freight it to Bethel, where it might go to a pantry. He asked if the policy should be reconsidered or refined.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that he had never experienced a situation where an enforcement officer required an individual to air freight meat to Fairbanks or another distant location to surrender it. He stated that officers would work with local residents to facilitate surrender of the meat within the local community.

Representative Stapp stated that although a situation had never occurred, that did not mean it could not happen. He asked for confirmation that such a situation was possible, even though it had never occurred.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded in the affirmative.

Co-Chair Schrage stated that a constituent had expressed concern to him about the price of hunting tags for out-of-state residents who wanted to hunt in Alaska. He asked for an explanation of how the pricing structure was determined for out-of-state hunting licenses and tags for various hunts. He asked whether the department attempted to remain competitive, whether auction values were considered, and how he could justify the current rates to his constituent.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the rates were set by the legislature and were codified in statute. He explained that the department reviewed the rates routinely. Under the Commerce Clause, the department was required to ensure that any increased rates for non-residents could be justified by the expenses incurred in managing the resource. He explained that the department typically reviewed the rates every two or three years and would return to the legislature with suggested adjustments as necessary. However, setting the rates was ultimately the legislature's responsibility.

Co-Chair Schrage asked for more information about the department's recommendations to the legislature and if the

recommendations were provided in a report. He asked if the department thought that there was room to increase the rates and whether the costs justified a substantially increased rate for some tags.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the last time the department reviewed the rates, the differential between resident and non-resident fees was aligned with the costs associated with managing the resource. He stated that he could not recall the exact date of the review but believed it had occurred one or two years ago. He would provide the report to Co-Chair Schrage.

Representative Allard stated that she wanted to return to the discussion of subsistence and the importance of not abusing the system. She wanted to ensure that when an animal was taken in defense of life or property, the law would not be exploited. She asked whether the department had observed abuse of the law in any part of Alaska.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the Alaska State Troopers (AST) always investigated when an animal was taken out of season to determine whether it had been taken in defense of life or property. He stated that if an individual could prove that the animal was killed in defense, the meat was usually surrendered and taken into possession by the troopers. He added that the troopers did not want to handle the meat any more than anyone else and would look for the nearest available distribution point. He indicated that the meat was typically distributed to the community through a church or similar organization when possible.

Representative Allard asked if there had been a situation in a remote area where the troopers had coordinated with the village to decide what to do with the animal.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that there had been an incident involving muskox in Nome. He stated that a muskox had killed an individual who was defending his dog team and that some residents now lived in fear of muskox in certain areas. The department had worked with the local police department to establish a process that allowed residents to take an animal and then surrender it if the residents felt threatened. The meat would then be distributed to the local community. He emphasized that the goal was to ensure people were not living in fear of wildlife, while also preventing abuse of the defense of life and property justification. He

stated that the department expected individuals to follow state laws and regulations for the sake of sustainability, but an individual could take the animal to protect their life and property.

Representative Allard stated that she wanted to ensure that there was some flexibility with the law in some communities. She clarified that she did not mean more lenient enforcement, but rather context-specific application.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the department typically tried to return the meat to the community and often extended hunting seasons when there was a harvestable surplus. He explained that in the current year, the department had extended two to four hunting seasons for moose in villages where the harvestable surplus had not been met. He stated that the department received requests to extend seasons due to factors such as poor snow conditions.

[2:35:07 PM](#)

Ms. Jensen continued on slide 13 which summarized similar information presented in earlier slides and provided a further breakdown of each funding source that made up the department's funding categories. She noted that the slide showed an \$8 million increase for facilities maintenance and rental payments. She clarified that she had not included the changes in the upcoming slides that displayed the department's change records.

Co-Chair Josephson asked Ms. Jensen to repeat her last point.

Ms. Jensen repeated that the \$8 million increase would not be reflected in the change record slides that would be shown later.

Ms. Jensen continued to slide 14, which provided a breakdown of the department's budget for each division and section. She stated that the largest division was DCF with a total budget of \$88 million. The next largest was DWC at \$71 million, followed by DSF at \$55 million, and then Statewide Support Services at \$34 million. She relayed that the Habitat Section and the Division of Subsistence Research were relatively small in comparison to the others.

Ms. Jensen advanced to slide 15, which showed a historical overview of budgeted positions over the past decade. She explained that the department's position count had declined steadily but there was a recent increase in the past few years. However, the department's budget had grown during the same period, resulting in remaining staff taking on additional responsibilities. She noted that staff were at capacity and that additional positions had been added in recent years to help address the workload and provide support for the department's ongoing work.

Ms. Jensen moved to slide 16, which displayed the department's position vacancy history. She reminded the committee that the department operated with field seasons, which varied depending on the assessments and field work being conducted. She stated that roughly half the workforce for DCF and DSF consisted of permanent part-time seasonal employees. Seasonal employees peaked during the field season, resulting in low vacancy rates, and vacancy rates rose during the off-season. Approximately 74 percent of the vacancies in the two divisions were part-time seasonal positions. She added that recruitments were underway and she encouraged members to refer any interested individuals. The department also faced challenges in filling information technology (IT) positions and similar roles in rural areas due to housing and connectivity issues. The graph on the slide showed a large dip in the vacancy percentage between FY 17 and FY 19. She explained that during that time, 91 positions had been deleted, leading to a decrease in the overall vacancy percentage.

[2:38:37 PM](#)

Representative Tomaszewski asked how many of the department's 1,440 employees currently worked remotely or teleworked from home.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the department had been flexible with allowing employees to work from home. The department had since been working to return employees to the office. He stated that a vast majority of employees had returned to the office but there were several hard to fill, high demand positions where individuals often preferred to work independently, such as analyst programmers. The department was more flexible with such positions because it would be difficult

to replace the workers. He shared that the only time he would agree to sign a telework agreement was if there was a personal issue, such as someone had a sick family member who required care. He reiterated that the department was trying to bring all other workers back into the office.

Representative Tomaszewski asked if Mr. Vincent-Lang could follow up with the exact number of remote workers.

Mr. Vincent-Lang asked if Representative Tomaszewski was interested in part-time workers or full-time workers.

Representative Tomaszewski did not have a preference.

Mr. Vincent-Lang would follow up with the numbers for both.

Co-Chair Schrage asked for more information about recent reports indicating that 25 percent of the state workforce consisted of out-of-state employees. He acknowledged that the individuals performed good work but stated that he would prefer to see the jobs filled by Alaskans. He asked to what extent DFG experienced a similar reliance on out-of-state workers to fill its positions.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the only circumstances under which he currently signed out-of-state telework agreements were for family or medical issues that required care. He added that in some cases, he might allow it for schooling if the department needed someone with specialized training. He emphasized that almost all of the department's employees were now located in-state unless there was a compelling family or medical reason.

Representative Allard understood that the commissioner was no longer approving out-of-state telework agreements unless there was a medical emergency, family circumstance, or specialized requirement. She stated that she disagreed with much of what the commissioner had said and asked whether the employees already working out of state were being brought back. She also asked whether employees currently teleworking from home were being required to return to the office part-time or full-time. She pointed out that he had used the word "trying" and she remarked that he was in a position to compel action.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that nearly all of the telework agreements that had been signed early during the COVID-19

pandemic had been short-term. He acknowledged that some individuals wanted to work from home for a variety of reasons and that the department wanted to retain good employees. However, he stated that the department needed connectivity between management and research staff. The department was working to bring people back into the office and to reestablish a routine of in-person work. He added that the department was being somewhat flexible and was not necessarily requiring five days per week in the office, but it did require that employees be present and performing their work functions. He stated that telework agreements were now tied to performance. If employees were not meeting performance expectations, they were required to work in the office. If employees were performing well, they were permitted to work outside the office one or two days per week. He reiterated that the department's goal was to bring people back into the office.

Representative Allard relayed that she was focusing on the use of the word "trying" and asked whether employees were being told to return to the office but were refusing, or if it meant something else. She asked for clarification on what was meant by "trying."

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that employees were returning to the office.

[2:43:01 PM](#)

Ms. Jensen continued to slide 17 which showed highlights for the FY 26 budgetary changes for DCF. She explained that the department was requesting a one-time increment in the Fisheries Management component in Southeast to maintain groundfish projects for assessment and management obligations in order to maintain current operations. She clarified that groundfish included species such as rockfish, pollock, and cod, which were non-salmon species.

Ms. Jensen continued that in the central region for the same component, the department was requesting funding to add a full-time Boat Officer III position to serve as second-in-command on a newly acquired research vessel. She relayed that Trident had donated a vessel to the department the previous year and it was currently being retrofitted for use in the upcoming season.

Representative Galvin asked if the department could provide a ballpark estimate on the cost of a fisheries management survey. She noted that the slide showed a general fund authority for surveys and assessments and that the figure appeared to be \$716,000. She asked whether the amount covered one survey or multiple surveys.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that in the final hours of the previous legislative session, the department had lost funding for CFEC. He explained that the funds had supported a variety of stock assessment programs across the state and that some of the programs cost approximately \$100,000, while others were closer to \$60,000. He relayed that the governor had included general fund monies in the current year's budget to reverse the unanticipated \$716,000 cut. As a result, the department would be able to restore the research programs that had been cut. He clarified that the \$716,000 figure did not represent a single program but instead encompassed a series of different programs. He reiterated that the previous year's funding cut had resulted in the loss of research programs throughout the state, and the governor had restored funding in recognition of the importance of the work.

Representative Galvin understood that the cost of a single survey could vary but was generally between \$60,000 and \$100,000. She understood that several surveys needed to be conducted and that the department was now trying to catch up. She asked if her understanding was correct.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded in the affirmative. He added that some marine assessment programs could cost \$100,000 to \$200,000 each.

Co-Chair Josephson shared that he had received a visit from a representative of the Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation regarding a depleted capital budget item for chum assessments. He relayed that the organization was seeking to move the item into the operating budget as a \$500,000 base item to continue work conducted out of Dutch Harbor that also impacted Bristol Bay. He asked whether the commissioner was familiar with the item.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that he was familiar with the item and presumed that the visitor had likely been Mr. Michael Link. He explained that the research in question aimed to assess the intercept of chum salmon returning to

Western Alaska. He stated that genetic samples were being taken in the trawl fishery to determine the proportion of Western Alaskan chum versus Asian chum being intercepted. He reported that a test program conducted the previous year had shown promise. Although the program was still some time away from full implementation, it was providing valuable insights into the spatial distribution and timing of the intercept. The results had laid the groundwork for a proposal before the council to establish a conservation corridor to help Western Alaskan chum migrate through the B-season trawl fishery.

Co-Chair Josephson understood that the item was not funded in the budget. He asked whether it was concerning that it had not been included in the budget.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the research was still ongoing at the time the budget had been prepared. He stated that the department was only now receiving briefings on the results of the work. He noted that the project had been funded as a capital item for several years.

[2:48:02 PM](#)

Ms. Jensen continued on slide 17 and detailed the statewide fisheries management component. She explained that three changes were being requested. First, the department was requesting \$450,000 in UGF for the state vessel, vehicle, and aircraft maintenance project. The division operated six research vessels and five aircrafts and it was necessary to contract out maintenance work for the assets. Secondly, the department was requesting \$716,000 to support survey and assessment projects across the state.

Ms. Jensen warned that if the division did not receive the increment, the following projects would be eliminated: the Judd Lake Weir, the Togiak Herring Assessment, the Prince William Sound Trawl Survey, the Chelatna Lake Weir, the Lower Yukon Test Fishery, Kobuk River Test Fishery, the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) Sonar Funding, and the Sandy River Weir. She noted that the division would also exit its Craig office and the Kuskokwim Area Bethel Test Fishery would be reduced. She added that the Craig office had multiple divisions housed in it and the office would not be completely closed. The last item on the slide was a one-time increment to replace equipment in the genetics conservation laboratory. She explained that the equipment

supported in-season genetic stock identification used to inform fisheries management and it had exceeded its useful life. She reported that the department was requesting \$175,000 from FGF to replace the equipment.

Ms. Jensen moved to slide 18 which detailed the request for DSF. She stated that the Anchorage and Fairbanks hatcheries were requesting \$100,000 in federal authority and \$100,000 in FGF authority to maintain enhancement activities. She noted that the RDU did not currently have any FGF authority, which was necessary to match federal funds.

Representative Allard asked whether the reference to Anchorage also included the Chugiak and Eagle River area.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the Anchorage hatchery served all of Anchorage and Southcentral Alaska.

Co-Chair Josephson asked Ms. Jensen to repeat the last part of her earlier statement regarding the absence of something in the budget.

Ms. Jensen repeated that RDU did not currently have any FGF authority in FY 25. She explained that the department was requesting the authority in FY 26 to match federal funds.

Ms. Jensen moved to slide 19 and stated that the Division of Subsistence was requesting \$100,000 in statutory designated program receipt authority to support current and future mission-critical projects. She noted that two projects would be located in the Yukon and Prince William Sound regions and would involve collaboration with the North Pacific Research Board (NPRB).

Ms. Jensen proceeded to slide 20 and reported that there was a request for the Habitat component of \$100,000 in federal authority to support the pursuit of federal funding opportunities. She explained that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) award had obligated a majority of the current federal authority, and the additional request would allow the Habitat component to apply for and accept federal opportunities as they arose.

[2:52:27 PM](#)

Ms. Jensen advanced to slide 21 and stated that DWC was requesting \$217,000 in FGF authority to maintain its fleet

of ten aircrafts and various other vehicles, including snow machines and four-wheelers. She added that the division was also requesting \$112,000 in UGF to fund a biologist position associated with the guide concession permit and SB 189 [passed in 2024 by the Thirty-Third Alaska State Legislature].

Representative Hannan shared that she understood the need for initial funding for the guide concession permit program, but she thought that the implementation of SB 189 was intended to create a program that would eventually be self-supporting. She asked whether the intention for the program to be self-sustaining applied only to licensure or also to management.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the intention was for the program to become self-supporting over time, but establishing the program would require upfront funding and dedicated resources. He explained that SB 189 had passed after midnight on the last day of the previous session, and the department was waiting to see how the courts would address the legality of the legislation. He stated that the bill had passed previously without a fiscal note and that the current version aimed to incorporate the funding component from the outset. He agreed that the program would likely evolve to become self-funded through fees, but initial implementation would require financial support from both DFG and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Representative Hannan asked if there was an estimate on how long it would take for the guide concession program to become self-sustaining. She asked whether it would take five years, ten years, or some other amount of time.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that he recalled that the program was intended to be piloted in one area first. He stated he believed that Unit 19 was the initial area targeted for implementation and that the program would gradually expand. He agreed that most of the work would be front-end loaded and estimated that five years would likely be a reasonable timeframe for the program to become self-supporting.

Co-Chair Josephson asked where Unit 19 was located.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that Unit 19 was located near the upper Kuskokwim River and next to Denali. He stated

that it was an area where there had been significant unguided hunting conflicts and where unguided hunting had already been closed. He explained that the department was working to find a path forward and it was likely to be the first location considered for the guide concession program.

Ms. Jensen proceeded to slide 22, which reflected changes in statewide support services. She reported that the department was requesting the deletion of a full-time administrative officer position within DAS. She explained that the reduction represented a \$28,000 UGF cut. The position had been funded with 25 percent UGF and 75 percent interagency authority. The remaining funding would be redirected to support department-wide operational expenses, including rental costs. Additionally, BOG and BOF were requesting a \$14,000 increase in UGF to support the guide concession permit program to cover increased expenses related to upcoming meetings. She reported that the department was also requesting a multi-year operating appropriation unit to allow it to accept fishery disaster funds from the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission. She clarified that the zero-dollar amount listed for the request indicated that it was an unlimited appropriation.

[2:56:52 PM](#)

Ms. Jensen moved to slide 23 and relayed that the Division of Subsistence had submitted one FY 25 supplemental request to support a partnership with the Chugach Regional Resources Commission. The request was to gather mission-critical subsistence resource use data in Prince William Sound.

Mr. Vincent-Lang advanced to slide 24 and detailed the capital budget requests. He explained that when he became commissioner approximately seven or eight years ago, he had identified that the department had a solid understanding of freshwater systems but lacked information on marine conditions. The department had since established a growing Marine Science Program (MSP). The department expected to request that the program be incorporated into the base budget the following year but would seek one additional year of capital funding in the current request. The program had made significant progress in understanding what occurred during the first year of salmon life in the ocean.

Mr. Vincent-Lang noted that the Equinox vessel was now funded and that the department would potentially fund a second position to support the vessel's use. He described the Equinox as a key tool in conducting marine science research. He relayed that MSP began its work in the area just north of the Yukon River and early findings showed the department could begin to predict salmon returns three to four years in advance by studying the survival of juvenile chum and Chinook salmon in nearshore waters. He explained that the department had since expanded the work to areas south of the Yukon and was now extending the research into the Gulf of Alaska. He expressed that the program was yielding positive results and he hoped that the committee would continue to support it.

Mr. Vincent-Lang relayed that there was a petition for Chinook salmon in the Gulf of Alaska to be covered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). He reiterated that the department had a solid understanding of freshwater conditions but limited knowledge of marine environments. He stated that questions remained about stock interception and genetic composition in marine waters. He explained that the department intended to begin addressing the questions over the next three to five years. He reported that approximately 100,000 Chinook salmon were still harvested in marine fisheries. Nearly all freshwater fisheries in the Cook Inlet, Kodiak, and the Alaska Peninsula had been closed. He emphasized the importance of understanding the stock composition of the remaining marine fisheries.

Representative Galvin asked for more information the \$5.6 million UGF request. She noted that the presentation did not indicate a defined time period and it appeared to be indefinite. She asked whether capital budget appropriations typically allowed up to five years to expend the funds.

Ms. Jensen responded that capital budgets generally allowed five years for expenditures. The request represented the largest funding year and the amounts were anticipated to decrease in subsequent years. She reported that the total capital budget request was just under \$22 million.

Mr. Vincent-Lang added that it was important to understand the composition of stocks harvested in marine fisheries. He noted that many of the stocks were potentially not Alaskan in origin but may instead be from the Columbia River and other regions. He stated that the department needed to

begin piecing the information together. He noted that the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund had received a significant funding increase in recent years due to the federal Build Back Better infrastructure initiative. He stated that the department used the funding for a variety of purposes, including subsistence research, stock rebuilding assessments, culvert replacements, and other statewide activities. He explained that the program operated as a grant administered by the department and consisted entirely of federal receipts.

Mr. Vincent-Lang continued on slide 24 and detailed the Pacific Salmon Treaty fishery mitigation. He stated that approximately four to eight years ago, Alaska had agreed to a reduction in allowable salmon harvests under treaty as part of a negotiated settlement. In exchange, the federal government provided funding to offset lost revenue to fishers. The department used mitigation funds in Southeast Alaska to produce chum salmon at private nonprofit hatcheries, which created additional harvest opportunities that did not count against the state's treaty allocation. He added that the proceeds from the sale of state-owned vessels and aircraft were typically returned to the general fund, but the department preferred to retain the funds for reinvestment.

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Mr. Vincent-Lang continued on slide 25 and reported that the department was requesting \$150,000 in FGF authority and \$100,000 related to the conservation program to reinvest proceeds into new equipment as the existing equipment aged.

Mr. Vincent-Lang continued to slide 26 and stated that the department wanted to ensure proceeds from federal purchases were returned to FGF. He explained that DOL had advised that any equipment originally purchased using FGF revenue must have its resale proceeds returned to the fund. He explained that the department was also requesting Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson funds. He stated that federal law required the department to invest a specific amount each year in angler access, which was matched by FGF dollars. He relayed that such projects included the construction of boat launches across the state, such as the North Douglas boat launch in Juneau.

Mr. Vincent-Lang expressed that there was a \$500,000 mission-critical replacement request for outboard motors and skiffs that had exceeded their useful life. He stated that 95 percent of the department's inventory required replacement, and the request was intended to begin addressing the backlog.

Representative Tomaszewski noted that there was mention on slide 5 about turning a \$250 million investment into an annual return of over \$14 billion. He remarked that such a return would be impressive even for the Permanent Fund. He asked for more information about the \$14 billion figure.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the \$14 billion included returns generated by the commercial fisheries sector and the associated employment across the state. The total for sport fish included both charter and non-charter sport fishing activities. The wildlife figure included hunting and wildlife viewing, tag receipts, and the overall economic contributions of visiting hunters. He stated that the department had compiled specific data but had removed it from the presentation due to time constraints. He would follow up with a breakdown of the figure.

Representative Jimmie asked for clarification on how DFG used subsistence research and monitoring to inform BOF in its decision-making. She noted that the number of management plans incorporating subsistence information had decreased significantly, from 180 in the year 2000 to only 75 in 2025. She asked if there was less subsistence information available. She asked for an explanation of the "failure."

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that he did not believe the department was failing. He relayed that the department used its available funding to inform decisions. He acknowledged that the department did not update subsistence use surveys annually in every area, but it was currently conducting more surveys than it had in the past four or five years. He reported that the department had pursued funding through NPRB and federal subsistence programs. He noted that a significant survey effort was underway in the Yukon and expressed pride in the department's progress over the last few years in securing additional federal funding for subsistence.

[3:05:11 PM](#)

Representative Jimmie opined that the department did not appear to be catching up because her district had recently experienced poor subsistence seasons that had left many families with empty freezers and unfilled storage sheds. She asserted that the department should not claim to be making progress but instead should express a willingness to try.

Representative Galvin asked for more information about equipment listed on slide 26. She noted that the slide listed skiffs and outboard motors under the capital budget as mission-critical equipment. She understood that slide 21 included a request for aircraft and four-wheelers. She asked whether the request was for repairs or purchases. She requested clarification as to why one category was included in the operating budget and the other in the capital budget.

Ms. Jensen responded that the requests fell under different divisions and served different purposes. She stated that the capital budget request was intended to replace equipment that had reached the end of its useful life, whereas the request in DWC was to maintain the department's current inventory.

Mr. Vincent-Lang stated that when he became commissioner, he had not realized that he would be overseeing an Army, an Air Force, a Marine Corps, and a Navy. He explained that each entity's equipment required significant maintenance. He expressed surprise at the high cost of dry-docking one of the department's major research vessels to make it seaworthy again.

Representative Stapp shared that based on his experiences in interior communities such as Galena, Koyukuk, Ruby, and Newtok, many residents perceived the state's management of fish as a failure due to the lack of available fish. He asked for clarification that the department's intent was to protect and support subsistence fishing and hunting rights and to ensure adequate subsistence harvests for residents of areas such as the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. He stressed the importance of ensuring a plentiful subsistence season and he thought everyone shared in that goal.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that he fully agreed with Representative Stapp. During the recent agreement with

Canada regarding the settlement on the Yukon, the department had sought to rebuild salmon runs to support both subsistence harvests and, eventually, harvestable surpluses for commercial fisheries. He stated that the department planned to allow limited fishing opportunities for cultural purposes going forward. He noted that regulations were currently out for review that would enable the department to issue educational permits to allow fish to be distributed to Alaskans in order to preserve cultural practices, even when escapement goals were not met.

[3:09:10 PM](#)

Representative Jimmie relayed that her comments were not intended to be unkind, but she had genuine concern. She asserted that management decisions made by BOF were negatively impacting her district. She explained that the fishing schedule was unpredictable and that short openings made it difficult for residents to access their fish camps. She noted that the cost of fishing was high, such as buying the necessary gear and gas. She explained that much of the harvest on the Kuskokwim River went to waste because fishing occurred during the rainy season instead of the dry season. Residents in the community of Chevak were unable to fill their freezers because the designated fishing area was too far from the river.

Representative Jimmie emphasized that summer was meant to be a time when families gathered to work together, reinforcing bonds across generations. She expressed concern that current management practices were undermining tradition, leading to family disconnection and a loss of cultural continuity. She had passed on the knowledge she had learned from her grandmother to her daughter and hoped to do the same with her grandson. She asked why the department had failed to build a subsistence calendar that aligned with the needs of her district, noting that July was typically rainy while June was dry and more suitable for fishing. She argued that the issue persisted even when fish were accounted for and asserted that elders in the area held valuable knowledge. She recommended that the department connect traditional knowledge with scientific data to create more effective solutions.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that he was restricted from managing fisheries in the Kuskokwim River because the area fell under the authority of the Federal Subsistence Board.

He noted that he was sensitive to the issue and expressed regret that he could not manage subsistence fisheries in the region. He shared that he had attempted to open a sockeye fishery on the Kuskokwim River for subsistence purposes but the effort was met with a restraining order. He expressed hope that management could be unified under a single authority in the future. He shared that he had recently visited an individual in the lower Yukon area where the department had had allowed dip net fisheries as a way to protect king salmon migrating into the Yukon territories of Canada. He had spoken with a resident who used a dip net to teach his son how to fish, even though it was not a traditional gillnet. He thought that such efforts aimed to preserve cultural practices while rebuilding fish runs and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Co-Chair Josephson asked whether BOF had any authority over the seasonality of fishing related to the rainy season.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the state was currently banned from managing fisheries within the refuge in the Kuskokwim River area.

Representative Jimmie asked who had the management authority.

Mr. Vincent-Lang responded that the Federal Subsistence Board currently held management authority and that the state was challenging the matter in court in hopes of returning to a single management system.

Co-Chair Josephson thanked Representative Jimmie and stated that he appreciated her remarks and that her comments had been heard.

HB 53 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 54 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 55 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Josephson reviewed the agenda for the following day's meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

3:13:20 PM

The meeting was adjourned at 3:13 p.m.