

Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development

**BIG GAME COMMERCIAL SERVICES BOARD**  
**GMU 23 Working Group**  
**Investigation and Enforcement Services**  
**Report 2013**



Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing

Big Game Commercial Services Board

[www.commerce.alaska.gov/ooc/pgui.htm](http://www.commerce.alaska.gov/ooc/pgui.htm)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wildlife Resource Management in Alaska is accomplished through the cooperative efforts of Alaska's Departments Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED), Fish and Game, and Public Safety. Collaboration between these state departments, as well as with federal wildlife management agencies and other stakeholders, is an important part of the stewardship of Alaska's wildlife.

The Big Game Commercial Services Board (Board), administered through DCCED, regulates and licenses the big game commercial service industry in Alaska. The Board also enforces its regulations through investigative and possible disciplinary action against commercial operator licensees who violate licensing laws.

The Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing (Division) monitors compliance with Board regulations through investigative and enforcement efforts conducted by an investigative unit. One permanent investigator assigned to the Board is responsible for investigation and enforcement efforts within Alaska's 26 game management units (GMUs).

In 2008, the Board was invited to participate in a 21-member working group established to address hunting game management concerns in the area encompassing Kotzebue Sound and the Chukchi Sea, known as Game Management Unit 23 (GMU 23).<sup>1</sup> These concerns centered around the conduct of commercial operators such as Big Game Guides, Transporters and Air Taxis and their involvement in the wasting of game meat, unlicensed activities, and remaining in the field with their clients.

Since the establishment of that working group in 2008, the Division has hired a seasonal Investigator to assist the Board while the assigned Investigator travelled into Unit 23 to conduct camp inspections, field contacts, and ramp checks etc. on these commercial operators for consecutive years, 2010, 2011 and once again in 2012. This did not occur in 2013.

---

<sup>1</sup> The 21-member working group is comprised of representatives from regional and tribal governments and organizations, state and federal land and wildlife management agencies, Fish and Game advisory committees, the Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, NANA Corporation, the Alaska Board of Game, the Federal Subsistence Board, and the Big Game Commercial Services Board. *See* Appendix B, GMU 23 Working Group.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. Conduct field inspections of Board-regulated licensees to verify compliance with statutes and regulations related to big game hunting.
2. Interview hunters to determine if any transporter violations, game animal waste, or other illegal activity had occurred during their hunt, as well as to review the quality of their hunting experience in Alaska.
3. Investigate, enforce, and report any violation of statutes and regulations relating to big game commercial services.
4. Coordinate with state and federal wildlife management agencies, permitting agencies for commercial operations on public lands, and regional organizations.

## **RESULTS**

### **OBJECTIVE 1: Conduct field inspections within GMU 23 to verify licensees' compliance with statutes and regulations related to big game commercial services.**

- Investigator Strout spent 4 days traveling within GMU 23 during September 2013. During that time, he met with 11 transporters, air taxi operators, and guides to verify they were correctly licensed and in compliance with big game hunting laws. The investigative and enforcement results of his field inspections are discussed below.
  - While in the field, the investigator observed or uncovered minor violations involving both **transporters** and **guides**. These were violations that could be easily corrected on site. Specifically the completion of a date, the correction of the hunter's first name or a transporter activity report. The violations were corrected by the licensees, and no further action was necessary.
  - The Investigator assisted one **Transporter** in interpreting/clarifying statute/regulation intent relating to her signature on the Transport Activity Report, Specially 12 AAC 75. 400, Transporter Activity Reports.

### **OBJECTIVE 2: Interview hunters to determine if any transporter violation, game animal waste, or other illegal activity had occurred during their hunt, as well as to review the quality of their hunting experience in Alaska.**

- Investigator Strout interviewed approximately 18 hunters at various locations at which hunters gather. The interviews were conducted at hunters' camps, the Kotzebue airport, restaurants, hotels, and on the street.

- Hunters were asked about methods used to get to and from the field, whether they were bringing in the required harvested meat, and concerns or issues that may have arisen during the hunt. Most were pleased with the services they were receiving, except for one transported party of non-resident caribou hunters who complained about their camp location and the lack of caribou in the area. This party was due to depart the field and was going to discuss a refund with their Transporter. No official complaint has been received.
- Statute and Regulations interpretation and intent were discussed in these contacts.

**OBJECTIVE 3: Investigate, enforce, and report any violation of statutes and regulations relating to big game hunting, with a focus on transporter and air taxi activity.**

- The Investigator accompanied Alaska Wildlife Troopers (AWT) to follow up on a complaint from a local elder with a camp on the Noatak, alleging a Guide or Transporter was observed flying low at some caribou and running them off from local hunters.
  - Contact was made with the elder who reported that the complaint had been greatly exaggerated by the time it was received by AWT back in Kotzebue. The Elder, stated he had observed a plane (occupants unknown), flying low around an area in which he had observed caribou earlier. The elder could not say the pilot was a guide or a transporter or that there was anything unlawful taking place.
- The investigator assisted AWT in possible violations of antler before meat and failure to leave the meat attached to the rib bones of moose. The case involved a party of private hunters and no guides or transporters were involved. At least one citation was issued.
- An investigation was initiated into a transporter crossing the line between his transporter business and his guiding operation. AWT is pursuing the issue for possible culpability and subsequent prosecution.
- The investigator met with Alaska Fish and Game to follow up on a complaint that a brown bear cub may have been harvested by a Guided non-resident client. After further investigation, despite being very young and very small, it was determined the bear was old enough and a legal harvest. No further action was taken.

NOTE: The investigator's efforts were hampered by the inability to obtain unescorted access to the aircraft ramp where a majority of the transporter and air taxi activity takes place.

**OBJECTIVE 4: Coordinate with state and federal wildlife management agencies to investigate big game hunting violations, and with agencies involved in issuing permits for commercial operations involving hunting on public lands, and with other regional organizations.**

- The investigator traveled with the Alaska Wildlife Troopers to check field camps of operators within GMU 23. He spent three days on patrol with Alaska Wildlife Troopers.
- The investigator met Kotzebue Mayor Reggie Jewell and his assistant Zack Stevenson to discuss the ability to obtain unescorted access to the air field. Mr. Jewell agreed there is a need for unescorted access and that he would have his assistant look into the necessary training to accomplish same.

**SUMMARY**

The investigator traveled to the Kotzebue area to investigate concerns of wanton waste and the level of illegal or unlicensed activity, and surveyed approximately 18 hunters to determine what methods were being used to get to and from the field. The investigator also looked into how hunters were harvesting their game animals. Field inspections of transporters and guides to ensure compliance with hunting laws were conducted, and minor violations were corrected in the field. Serious violations have been or will be brought before the Big Game Commercial Services Board.