

DRAFT LETTER OF SUPPORT

Date

Representative Talerico:
Co-chair House Resources Committee
and
Senator Giessel
Chair Senate Resources Committee

Subject: Support for HB 137 concerning hunting, trapping, and sport fish fees

Dear Representative Talerico and Senator Giessel:

The Board of Game has taken the opportunity to discuss issues related to the Department of Fish and Game's ability to carry the increasing resource management demands being placed on the agency. Particularly, we have focused on the Wildlife Conservation Division's funding and the need for additional funds should the existing General Funds in the Division be significantly reduced. By all accounts, those funds will decline which brings us to the only practical solution which is the need for license increases.

The Board of Game has attempted to implement the letter of the intensive management law since it was passed. With strong support from the public, we have carefully selected and implemented management programs, including predator management, to increase prey species like moose and caribou for Alaskan uses. Many of our efforts have been successful and some have resulted in less than desirable results, for a variety of reasons. However, these programs, although extremely popular, are expensive. We are concerned that conducting these intensive management programs without adequate funding will not only be counter-productive but may eventually result in a loss of public support and also provide the basis for successful attacks by the anti-hunting organizations.

We are concerned that the Division stands to lose federal aid dollars if we are unable to match the Pittman-Robertson funds available to the state. Presently our obligation of federal matching dollars is way short of the funds available for matching at a 3:1 federal to state matching ratio. Obviously, additional fish and game fund dollars are necessary to take advantage of the existing Pittman-Robertson funds available.

Unfortunately, federal matching funds cannot be used to finance the bulk of the intensive management programs already on the books and other Division programs not eligible for federal matching will be in jeopardy. Thus, the only rational solution is to support license increases to fill in the financial gap. Since the hunting and trapping license fees have not been raised since 1993, the timing seems appropriate and justified to seek increases this year.

We are aware of the existing draft legislation being circulated which proposes license increases. We, the undersigned, support this effort. We believe the proposed legislation is particularly innovative by proposing an Intensive Management Surcharge to be added to the hunting license fees. The 3 year sunset provision will assure everyone that it will be reviewed to see if the public supports this particular approach.

We can only emphasize how critical it is to provide adequate funding for the conduct of the legislatively mandated management programs. The fact that a major segment of the Alaskan hunting and fishing community have stepped up to the plate and offered to pick up more of the funding responsibility is unprecedented. We sincerely hope the legislature will take them up on their offer.

If we can assist, in any way, the legislative process, we stand ready and willing to participate.

Sincerely,