



Alaska Board of Game

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ALASKA BOARD OF GAME

Work Session

January 21, 2021

Meeting Summary

The Board of Game (board) convened the Work Session at 9:50 a.m. on Thursday, January 21, 2021 via video web-conference. Seven board members were present: Chairman Stosh Hoffman, acting Vice-Chairman Larry Van Daele, Jerry Burnett, Orville Huntington, Al Barrette, Lynn Keogh, and Jake Fletcher.

The meeting was open to the public for listening only. Meeting materials and audio are available online at: www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=gameboard.meetinginfo&date=01-21-2021&meeting=wasilla.

Election of Officers (*Audio log: 10:00:29 AM*)

The board elected Larry Van Daele as Chairman and Stosh Hoffman as Vice-chairman.

Agency Reports and Updates

The following agency updates were provided:

- Commissioner Doug Vincent-Lang, Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) (*Audio log: 10:27:04 AM*)
- Ryan Scott, ADF&G Division of Wildlife Conservation (*Audio log: 10:32:53 AM*)
- Lisa Olson, ADF&G Subsistence Section (*Audio log: 11:00:24 AM*)
- George Pappas, Department of Interior / Office of Subsistence Management (*Audio log: 11:06:01 AM*)
- Kristy Tibbles, Boards Support Section (*Audio log: 11:18:31 AM*)
- Cheryl Brooking, Department of Law (*Audio log: 11:26:19 AM*)
- Captain Derek DeGraaf, Alaska Wildlife Troopers (*Audio log: 11:43:54 AM*)

Big Game Commercial Services Board (BGCSB) Update: (*Audio log: 11:51:48 AM*)

Chairman Van Daele provided an update of the BGCSB's activities over the past year. The written report is available on the board meeting website as RC 3.

Board of Game Committees and other Assignments: *(Audio log: 11:56:46 AM)*

- Member Jerry Burnett volunteered to serve on the Big Game Commercial Services Board as the representative for the Board of Game.
- Members Van Daele, Hoffman and Barrette volunteered to serve on the Joint Board of Fisheries and Game Committee.

Reschedule the 2020/2021 Board meetings *(Audio log: 1:08:12 PM)*

After hearing testimony from the department and information from the Department of Health and Social Services on the status of COVID-19 in the state and precautionary protocols for public health (documents available at www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=gameboard.meetinginfo&date=01-21-2021&meeting=wasilla). The board voted unanimously to reschedule the Central/Southwest Region meeting and the Statewide Regulations meeting to 2022. All meeting cycles will be moved forward by one year. The meeting dates for 2022 will be the following:

- Central/Southwest Region: January 21 – 28, 2022, Wasilla
- Statewide Regulations: March 4 – 11, 2022, Fairbanks

The board scheduled a one-day regulatory meeting on March 18, 2021 to act on proposals to reauthorize antlerless moose hunts and brown bear tag fee exemptions. They will also act on proposal 194 concerning the sealing requirement for wolves in Unit 2.

The meeting will be held as a web-conference. Oral testimony will not be taken; written comments will be solicited. The “on-time” comment deadline will be March 4, 2021.

The board also agreed to discuss the following topics at the March 18 meeting: 1) the option for reissuing the Call for Proposals for the Central/Southwest Region and Statewide Regulations meeting; and 2) options for establishing a delegation of authority to ADF&G and/or other protocols for handling emergencies; assigning a subcommittee or developing a plan for holding regulatory meetings via web-conference if the pandemic continues to impact the board’s ability to meeting in person.

Approval of the 2021/2022 Meeting Dates & Locations for the Southeast and Southcentral Regions.

No board action was needed since the board postponed the entire meeting cycle by one year. The Southeast and Southcentral Regions will now be scheduled for 2023.

Board Findings *(Audio log: 2:34:39 PM)*

The board extended the expiration dates for the Bear Management and Conservation Policy (#2016-214-BOG) and the Wolf Management Policy (#2016-215-BOG) to March 31, 2022.

The board discussed a public request asking the board to consider adopting a finding, policy, or standing rule to deal with the amendment process, specifically, amendments that are contrary to the

original intent of the proposal. The board did not adopt a policy but discussed the need for being cognizant when changing proposals to be clear on the record to explain the reasoning when amendments are adopted so the public is aware.

ADF&G Update on Hunter Access Projects (*Audio log:03:04:48 PM*)

Katie Seachrist with ADF&G Division of Wildlife Conservation provided a report on the ADF&G Hunter Access Program which is funded by the Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson) funds. The presentation is posted on the board meeting website as RC 2.

Biological Updates from ADF&G

- Mulchatna caribou herd (*Audio log: 03:24:53 PM*)

Gino Del Frate, ADF&G Regional Supervisor for the Central/Southwest Region, provided the board with an update on the status of the Mulchatna caribou herd. The report included a history of the rise and fall of the herd; population and harvest objectives, and issues with the herd that have arisen since the February 2018 Board of Game meeting in Dillingham. The board was made aware of a recent research results that revealed 37% of collared animals testing positive serologically for brucellosis. The results indicate a current or past outbreak in the population.

The department is managing the herd very conservatively. They will be working to adjust their research efforts and will be developing a public outreach program that will include seeking input from state advisory committees, federal regional advisory councils, village leaders and the public.

The board has a proposal to address the harvest strategy of the herd (Proposal 20) which is scheduled for the Central/Southwest Region meeting in January 2022. The board asked the department for an update at the March 18, 2021 board meeting.

- Predator Control Plan for Units 13A and 13B (*Audio log: 03:59:47 PM*)

Gino Del Frate provided an overview of the department's efforts this year for wolf control in Unit 13A and 13B. The program was first approved by the board in 2003 with a management objective to maintain a late winter population of 135-165 wolves throughout Unit 13. The report included information about the moose population in the area. Moose in Unit 13B and 13D are below objectives and Unit 13A has seen a slight decline. Because of the declines, the department initiated predator control for Units 13A and 13B for the 2020/2021 regulatory year. The department will be researching habitat quality and quantity of the area and controlled burns are planned.

- Fortymile caribou herd (*Audio log: 04:17:00 PM*)

Jeff Gross, Tok Area Biologist for the Division of Wildlife Conservation updated the board on the status of the Fortymile caribou herd and the harvest management strategy. He provided a history of the herd and efforts to grow the herd since the 1970s including implementing predator control and the development of five harvest management plans by the Fortymile harvest management coalition. He explained the coalition is a public advisory group made up

of stakeholders from both Alaska and the Yukon Territory and includes members from six fish and game advisory committees.

The report included details about the recent poor nutritional condition of the herd caused by overgrazing of its range; the department's strategy to reduce the population below 50,000 caribou by setting the harvest quota at a combined total of 10,000 caribou for the fall and winter hunting seasons; and the social issues of safety conditions, trail damage, overcrowding and poor hunt quality due to the substantial increase of hunters, especially during the fall season.

Mitigation efforts on the various social issues are being explored and the department is working with the land managers. The department does not have discretionary authority to adjust access restrictions or allocation among user groups for public safety.

The department believes substantial progress will be made towards achieving the goal of reducing the herd to more sustainable levels by spring 2021 and does not anticipate needing regulatory change in the near future from the board to manage the herd biologically.

- **Wolf population in Unit 2** (*Audio log: 04:40:28 PM*)

Tom Schumacher, ADF&G Regional Supervisor for the Southeast Region, provided an update on wolves in Unit 2, the Prince of Wales Island area. For newer board members he provided an overview about hunter access on the Island, habitat changes related to logging, and population dynamics for both deer and wolves. Deer are an important subsistence resource in Unit 2/Prince of Wales Island. Reported harvest peaked in 2015 and has since declined below the annual harvest objective of 2,700 deer.

The report also described recent genetics research that indicates the Unit 2 population is largely isolated from other Southeast wolf populations, a summary of recent population estimates and harvest, an update on the status of the pending petition to list wolves in Southeast Alaska under the Endangered Species Act, and the challenges of applying the new harvest management strategy first implemented in fall 2019. The department believes that strategy is workable for achieving the fall population objective of 150-200 wolves.

The board scheduled a department proposal for the March 18, 2021 meeting that would re-establish a shortened sealing requirement for wolves in Unit 2. If adopted by the board, the department feels the shortened period will help obtain more accurate population estimates, which are key to setting annual season length and maintaining the population within the objective range.

Adjournment:

Before adjourning, the board held an executive session for the purpose of receiving confidential information concerning pending wildlife related litigation.

The board adjourned the meeting at 6:00 p.m.