



## Alaska Department of Fish & Game – Division of Sport Fish

### Guide Licensing and Logbook Meetings – Homer/Seward Meetings Summary

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Sport Fish (division) held public meetings November 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in Homer and Seward, respectively. The purpose of the meetings was to engage in a dialogue with sport fishing business owners, guides and others (stakeholders) about the guide registration and logbook programs and solicit input on how they might be improved. House Bill 41 (HB 41), introduced during the 2015 legislative session, was also discussed at the meetings. If adopted, HB 41 would re-establish sport fish business and guide license and vessel registration requirements and modify fees that sunset in December 2014.

Stakeholder attendance included one freshwater and one saltwater guide in Seward, and five saltwater guides and one legislator in Homer. Those present received a brief overview of program history and general requirements, importance of data collected through the logbook program, and the benefits of an established guide licensing program. The purpose of this document is to summarize the general concepts and ideas that were presented by the stakeholders during the public meetings held in Homer and Seward.

#### Licensing Program

Passage of HB 41 would result in an increased fee for a sport fishing operator/business license from \$100 to \$200 and a guide license from \$50 to \$100. The increased fees are projected to generate approximately \$411,000 in revenue for the division. Stakeholders expressed interest in knowing that all license fee revenues remain with the division and be spent to fully fund the administration of the guide licensing and logbook programs. This should include timely data entry so logbook data summaries are available for halibut discussions. Specific to the 2016 season, registration and logbooks will be similar to 2015. If HB 41 passes, fees will not likely be implemented until 2017.

Stakeholders inquired if any other agencies are involved in the logbook program and if the department receives any money from the federal agencies to offset the approximately \$383,000 cost to administer the program. Federal agencies that rely on guide licensing and logbook data do not provide annual funding to offset the cost of program administration. However, the division has received funding from federal entities in the past to help implement an electronic reporting program, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) contributed \$100,000 in 2015 to offset some program costs.

Some stakeholders requested directing a portion of the revenue from guide license sales to enforcement, particularly towards enforcement of those operations that are guiding without a license. The department aids enforcement where and when it can, but the revenue generated by the guide license program funds only the license/logbook program and likely will not generate enough revenue to support additional enforcement.

Some licensing requirements prescribed in HB 41 may be duplicative of other entities' licensing requirements (U.S. Coast Guard, State Parks, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). To the extent possible, most stakeholders expressed a desire that the division's licensing requirements not be duplicative. Additionally, the issue of requiring First Aid training was discussed. Other agencies, such as the U.S. Coast Guard, no longer require First Aid/CPR certification, and there was mixed support of the First Aid training requirement by the stakeholders present. Conversely, it was suggested to keep the U.S. Coast Guard 6-pack license requirement in place, even though it is required by federal regulations, to maintain charter captain abilities in the saltwater guide industry. It was also suggested to require a vessel safety inspection in conjunction with the guide licensing program. The fees in HB 41 could be increased to cover the costs of the inspections and would provide additional safeguards for the guided angler.



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A stakeholder inquired as to what other changes are included in HB 41, besides the fee increase, relative to the past guide licensing/logbook program. The current version of HB 41 has an amendment that includes a waiver for Kenai River guide businesses to replace a Kenai Guide Academy certified guide, during the season, with an uncertified guide if the business has met specific requirements.

### Logbook Program

One reason the logbook program was implemented was to obtain more accurate and timely information on effort and harvest for Chinook salmon and halibut at a time when guided effort was increasing. The Board of Fisheries and the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) were both interested in logbook reporting as a means to provide more accurate and timely guided fishery information.

The division provides logbook data to the NPFMC and it has become the primary data used for management decisions impacting the guided sport fishery by the International Pacific Halibut Commission, NPFMC, and National Marine Fisheries Service. Chinook salmon guided use data has also been used in Chinook salmon treaty discussions and domestic allocations in Southeast Alaska fisheries. Stakeholders expressed an understanding of the value of collecting logbook data, but the timeliness of the data and how it is used remained a point of conversation.

Sport fishing licenses can now be purchased online. Stakeholders expressed interest in the division's progress towards electronic reporting and logbooks. Development of electronic logbooks and reporting capabilities is in progress. Electronic reporting was tested by Kenai River freshwater guides in 2015 and a pilot program is planned in 2016. The department will be soliciting volunteers from among freshwater and saltwater guides to pilot electronic logbooks in 2016.

When fully implemented, the electronic logbook program should allow guides to use a downloadable program and mobile device in conjunction with electronic sport fishing licenses that could be scanned by the guide to upload angler information into the program. The program will upload data via the web. Paper logbooks will still be made available where electronic logbooks would be problematic and for operators who prefer that method. Only one method (paper or electronic) will be required.

Staff inquired of the attendees how long it took each of them to complete a logbook. For large boats with 16-20 clients it can take up to an hour to complete a logbook trip, for 6-pack charters it generally took 15-20 minutes per trip to complete the logbook.

### Penalties and Enforcement

Representatives from the Department of Public Safety, Alaska Wildlife Troopers (AWT) attended the two meetings and heard stakeholder concerns about the potential for logbooks to be used as an enforcement tool. Concerns were voiced by saltwater charters about the enforceability of the halibut annual limit implemented in 2015 and the potential that a guide could be cited if a client took more than their annual limit. The lack of an angler harvest recording requirement in 2015 was an oversight by the federal program. Logbook data can identify individual anglers by a unique angler ID assigned to that angler when they purchase a sport fishing license. This can be cross-referenced if anglers purchase multiple licenses in a given year. Based on 2015 data through July, compliance with the halibut limit is high, approximately 98%.

An AWT representative explained that the goal of the logbook program is to collect accurate information and not generate additional enforcement opportunities. Each potential violation scenario is



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handled on a case-by-case basis; specific offenses must be committed “knowingly” to warrant a citation. Operators/guides are only responsible for violations committed by a client if they aid in the commission of the offense or permit the offense to occur without attempting to prevent it and then not reporting the violation. One stakeholder stated that his vessel has been boarded by AWT, thanked the enforcement staff for their professionalism and demonstrated respect towards him and his clients, and stated that he has always had a positive experience with enforcement.