

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 28, 2025

3:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Cathy Giessel, Chair
Senator Matt Claman
Senator Forrest Dunbar
Senator Scott Kawasaki
Senator Shelley Hughes
Senator Robert Myers

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Bill Wielechowski, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S): BOARD OF FISHERIES

- HEARD

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S): STATE ASSESSMENT REVIEW BOARD

- HEARD

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 18

Urging the Governor, the Department of Natural Resources, division of forestry and fire protection, the Department of Public Safety, municipalities of the state and relevant wildfire planning and response agencies, and the Alaska delegation in Congress to prepare for the 2025 wildfire season.

- HEARD & HELD

CS FOR HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 15(CRA)

Urging the Governor, the Department of Natural Resources, division of forestry and fire protection, the Department of Public Safety, municipalities of the state and relevant wildfire planning and response agencies, and the Alaska delegation in Congress to prepare for the 2025 wildfire season.

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 174

"An Act establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council in the Department of Fish and Game; relating to management of invasive species; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SJR 18

SHORT TITLE: WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS

SPONSOR(s): RESOURCES

04/02/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/02/25	(S)	RES
04/14/25	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
04/14/25	(S)	Heard & Held
04/14/25	(S)	MINUTE(RES)
04/28/25	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: HJR 15

SHORT TITLE: WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS

SPONSOR(s): HOLLAND

03/24/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/24/25	(H)	CRA
04/01/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
04/01/25	(H)	Heard & Held
04/01/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
04/03/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
04/03/25	(H)	<Bill Hearing Canceled>
04/08/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
04/08/25	(H)	Moved CSHJR 15(CRA) Out of Committee
04/08/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
04/09/25	(H)	CRA RPT CS(CRA) 6DP
04/09/25	(H)	DP: HOLLAND, PRAX, RUFFRIDGE, HALL, MEARS, HIMSCHOOT
04/25/25	(H)	TRANSMITTED TO (S)
04/25/25	(H)	VERSION: CSHJR 15(CRA)
04/28/25	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 174

SHORT TITLE: INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

SPONSOR(s): DUNBAR

04/14/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/14/25	(S)	RES, FIN

04/28/25

(S)

RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

OLIVIA IRWIN, Appointee
Board of Fisheries
Nenana, Alaska

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

VIRGIL UMPHENOUR, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Irwin to the Board of Fisheries.

SHANNON MARTIN, Executive Director
Kenai River Sportfishing Association
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Irwin to the Board of Fisheries.

KACEY HOPSON, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Irwin to the Board of Fisheries.

CRAIG CHYTHLOOK, Fisheries Policy Director
Native Peoples Action
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Irwin to the Board of Fisheries.

LOUIS SILAS, Member
Minto/Nenana Fish and Game Advisory Committee
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Irwin to the Board of Fisheries.

SAMUEL LAFFEY, Appointee
State Assessment Review Board
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the State Assessment Review Board.

INTIMAYO HARBISON, Staff
Senator Cathy Giessel
Alaska State Legislature

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a brief presentation on SJR 18.

REPRESENTATIVE KY HOLLAND, Alaska, District 9
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HJR 15.

NORM MCDONALD, Deputy Director
Division of Forestry and Fire Protection
Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions on HJR 15.

AL BARRETTE, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 174.

KIM TITUS, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 174.

RACHEL LEVY, Staff
Senator Forrest Dunbar
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a sectional analysis for SB 174.

CASEY DINKEL, Manager
Alaska Plant Materials Center
Division of Agriculture
Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information related to SB 174.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:30:49 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL called the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Myers, Kawasaki, Dunbar, Hughes, Claman, and Chair Giessel.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) : BOARD OF FISHERIES

[3:31:49 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of the governor's appointment of Olivia Irwin to the Board of Fisheries.

CHAIR GIESSEL provided an overview of the Board of Fisheries. It is a seven-member board. Members should be Alaska residents and are chosen based on their interest in public affairs, good knowledge and ability in the field of action of the board. The board strives for a diversity of opinions. Compensation is an administrative range 20(a) for board meetings and half of that amount for non-board meetings. The board meets roughly 4-5 times per year for a total of 33-45 days.

3:33:30 PM

OLIVIA IRWIN, Appointee, Board of Fisheries, Nenana, Alaska, introduced herself and said she grew up between Alaska and Missouri. She shared that she attended culture camp in the summers, where elders taught her to process fish. She provided a brief overview of her education and work experience, including collaborations with the Tanana Chiefs Conference and the University of Alaska Fairbanks related to fish and game policy. She said she has studied state and federal management. She has attended Board of Fisheries and Board of Game meetings. She is the co-chair of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) Minto/Nenana Advisory Committee.

3:35:21 PM

MS. IRWIN said she has worked closely with regional ADFG advisory committees and other organizations to develop proposals and comments that create a unified voice for the region. She briefly listed the advisory committee meetings that she has attended. She said attending meetings of the Fairbanks Advisory Committee, Tanana/Rampart/Manley Advisory Committee, and the Yukon Flats Advisory Committee has been integral to understand what is happening throughout the river. She emphasized that understanding the fisheries requires knowledge of what users are seeing as the fish are coming in. She shared that she worked closely with the Wood Bison Restoration Project, which provided useful experience working with advisory committees, various organizations, state agencies, and the Board of Game to develop a plan. She participates weekly at the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) Working Group. She shared that she worked alongside ADFG staff and Board of Fisheries members to legalize "hook and line" as subsistence gear throughout the Yukon River.

MS. IRWIN briefly discussed how that experience taught her to work toward compromise on regulations. She shared that following this experience, she felt empowered to further engage in

policymaking and take part in management meetings. This is one reason she would like to be a Board of Fisheries member. She shared that she would like to promote the public process, encourage public participation, and to support the board in developing strategies to better engage with user groups.

MS. IRWIN stated that the primary reason she is seeking appointment to the Board of Fisheries is to protect and promote healthy Alaskan fish stock. She indicated a specific interest in Chinook (King) salmon. She stated that the Yukon River is in its seventh year of a Chinook salmon fishing moratorium. She shared that she comes from a long line of fishermen, and her family includes users from each group. She is personally impacted by the loss of the Yukon River's commercial fishery. She shared that her aunt and uncle previously operated a commercial fish wheel in Nenana alongside many other families. She said that she knows of only one person currently operating a fish wheel. She expressed a desire to preserve and protect Alaska's fisheries resources and the fisherperson's way of life. She said she is young, enthusiastic, and deeply knowledgeable of the regulations. She is willing to put in the necessary time to complete work outside of board meetings and is a good listener. She stated that, if confirmed, she would make decisions based on science and stakeholder experience and would follow the statutes that guide the promotion of healthy, thriving fish stocks. She expressed gratitude for the support she has received from various organizations regarding her appointment to the board.

[3:38:44 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked for Ms. Irwin's position on hatcheries, particularly those located in Southern Alaska.

[3:39:13 PM](#)

MS. IRWIN said statewide discussion on this issue is needed. She said that she has begun to research the issue and is not prepared with an answer at this time. She shared her intention to review the relevant data prior to meetings addressing the issue of hatcheries. She added that she would be sure to engage with stakeholders closest to that resource. She noted that the Board of Fisheries has limited authority over fisheries; therefore, she would defer to the legislature for most hatchery-related decisions.

[3:39:49 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS noted that Ms. Irwin's resume includes a reference to "decriminalizing subsistence practices." He asked her to elaborate on this.

[3:40:00 PM](#)

MS. IRWIN said that, in multiple river systems throughout the state, the State of Alaska has not met the needs of subsistence users. She said that according to AS 16.05.258, the legislature must prioritize meeting the needs of subsistence users. She explained that when subsistence users' needs are not met, many turn to illegal fishing opportunities to meet those needs. She emphasized that she would like to ensure that Alaska residents closest to a resource receive access and opportunity to that resource.

[3:41:03 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS noted that the Yukon River has been closed to fishing for several years. He asked what circumstances would be appropriate to shut down a subsistence fishery - recognizing that shutting down the fishery is a last resort.

[3:41:26 PM](#)

MS. IRWIN replied that she would need more data and information, including in-season reports and data from fisheries managers, to make that decision.

[3:41:51 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL opened public testimony on Ms. Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

[3:42:27 PM](#)

VIRGIL UMPHENOUR, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Irwin to the Board of Fisheries. He said he served three terms on the Board of Fisheries and was a long-standing member of the Pacific Salmon Commission. He said he owns a meat and fish processor in Fairbanks and previously purchased fish from Ms. Irwin's family. He briefly discussed the status of the salmon fisheries in Northern Alaska.

[3:45:03 PM](#)

SHANNON MARTIN, Executive Director, Kenai River Sportfishing Association, Soldotna, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Irwin to the Board of Fisheries. She gave a brief overview of the Kenai River Sportfishing Association (KRSA). She said Ms. Irwin's is well-spoken and is familiar with KRSA through her work on the Minto-Nenana Fish and Game advisory committee. In that role, Ms. Irwin gained valuable experience working closely with the Board of Fisheries, staff from Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), and stakeholders from all

user groups. She emphasized that firsthand knowledge and familiarity with the Board of Fisheries processes are essential for potential board members. She said in interviews with KRSA, Ms. Irwin has shown herself to be deeply committed to the sustainable management of Alaska's fisheries and aligned with KRSA's core priority of delivering more fish to Alaskan rivers. She encouraged support of Ms. Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

[3:48:17 PM](#)

KACEY HOPSON, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Irwin to the Board of Fisheries. She shared that she has known Ms. Irwin for several years and has also worked with her in a professional capacity. She stated that Ms. Irwin is familiar with the Board of Fisheries process and is deeply committed to making fisheries resources accessible to all Alaskans. She shared her belief that Ms. Irwin is extremely thorough in her research, particularly when an issue will impact Alaskans. She said Ms. Irwin is dedicated to ensuring that Alaskans who depend on salmon can practice their livelihood. She shared her belief that Ms. Irwin brings a perspective that is underrepresented on the Board of Fisheries. She opined that this perspective is much needed in the present time of declining salmon numbers in Alaska's rivers. She opined that Ms. Irwin would be a strong asset to the Board of Fisheries and encouraged support for her appointment.

[3:50:06 PM](#)

CRAIG CHYTHLOOK, Fisheries Policy Director, Native Peoples Action, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Irwin to the Board of Fisheries. He said he is a lifelong subsistence user and sport fisherman. He provided a brief overview of Native Peoples Action. He stated that Ms. Irwin has consistently demonstrated exceptional dedication to service of communities through her work with Minto-Nenana ADF&G Advisory Committee, among others. He said Ms. Irwin has shown leadership, commitment, and the ability to work with all stakeholder groups. Her methods are inviting, constructive, and solution oriented. He emphasized that Ms. Irwin's appointment would bring a needed perspective and innovative solutions to the Board of Fisheries. He stated that Ms. Irwin's ability to collaborate and solve problems would be invaluable to insuring the long-term health and prosperity of Alaska's fisheries.

[3:52:29 PM](#)

LOUIS SILAS, Member, Minto/Nenana Fish and Game Advisory Committee, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of the

appointment of Ms. Irwin to the Board of Fisheries. He provided a brief overview of his work. He said Ms. Irwin is a dedicated advocate for the communities she represents. She brings a wealth of experience and a deep understanding of local and regional fisheries issues. He emphasized the work Ms. Irwin has done as co-chair of the Minto/Nenana Fish and Game Advisory Committee, which has been instrumental in ensuring the community's voices are heard at the state level. She has also worked tirelessly to support the advancement of traditional indigenous practices. He emphasized that her knowledge of traditional ways of life - combined with her knowledge of the complex regulatory systems - makes her an invaluable asset to the Board of Fisheries. He said Ms. Irwin's unique perspective and dedication will contribute significantly to the board's goal of responsibly and sustainably managing Alaska's fisheries.

[3:54:53 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL closed public testimony on the governor's appointment of Olivia Irwin to the Board of Fisheries.

[3:55:01 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES commented on Ms. Irwin's resume, indicating pleasant surprise that she enjoys researching fishing and hunting regulations. She surmised that Ms. Irwin is serious about her work supporting Alaska's fisheries and added that her resume is impressive.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) : STATE ASSESSMENT REVIEW BOARD

[3:55:38 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of the governor's appointment of Samuel Laffey to the State Assessment Review Board.

CHAIR GIESSEL provided an overview of the State Assessment Review Board. The board consists of five members. The board conducts oil and gas property assessment appeal hearings on values set by the Alaska Department of Revenue (DOR). Meetings are held twice yearly. Members must be knowledgeable about the assessment procedures for pipeline transportation of gas and unrefined oil.

[3:56:58 PM](#)

SAMUEL LAFFEY, Appointee, State Assessment Review Board, Anchorage, Alaska, said he is an attorney employed by the state of Alaska Department of Administration Office of Public Advocacy. He briefly described his work, explaining that he

primarily works with indigent Alaskans with a focus on "child in need of aid" cases. He acknowledged that an appointment to the State Assessment Review Board does not directly align with his work experience. He addressed this by explaining that he studied oil and gas law while obtaining his law degree and master's degree in business administration (MBA) in Wyoming. He stated that he is good with numbers and using best practices and standards to determine the value. He said he applied to the State Assessment Review Board because a large proportion of the board's work is reviewing statutory law passed by the legislature, regulations created by the Alaska Department of Revenue, and case law related to previous board decisions and DOR assessment decisions. He briefly discussed a case brought by the City of Valdez related to assets. He said he is seeking appointment to the board because his legal background enables him to provide a different type of analysis. He briefly discussed how his law education and experience would be an asset to the board.

[4:01:53 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS asked about Mr. Laffey's experience assessing real estate in general - and oil and gas real estate in particular.

[4:02:14 PM](#)

MR. LAFFEY answered that he has had some experience assessing real estate in general, though none related to oil and gas or pipelines specifically. He said his understanding of pipelines comes from his academic studies.

[4:03:05 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN noted that he is also a lawyer. He said that Mr. Laffey's resume is broad, with experiences covering nearly all areas - except oil and gas (and oil and gas valuation). He asked if the legislature should be concerned that Mr. Laffey has so little (if any) experience doing the work that is required by the State Assessment Review Board.

[4:03:44 PM](#)

MR. LAFFEY said he is not qualified to answer that question. He said this determination is up to the legislature.

SENATOR CLAMAN said he recognizes that this determination is ultimately up to the legislature. He shared that in his legal career, he has successfully represented clients in areas of law in which he previously had no experience. He opined that it is fair to ask why Mr. Laffey is interested in joining the board, given his lack of experience. He clarified that he is requesting

reassurance regarding why he should not have concerns about Mr. Laffey taking on this role. He opined that Mr. Laffey is the only person qualified to answer that question.

[4:05:23 PM](#)

MR. LAFFEY answered that, while he does not have the direct oil and gas experience that is typical of board appointees, he is a fast learner who dedicates himself to successfully completing the tasks he is assigned. He shared that he has dedicated personal time to reading briefs for current cases before the board. He shared his belief that he has been an asset to the board since his appointment began. He opined that this is evidence of his ability to serve on the State Assessment Review Board.

[4:08:33 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN suggested focusing on the work Mr. Laffey has done since beginning to work with the board. He noted that oil and gas valuation is vastly different from the child in need of aid cases that have made up much of Mr. Laffey's work experience. He asked if Mr. Laffey has had difficulty assessing the issues, reading Alaska Statutes, and making balanced and thoughtful decisions during his time on the board.

[4:09:13 PM](#)

MR. LAFFEY replied that he has had some difficulty with oil and gas terminology. He said he has had to consider arguments, research, and take notes to understand core issues and offered examples. He indicated that this is a standard attorney practice.

[4:11:42 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI asked for more information on how Mr. Laffey would make decisions related to taxable property value and appeals.

[4:12:08 PM](#)

MR. LAFFEY stated his intention to closely follow the Alaska Department of Revenue (DOR) statutes and regulations to determine what qualifies as assessable property and the procedure for determining the value. He briefly discussed the appeals process and said he would balance grey area between DOR and the petitioner.

[4:14:11 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL noted that Mr. Laffey was admitted to the Alaska bar in April 2021. She stated that the assessment of oil and gas

property and transportation facilities is critical to the State of Alaska. She pointed out that this industry is the state's primary funding source. She emphasized the importance of the State Assessment Review Board and explained that, for these reasons, the board does not have a public member. She stated that board members are knowledgeable of assessment procedures for pipeline transportation of gas and unrefined oil. She asked what motivated Mr. Laffey to move to Alaska.

[4:15:19 PM](#)

MR. LAFFEY replied that he has always wanted to live in Alaska and briefly shared why. He said he wanted to practice law in a place that had both urban and rural areas. He indicated that Alaska's small bar was appealing. He stated that he values access to rural areas and the outdoors. He briefly discussed the challenges of relocating.

[4:17:57 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL opened public testimony on the appointment of Mr. Laffey to the State Assessment Review Board; finding none, she closed public testimony.

[4:18:17 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL solicited the will of the committee.

[4:18:22 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN stated that [in accordance with AS 39.05.080,] the Senate Resources Standing Committee reviewed the following and recommends the appointments be advanced to a joint session for consideration:

State Assessment Review Board
Samuel Laffey - Anchorage

Board of Fisheries
Olivia Irwin - Nenana

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

[4:18:48 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL found no objection and affirmed the advancement of the governor's appointees to the full legislature for consideration.

SJR 18-WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS

[4:19:01 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 18 Urging the Governor, the Department of Natural Resources, division of forestry and fire protection, the Department of Public Safety, municipalities of the state and relevant wildfire planning and response agencies, and the Alaska delegation in Congress to prepare for the 2025 wildfire season.

[4:19:47 PM](#)

INTIMAYO HARBISON, Staff, Senator Cathy Giessel, Alaska State Legislature, said he would give a short presentation on SJR 18 highlighting the fire risk in Anchorage compared to west coast states and other areas in Alaska.

[4:20:05 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slide 2 and briefly discussed the January 2025 Palisades Fire in Los Angeles, California.

[4:20:14 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slide 3, containing a California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) map with the Palisades fire overlaid. He explained that the fire began in a high-risk area and moved into a low-risk area, where it caused severe devastation.

[4:20:27 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slide 4, containing an August 12, 2024, excerpt from the Salem Statesman's Journal titled, "Oregon wildfires: Record for acres burned broken, Crater Lake closes north entrance." He pointed out that, according to the article, in 2024 Oregon broke its total fire burn record.

[4:20:38 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slide 5, containing a map of the Harney County Falls Fire (2024) in Oregon. He explained that this fire moved from a high-risk area to a moderate-risk area.

[4:20:45 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slide 6, containing a map of the Cow Valley Fire/Durkee Fire, Oregon. He explained that this fire moved from a moderate-risk area to a high-risk area, where it burned out of control.

[4:21:05 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slides 8-9. Slide 8 contains an excerpt from an article titled, "Munson Creek Fire near Chena Hot Springs still cooking with hot, dry weather." Slide 9 is a map of the Munson Creek Fire, Fairbanks. He explained that this fire began in a moderate-risk area and moved into a high-risk area, causing structural damage and devastation to that region.

[4:21:24 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slide 10, containing excerpts from newspaper articles on the Swan Lake (2019) and Funny River (2014) fires. He said that the Swan Lake fire burned more than 162,000 acres.

[4:21:44 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slide 11, containing maps of the Swan Lake (2019) and Funny River (2014) fires. He noted that both fires (indicated in brown) began in low-risk areas and burned out of control.

[4:22:01 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slides 12 - 13. Slide 12 contains an excerpt from an article titled, "McHugh fire now estimated at 842 acres." Slide 13 contains a map of the McHugh Creek Fire (2016), Turnagain Arm. He explained that this fire burned in a low-risk area. He noted that the fire burned for an extended period because fire crews were unable to reach the location due to difficulties navigating the terrain and high wind conditions.

[4:22:33 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slide 15, containing the Anchorage Bowl fire risk assessment map. He explained that the following slides would zoom in on specific areas of this map.

[4:22:45 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slide 16, containing the East Anchorage/Hillside fire risk assessment map. He explained that the dark brown indicates areas of extreme fire risk. Light brown indicates high fire risk. He added that light green and dark green indicate moderate and low risk, respectively.

[4:22:03 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slide 17, containing the East Anchorage/Hillside fire risk assessment map. He directed attention to the red circle, which indicates an area located near the Campbell Tract.

[4:23:11 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slide 18 and discussed the Campbell Tract Fires. He explained that there have been fires in the Campbell Tract area in 2008, 2019, and 2022. He stated that those fires had the potential to burn out of control. He briefly directed attention to the map on the previous slide to illustrate how the fires could have burned throughout the Campbell Tract and up the hillside.

[4:23:40 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slide 19, containing the East Anchorage/Hillside fire risk assessment map, and discussed the wildfire risk to schools, homes, and businesses. He pointed out that Service High School and South High School are highlighted on the map and noted that there are many homes and businesses in between these two schools. This area is a mix of extreme, high, and moderate fire risk. He recalled earlier slides and emphasized that fires can spread between areas with different fire risk levels; therefore, all of the area contained on the map contains the potential for severe fire risk.

[4:24:14 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slide 20, containing the Girdwood fire risk assessment map. He stated that all of Girdwood is considered high or extreme fire risk. He explained that Girdwood relies on volunteer firefighters. In the event of a fire burning out of control, a response unit from the Anchorage Fire Department would take 45 minutes to arrive. He stated that such a lengthy response time is not ideal.

[4:24:49 PM](#)

MR. HARBISON advanced to slide 21:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Conclusion

- This resolution highlights the need for focus on wildfire education, mitigation, and preparation in Alaska. This is to avoid large fires seen near or in population centers in California, Oregon, and other parts of Alaska from occurring in Anchorage.
- Wildfires can move between high and low risk areas particularly when those areas are adjacent to one another.

- With increased wildfire education, mitigation, and preparation Anchorage can avoid the fate of other communities lost to fires in recent years.

[4:25:53 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL noted that the maps and the modeling included in the presentation came from the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Alaska.

[4:26:00 PM](#)

[CHAIR GIESSEL held SJR 18 in committee.]

HJR 15-WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS

[4:26:06 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of CS FOR HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 15(CRA) Urging the Governor, the Department of Natural Resources, division of forestry and fire protection, the Department of Public Safety, municipalities of the state and relevant wildfire planning and response agencies, and the Alaska delegation in Congress to prepare for the 2025 wildfire season.

[4:26:53 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KY HOLLAND, Alaska, District 9, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, introduced himself.

[4:27:07 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND said the presentation for SJR 18 provides a good framework for the work being done to address wildfires in Alaska. He advanced to slide 2, containing a map of Alaska indicating significant wildland fire potential:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The Growing Wildfire Threat in Alaska

- Unusually dry conditions in South Central Alaska
- Increased wildfire risk due to rising temperatures and lower precipitation.
- High-risk communities in WUI areas: Anchorage, Fairbanks, Kenai, Soldotna, and others.
- Challenges: Limited water sources, difficult terrain, single-access roads.

- Benefits of Action: Reduce firefighting costs, economic damage, and loss of lives and homes.

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND said dry conditions may lead to an early, more significant wildfire season. This information was shared with Anchorage area community councils as well as state and local fire jurisdictions to raise awareness and concern about the potential danger and to encourage early planning efforts. He directed attention to the map on slide 2 and said the potential for wildfire danger is extending beyond typical high danger areas.

[4:28:55 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES referred to the map included on slide 2, pointing out that it was issued on March 3, 2025. She said the map was reissued one month later and commented that the wildfire threat is ongoing.

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND said conditions change and the map is updated monthly.

[4:29:13 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND advanced to slide 3:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Strengthening Interagency Communication and
Coordination

Key Recommendations in HJR 15:

- State and local agencies review and update wildfire response plans.
- Fire departments, forestry officials, and public safety officers collaborate on equipment, drills, and evacuation plans.
- Pursue investments in aerial firefighting resources, water reservoirs, and critical road ROW maintenance.
- Federal support is crucial—We urge Congress to increase funding for Alaska's wildfire prevention efforts.

SENATOR HOLLAND briefly discussed the challenge of managing wildfire treatment and evacuation in areas where a single road leads to many homes. He emphasized the importance of ensuring the right of way is cleared and that road capacity allows for the simultaneous evacuation of residents and arrival of emergency equipment.

[4:31:44 PM](#)

SENATOR HOLLAND advanced to slide 4 and said that HJR 15 addresses both government agency preparedness and public preparedness:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Community Engagement and Public Preparedness

Key Recommendations in HJR 15:

Proactive Community Actions:

- Expand Firewise USA participation & homeowner education.
- Promote "Ready, Set, Go!" evacuation preparedness program.
- Increase early detection efforts and emergency notifications.
- Organize community wildfire drills and evacuation route planning.

[4:33:06 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND advanced to slide 5:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Call to Action

2025 Wildfire Season has started!

- State and Local Leaders: Implement wildfire mitigation strategies now.

- Residents: Take part in preparedness programs and report risks.
- Congress and Federal Agencies: Support Alaska with funding & resources.
- First Responders and Public Safety Officers: Participate in interagency training and drills.

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND stated that the 2025 wildfire season was declared early.

[4:34:29 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND concluded that HJR 15 is a call to action for the 2025 wildfire season. He expressed hope that this would help raise awareness of the long-term work that is needed. He briefly discussed historical urban core fires and the subsequent changes that mitigated those fire risks. He expressed hope that large, urban perimeter fires would be similarly managed. He said that, in the future, large fires do not need to equal loss of life and major infrastructure losses. He stated that his goal is to bring awareness and to encourage support of the work being done to reduce wildfires.

[4:36:31 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said it is horrific to think of the impacts of large urban fires and expressed appreciation for HJR 15. She briefly discussed the National Interagency Fire Center maps for upcoming months. She expressed concern that campfires could potentially lead to wildfires. She said unhoused populations often start campfires in treed areas, which increases the potential for wildfires. She asked if this had been addressed.

[4:37:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND shared his understanding that the Municipality of Anchorage has been considering this issue and deferred the question.

[4:38:06 PM](#)

NORM MCDONALD, Deputy Director, Division of Forestry and Fire Protection, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Palmer, Alaska, said the Division is working with the Municipality of Anchorage to identify high-risk areas. Work on some of those locations is scheduled to begin in spring of 2025.

[4:38:49 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI noted recent federal announcements that states would assume responsibility for disaster response funding. He asked how the State of Alaska would address this. He commented that that Alaska has many urban-wilderness interface areas, which create additional risk.

[4:39:45 PM](#)

MR. MCDONALD said the Division of Forestry and Fire Protection (DFFP) is aware of this issue and is awaiting additional information. He said the National Association of State Foresters provides a channel for the State of Alaska to communicate its support for upcoming changes - or any concerns - to federal agencies.

[4:40:24 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI recalled extensive wildfires in the 2010's and the effort to build fire breaks, roads, and access points for fire equipment that resulted from those fires. He asked whether this is something that DFFP is continuing to work towards - or whether those fire mitigation efforts have become lax due to a lack of funding.

[4:40:59 PM](#)

MR. MCDONALD said the DFFP continues to invest a great deal of effort and energy into the fuels program. He briefly discussed fire protection efforts at Murphy Dome, including a fuel break to protect subdivision residents. He said fuel breaks make up a large percentage of DFFP funding. There are fuel breaks around the state (from Fairbanks to Homer) with both state and federal funding sources. He said preparedness and fuels mitigation are a large part of the mission of DFFP.

[4:41:55 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL held HJR 15 in committee.

SB 174-INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

[4:42:07 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 174 "An Act establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council in the Department of Fish and Game; relating to management of invasive species; and providing for an effective date."

[4:43:01 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR, speaking as the sponsor of SB 174, provided a brief overview. He said this legislation would help prevent, eradicate, and control invasive species in Alaska and would

reduce their long-term impacts. He provided several examples of invasive species and their impacts.

[4:44:19 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL opened public testimony on SB 174.

[4:44:33 PM](#)

AL BARRETTE, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 174. He said that AS 16.05.255 gives the Board of Game some authority on this issue. The board has created regulations under 5 AAC 92.029. He suggested adding a Board of Game member to the council. He expressed concern that SB 174 would result in two competing statutes.

[4:46:45 PM](#)

KIM TITUS, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 174. He said he is a retired wildlife professional and provided a brief overview of his work around the state. He said he is an avid user of Alaska's fish and wildlife resources and expressed a desire to keep [invasive species] out of Alaska. He expressed support for the creation of the Alaska Invasive Species Council and for broad representation on the proposed council; however, he questioned why there is no federal land management agency representation. He noted that SB 174 designs a complex, non-regulatory coordination system. He said there is a fair amount of invasive species work occurring in the state, including work done by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

MR. TITUS noted that 5 AAC 92.029 restricts the introduction of non-native wildlife and associated diseases into the state. DNR has a strategic plan for invasive weed and agricultural pest management and prevention. He expressed concern related to the definitions of "invasive species," "invasive species management," and "non-native species." He said these definitions do not consider the natural progression of species into and/or across the state. He offered examples to illustrate these concerns. He opined that SB 174 is overly complex insofar as it applies to activities that are already occurring in the state.

[4:49:48 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL closed public testimony on SB 174.

[4:50:02 PM](#)

RACHEL LEVY, Staff, Senator Forrest Dunbar, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented the sectional analysis for SB 174:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SECTIONAL ANALYSIS

SB 174: INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

Version A (34-LS0901\A)

4.23.2025

"An Act establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council in the Department of Fish and Game; relating to management of invasive species; and providing for an effective date."

Section 1 - Amends AS 16.20 to add three subsections. AS 16.20.800 establishes the 11-person Alaska Invasive Species Council; outlines the council's role in managing invasive species; and establishes the form, function, membership, responsibilities, and expectations of the council. AS 16.20.810 establishes the invasive species response fund as an account in the general fund. AS 16.20.850 defines "council," "department," "invasive species," "manage invasive species," and "non-native species."

Section 2 - Sets a date of repeal for the new subsections of July 1, 2035

Section 3 - Amends the uncodified law of the State of Alaska to add a new section detailing (a) the appointment and terms of members by the governor and (b) the timing of the first meeting within 90 days of appointment of members and the number of meetings required in the initial year at four.

Section 4 - Sets an immediate effective date under AS 01.10.070(c).

[4:51:15 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR explained that his interest in invasive species management began with a slug species in Cordova. He shared that he attended a meeting of the Alaska Invasive Species Partnership (AKISP) in 2022. He said the partnership has identified a need for greater coordination of the invasive species work being done in the state. He stated that many professionals working on this issue are in support of the proposed council. Eighteen states have similar councils. He surmised that none of those states rely on their state's natural resources to the degree that

Alaska does. He emphasized Alaska's pristine environment and said invasive species have the potential to do great harm. He said he is working with another legislator on invasive species issues, specifically European green crab, which is threatening red king crab populations. He reiterated that professionals who work with invasive species requested the creation of the council.

[4:52:55 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN said European choke cherry is an invasive species impacting the Anchorage area. He explained that, in addition to removal, there are concerns related to the use of chemicals. He commented that protecting the natural habitat comes with a diverse set of challenges.

[4:53:26 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR replied that as a member of the Anchorage Assembly one he worked to ban the sale of European choke cherry (*Prunus padus*). He explained that the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF) planted European choke cherry for erosion control. He emphasized that this is an example of a lack of communication and coordination between departments. He briefly discussed the negative environmental impacts of European choke cherry.

[4:54:25 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES asked why AKISP could not address this issue, rather than creating a separate entity.

[4:54:45 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR replied that AKISP has expressed frustration at the limited number of invasive species addressed in Alaska Statutes. He explained that AKISP has informed the department that additional species should be added; however, those changes have not been made. He shared his understanding that AKISP believes creating an official council within ADF&G would be a more effective way to address this issue. He noted that private organizations are working to address invasive species management; however, creating a council would provide an official forum through which to address these issues.

[4:55:45 PM](#)

[CHAIR GIESSEL reopened public testimony on SB 174.]

[4:56:17 PM](#)

CASEY DINKEL, Manager, Alaska Plant Materials Center, Division of Agriculture, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Palmer,

Alaska, provided information related to SB 174. He said the Alaska Plant Materials Center hosts and works with Cody Jacobson, the state's invasive plant coordinator to manage invasive species throughout the state. He briefly discussed Elodea (waterweed) an invasive aquatic weed that Mr. Jacobson has been working on eliminating. He noted that Elodea has been a focus for the past several years. The Division of Agriculture is unable to address all invasive plant issues across the state simultaneously. He stated that there are many invasive species in Alaska's agricultural sector, including orange hawkweed and bird vetch. He said Mr. Jacobson works closely with agencies across the state to address the different invasive species. He indicated that the invasive species council would provide an additional layer of information to the industry and indicated that this would help the Division of Agriculture tackle invasive species issues. He emphasized that successfully addressing invasive species requires statewide coordination and funding.

[4:59:00 PM](#)

[CHAIR GIESSEL closed public testimony on SB 174.]

[4:59:06 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR thanked the committee.

[4:59:14 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL held SB 174 in committee.

[5:00:16 PM](#)

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