



Alaska Department of Fish & Game – Division of Sport Fish

Southeast Alaska Guide Licensing and Logbook Meetings Summary

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Sport Fish (division) held public meetings November 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, 2015 in Juneau, Sitka and Ketchikan, 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 and 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 ranged from six to twelve freshwater and/or saltwater guides and up to three legislators or legislative aides depending on meeting location. 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 Southeast Alaska.

Licensing Program

Passage of HB 41 will result in an increased fee for a sport fishing operator/business license from \$100 to \$200 which is projected to generate approximately \$411,000 in revenue for the division. Stakeholders generally supported this fee increase, although there was some concern and resistance, particularly by smaller operators. That said, some suggested a higher fee for nonresidents, which is currently done in other states. Changes to the currently proposed licensing fee would require an amendment to HB 41.

Stakeholders expressed interest in knowing that all license fees remain with the division and will be spent to fully fund the administration of the guide licensing and logbook programs, which currently costs approximately \$383,000. Currently the 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 limited 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 in the absence of a licensing fee.

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, stakeholders expressed a desire that the division's licensing requirements not be duplicative. There was discussion on the sufficiency of the \$100,000 minimum insurance coverage per incident described in HB 41, particularly as it relates to adequately protecting businesses and clients. Additionally, the issue of requiring First Aid training but not CPR and whether that training needs to be kept current each year was discussed, with a suggestion made to include CPR in the licensing standards.

At least one stakeholder proposed that the HB 41 allow a licensee to unregister and re-register a boat during the guided sport fishing season to allow for subsistence halibut fishing opportunity with non-family members. Current federal halibut subsistence regulations prevent the use of a registered boat that is used for guided sport fishing with others than family members.



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Logbook Program

One reason the logbook program was implemented included a desire for 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 a solid understanding of the value of collecting logbook data, but the timeliness of the data and how it is used remained a point of conversation.

Stakeholders expressed interest in the division's progress towards electronic reporting and logbooks, which is 2-3 years from full implementation. Sport fishing licenses can now be purchased online. Development of electronic logbooks and reporting capabilities is in progress. A pilot study for electronic reporting was conducted with Kenai River freshwater guides in 2015 and expanded testing of the program is planned 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.

There was also some discussion about whether logbook data conflicted with Statewide Harvest Survey (SWHS) and creel program data. The SWHS is a household survey estimate, and individual logbook data is not strictly compared to SWHS or creel program data. When logbook data has been compared with SWHS and creel survey estimates, postseason harvest data by these three programs is in agreement.

There were questions about the necessity for obtaining angler signatures given that some operators have clients sign the logbook at the beginning of the trip regardless of species that are harvested. Signatures are a federal requirement when halibut are harvested, but the division does not assume halibut harvest based on that signature. Halibut harvest is only counted if it has been entered in the logbook.

Penalties and Enforcement

Some stakeholders expressed concerns with the severity of the penalties prescribed by HB 41 and suggested they hold the potential for inflicting considerable hardship if enforced. A representative from the Department of Public Safety, Alaska Wildlife Troopers (AWT) attended all three meetings and heard stakeholder concerns about the potential for logbooks to be used as an enforcement tool.

The 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 and that specific offenses must be committed "knowingly". Similarly,



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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.

Rental boat charters (bare-boat charters) were also a topic of interest and if that boat is guided or unguided is also considered on a case-by-case basis. If no sport fishing guide services are provided and the business transaction consists of the rental/lease of a boat and gear, then the rental boat is not required to be registered or have a logbook since no guiding activity occurs. If assistance is provided to an angler to take or attempt to take fish by accompanying or physically directing the angler in sport fishing activities during any part of the sport fishing trip, then it is considered sport fish guiding.