

MEMORANDUM

State of Alaska Department of Law

TO:	Kristy Tibbles Executive Director Alaska Board of Game	DATE:	March 4, 2015
		FILE NO.:	JU2014200587
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		SUBJECT:	March 2015 Southcentral Region Board of Game meeting

GENERAL COMMENTS

In general, ethics disclosures: Before staff reports begin on any new agenda item, or, if preferred, at the very beginning of the meeting, Ethics Act disclosures and determinations must be made under AS 39.52.

In general, record-making: It is very important that Board members carefully explain and clearly summarize on the record the reasons for their actions and the grounds upon which the actions are based. The Alaska Supreme Court has stressed the importance of a clear record to facilitate the courts in determining that the Board's actions are within its authority and are reasonable. A clear record also assists the public in understanding the Board's rationale. If Board members summarize the reasons for their actions before they vote, it will help establish the necessary record.

In considering each proposal, and the specific requirements that apply in some cases, such as with the subsistence law, it is important that the Board thoroughly discuss and summarize on the record the basis and reasons for its actions. Consistency with past approaches is another important point for discussion. If a particular action does not appear to be consistent, Board members should discuss their reasons for a different approach.

The Alaska Administrative Procedure Act requires that State agencies, including the Board of Game, "[w]hen considering the factual, substantive, and other relevant matter, ... pay special attention to the cost to private persons of the proposed regulatory action." AS 44.62.210(a). This requirement to pay special attention to costs means, at a minimum, that the Board should address any information presented about costs, or explicitly state that no such information was presented, during deliberation of any proposal likely to be adopted. In our view, this requirement does not go so far as to mandate that the Board conduct an independent investigation of potential costs, nor does

it require that cost factor into the Board's decision more than, for example, conservation concerns might. However, it does require the Board to address and "pay special attention to" costs relevant to each regulation adopted.

In general, written findings: If any issue is already in court, or is controversial enough that you believe it might result in litigation, or if it is complex enough that findings may be useful to the public, the Department, or the Board in the future, it is important that the Board draft and adopt written findings explaining its decisions. From time to time, the Department of Law will recommend that written findings be adopted, in order to better defend the Board's action. Such recommendations should be carefully considered, as a refusal to adopt findings, in these circumstances, could mean that the Board gets subjected to judicial oversight and second-guessing which might have been avoided. The Alaska Supreme Court has stressed the importance of an adequate decisional document, or written finding, to a determination that the Board has acted within its authority and rationally in adopting regulations, and has deferred to such findings in the past.

In general, subsistence: For each proposal the Board should consider whether it involves or affects identified subsistence uses of the game population or sub-population in question. If action on a proposal would affect a subsistence use, the Board must be sure that the regulations provide a reasonable opportunity for the subsistence uses, unless sustained yield would be jeopardized. If the Board has not previously done so, it should first determine whether the game population is subject to customary and traditional uses for subsistence and what amount of the harvestable portion, if any, is reasonably necessary for those uses. *See* 5 AAC 99.025 for current findings on customary and traditional uses and amounts reasonably necessary for subsistence uses. The current law requires that the Board have considered at least four issues in implementing the preference:

- (1) Identify game populations or portions of populations customarily and traditionally taken or used for subsistence; *see* 8 criteria at 5 AAC 99.010(b);
- (2) determine whether a portion of the game population may be harvested consistent with sustained yield;
- (3) determine the amount of the harvestable portion reasonably necessary for subsistence uses; and
- (4) adopt regulations to provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses.

Reasonable opportunity is defined to mean "an opportunity, as determined by the appropriate board, that allows a subsistence user to participate in a subsistence hunt or

fishery that provides a normally diligent participant with a reasonable expectation of success of taking of fish or game.” AS 16.05.258(f). It is not to be construed as a guarantee of success.

The amount of the harvestable portion of the game population that is reasonably necessary for subsistence uses will depend largely on the amount of the game population used for subsistence historically and the number of subsistence users expected to participate. This may require the Board to determine which users have been taking game for subsistence purposes, and which ones have not. Once the Board has determined the amount reasonably necessary for subsistence uses, the Board should by regulation provide an opportunity that allows the predicted number of normally diligent participants a reasonable expectation of success in taking the subject game. The Board may base its determination of reasonable opportunity on all relevant information including past subsistence harvest levels of the game population in the specific area and the bag limits, seasons, access provisions, and means and methods necessary to achieve those harvests, or on comparable information from similar areas.

If the harvestable portion of the game population is not sufficient to provide for subsistence uses and any other consumptive uses, the Board is required to eliminate non-subsistence uses in order to provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses. If the harvestable portion of the game population is still not sufficient to provide a reasonable opportunity for all subsistence uses, the Board is required to eliminate non-subsistence consumptive uses and distinguish among the subsistence users based on the following Tier II criteria:

- (1) The customary and direct dependence on the game population by the subsistence user for human consumption as a mainstay of livelihood; and
- (2) the ability of the subsistence user to obtain food if subsistence use is restricted or eliminated. AS 16.05.258.

In general, intensive management: Under AS 16.05.255 (e), (f) and (g), the Board should assure itself that the steps outlined below have been followed when acting on proposals dealing with ungulate populations.

First - Determine whether the **ungulate** population is **important for high levels of human consumptive use**. The Board has already made many of these determinations. *See* 5 AAC 92.108. However, these past findings do not preclude new findings, especially if based on new information.

- If so, then subsequent intensive management analysis may be required.
- If not, then no further intensive management analysis is required.

Second - Is the ungulate population **depleted** or will the Board be **significantly reducing the taking** of the population? See 5AAC 92.106(5) for the Board's current definition of "significant" as it relates to intensive management.

The Board must determine whether depletion or reduction of productivity, or Board action, is likely to cause a significant reduction in harvest.

- If either is true, then subsequent intensive management analysis is required.
- If not, then further intensive management analysis is not required.

Third - Is intensive management appropriate?

(a) If the population is depleted, has the Board found that consumptive use of the population is a preferred use? Note that the Legislature has already found that "providing for high levels of harvest for human consumption in accordance with the sustained yield principle is the highest and best use of identified big game prey populations in most areas of the State ..." In the rare cases where consumptive use is not a preferred use, then the Board need not adopt intensive management regulations.

(b) If consumptive uses are preferred, and the population is depleted or reduced in productivity so that the result may be a significant reduction in harvest, the Board must consider whether enhancement of abundance or productivity is feasibly achievable using recognized and prudent active management techniques. At this point, the Board will need information from the Department about available recognized management techniques, including feasibility. If enhancement is feasibly achievable, then the Board must adopt intensive management regulations.

(c) If the Board will be significantly reducing the taking of the population, then it must adopt, or schedule for adoption at its next meeting, regulations that provide for intensive management *unless*:

1. Intensive management would be:
 - A. Ineffective based on scientific information;
 - B. Inappropriate due to land ownership patterns; or
 - C. Against the best interests of subsistence users;

Or

2. The Board declares that a biological emergency exists and takes immediate action to protect and maintain the population and also schedules for adoption those regulations necessary to restore the population.

Comments on Individual Proposals

Proposal 150: This proposal would amend 5 AAC 85.045 to establish an antlerless moose drawing permit hunt for physically disabled residents in Kincaid Park during October. Eligible hunters must have a physical disability of 70% or greater under AS 16.05.940(25), require a wheelchair or other mobility device, complete a hunter education course, pass an orientation and marksmanship test provided by Department, and must wear a safety orange vest, to be provided by the Department. Hunters would be able to shoot from motorized vehicles while on trails in the park.

The Board has the statutory authority under AS 16.05.255(a)(3) to adopt regulations on methods and means for hunting by persons with physical disabilities. A special hunt season, created solely for physically disabled hunters, may be subject to challenge absent specific statutory authority. (For example, special youth hunts are authorized by AS 16.05.255(i).)

In addition, Kincaid Park is owned and managed by the Municipality of Anchorage and is subject to restrictions on uses within municipal parks, including:

AMC 25.70.040 – Prohibited activities generally. A. Except in areas specifically designated for such use in accordance with law, no person may engage in any of the following activities on municipal land.

...

5. Discharging firearms where there is a reasonable likelihood people, domestic animals, or property may be jeopardized.

....

B. On any municipal land, no person may, except as otherwise authorized by law:

a. Kill or injure any animal unless such act is necessary to protect a human being or domesticated animal from attack.

AMC 25.70.060 – Activities prohibited in parks.

...

Q. No person shall discharge a firearm or shoot a bow and arrow in a park except in areas designated by the director, where there is no reasonable likelihood of jeopardy to people, domestic animals, or property.

Proposal 152: This proposal would amend 5 AAC 85.055 to establish a resident only sheep hunt area in Unit 14C in Chugach State Park, Aug. 10-Oct. 31, 1 full curl ram (up to 240 permits will be issued) or 1 ewe (up to 150 permits will be issued) by drawing permit. Currently 14C is open to residents and nonresidents, with an archery-only hunt in the Eklutna Lake Management Area. The remainder of 14C currently has the season and bag limit as stated in the proposal, but the hunt is open to both residents and nonresidents.

According to the proposal, the recipient of the Governor's permit would be allowed to hunt sheep under this section, but this allowance would be eliminated if the Board of Game amends the regulation to exclude nonresidents, under the Department's requirements in 5 AAC 93.080. In addition, Board action on this proposal may affect other proposals submitted for consideration at this meeting that would continue nonresident sheep hunting in Unit 14C.

Proposal 183: This proposal would amend 5 AAC 92.530 to create a management area for Kachemak Bay in Unit 15C. The proposed language indicates the area is to be within the boundaries of Kachemak Bay State Park, but the referenced statutes also include the Kachemak Bay State Wilderness Park and the Kachemak Bay Critical Habitat Area. All of these areas were established by the Alaska legislature.

There may be some confusion about which "board" is intended by the proposer to adopt hunting restrictions, but hunting regulations would continue to be within the authority of the Board of Game, and hunting regulations would continue to be adopted through a public process. State parks are subject to use restrictions found in 11 AAC Chapter 12, including certain weapon restrictions. It is unclear whether the proposer intends additional restrictions to be imposed.

Proposal 190: This proposal would amend 5 AAC 85 to allocate 10% of sheep harvest to nonresidents for the Southcentral Region, including commercial guides and second degree of kindred. It would also restrict the number of drop off hunts that air charters can perform to prevent stacking hunters. The Board does not have the authority to regulate air charters or transporters.

Proposal 205: Amend 5 AAC 92.046 to allow immediate harvest of musk ox on stranded ice flows in Unit 18, primarily Nunivak Island. Hunters who come upon stranded musk oxen while hunting seals would not need to wait for a permit under 5 AAC 92.046 for taking incidental or stranded musk ox by emergency order, which may take several days. The proposal is worded in a manner that could be interpreted to limit the permission to residents of Unit 18. If approved by the Board, the permission would apply to all Alaska residents.

Proposal 71: This proposal would implement a reporting system for Tier I community and group subsistence hunts. According to the Alaska Supreme Court ruling in *State v. Morry*, 836 P.2d 358 (Alaska 1992), the Board lacks authority to adopt eligibility criteria for Tier I. Alternative language proposed by the department is intended to provide information to the Board about subsistence uses, without being scored or graded to determine eligibility to participate.