



Alaska Department of Fish & Game – Division of Sport Fish

Guide Licensing and Logbook Meetings - Soldotna Meeting Summary

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Sport Fish (division) held a public meeting November 17th, 2015 in Soldotna. The purpose of the meeting 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 meeting. 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 4 freshwater and 6 saltwater guides. 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 meeting held in Soldotna.

Licensing Program

Passage of HB 41 will 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. Some stakeholders suggested a higher fee for nonresidents, which is consistent with some other states. Staff summarized guide demographic data for 2009–2013 from the 2013 published report. During this period of time, the majority (87%) of guide business licenses were held by residents, while approximately 54% of licensed guides were residents. Changes to the currently proposed licensing fee would require an amendment to HB 41.

Stakeholders inquired if any other agencies are involved in the logbook program and if the department receives any money from 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 to help implement an electronic reporting program and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) contributed \$100,000 in 2015 to offset some program costs.

Several stakeholders asked if HB 41 included language for Kenai River guides to substitute an online course instead of attending the Kenai River guide academy. The current version of HB 41 has no language specific to an online course version of the Kenai River guide academy. However, an online course was discussed in committee during the 2015 legislative session and is an issue that would fall under the purview of Department of Natural Resources-Division of Parks and Recreation (DNR-DPOR). It is possible that HB 41 could be modified in committee during the 2016 legislative session; staff suggested meeting attendees follow HB 41 during the upcoming legislative session if interested in this issue.

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.



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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 saltwater logbook data, but the timeliness of the data, the utility of the freshwater logbook data and how it is used remained a point of conversation.

Several stakeholders commented on the burden in completing logbooks. Issues included: lack of weatherproof construction, level of detail in the information required, lack of a need to report released fish, difficulty in completing logbooks in adverse weather conditions and while providing guiding services to the client. Staff emphasized that simplicity is the objective in logbook design, because the data that is being collected needs to be accurate and timely. The 2016 freshwater and saltwater logbooks will be similar to the 2015 logbooks due to regulatory and printing schedules, with possible changes stemming from guide meetings occurring in 2017.

Sport fishing licenses can now be purchased online and 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 both the freshwater and saltwater guiding industry 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.

Penalties and Enforcement

Some stakeholders expressed strong concerns with the severity of the penalties prescribed by HB 41 and suggested they hold the potential for inflicting considerable hardship if enforced. Two representatives from the Department of Public Safety, Alaska Wildlife Troopers (AWT) attended the meeting and heard stakeholder concerns about the potential for logbooks to be used as an enforcement tool. Specifically, stakeholder concerns about enforcement centered on the potential that citations could be issued for simple mistakes and a short reporting timeline. These, in turn, can lead to thousands of dollars in fines and lost revenue due to DNR-DPOR Kenai River Special Management Area stipulations. Staff responded that guide businesses that submit late logbook pages are given leeway, and only recurring or blatant tardiness is forwarded on to AWT for enforcement action.

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 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. AWT summarized the number of citations issued for all of the Kenai Peninsula freshwater and saltwater guided fisheries. In 2013, 7 citations were issued; 2014, 10 citations were issued; and so



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far in 2015, 3 citations were issued. This included all violations, not just logbook and guide license citations.