Thursday, February 16, 2017

Dear Alaska Board of Game,

I am Wayne Kubat. I’ve lived in Alaska full time since 1976, and in the Mat-Su Valley since 1984. I served on the Mat-Su AC from 1998 to 2007, and chaired it my last 4 years. I’ve been a registered big game guide since 1986 and started my own business – Alaska Remote Guide Service, shortly after that. I became a Master Guide in 2004 and have served as a board of director for the Alaska Professional Hunters Association (APHA) since December 2012, and as Vice President since December 2014. This testimony represents my own views in order of importance.

Proposal 82: OPPOSE - I strongly oppose this proposal for the following reasons:

1. While the author’s proposal to offer just over half of the total effort to guide permits seems very generous and fair, drawing permits adversely impact guide businesses which on average are 89% resident, by not allowing them to plan their fall season until late February.

2. No biological or conservation concerns are expressed or mentioned by the author or the Dept. of Fish and Game, to suggest this is necessary now.

3. Putting a single subunit on drawing permit, could certainly reduce NR effort in the subunit if guide clients don’t draw, but that effort would most likely move elsewhere to non-drawing areas, and maybe to places where it could cause a conservation concern.

4. GMU 19C has some of the lowest resident hunter participation mainly because of the difficult and expensive logistics, not because there are too many guides.

5. With the drawing deadline for this year already past, the soonest this proposal could go into effect is for the 2018 season. The department has been directed to come up with a new sheep management plan and guide lines state wide. Last I heard these plans are expected to be out in fall 2017. Rather than take a piece meal, band aid approach to a single subunit prematurely, let’s see what the department comes up with for the whole region and state.

Proposals 51, 52, 62 and 97: OPPOSE - All of these proposals are very restrictive towards unguided and / or guided NR effort, and were submitted by Resident Hunters of Alaska (RHAK), a new organization that has formed in the last year, in my opinion, primarily because of the new restrictions on aircraft during sheep season that the BOG recently passed.

Contrary to their name, I feel that RHAK DOES NOT represent the vast majority of Alaskan resident hunters, but instead speaks for a very small and elite group of Alaskan professionals, that have far greater earning capabilities than most.

I think many and even most Alaskans enjoy bringing an occasional friend and family member to Alaska to hunt, and many enjoy hunting elsewhere. I think most Alaskan hunters would oppose the hunting license and tag fee increases that would be necessary if non-residents were to be restricted to the extent RHAK is asking for. I listened to testimony on the license fee increase bill last year (HB 137), and numerous Alaskans and legislators even opposed the recent $15.00 resident increase from $25.00 to $40.00.

I think overall, that the guide industry is very good for the majority of Alaskans and Alaska wildlife. I feel RHAK has used a few examples - such as the fact that more than half of the sheep hunting effort and almost 75% of the harvest in 19C is by guided NR – to mislead resident hunters into believing that the guide industry is mostly to blame for the bulk of overcrowding issues, when in reality we represent only a very small portion of statewide effort. Again, low resident participation in 19C is due mostly to difficult logistics, not too many guides.

According to findings in a February, 2017 report by the McDowell Group and commissioned by Alaska Professional Hunters Association (APHA), and Safari Club International:
1. Only 13% (14,211) of Alaska big game hunting licenses purchased in 2015, were purchased by non-residents, but generated 72% of the ADF&G Fish and Game Wildlife Fund license and tag revenue. This means that non-residents on average pay 17 times what residents do for licenses and tags.

2. Of the 14,211 non-resident licenses sold, only 3242 or about 23% were sold to guided hunters.

3. Based on license sales, guided non-residents only made up about 3% of the total big game hunting effort, yet circulated $52.5 million in the Alaska economy as labor income and spending for goods and services. Residents, transporters and air taxis are bringing 4 times the number of non-residents to Alaska, that guides are, yet every one's preferred solution seems to be get rid of the guides.

4. I don't think it would be much of a stretch, if any, to deduce that resident Alaskans bring as many or more non-residents to this state as guides do.

Proposal 49: SUPPORT - I support this proposal to remove the bag limit restrictions for resident Alaskans accompanying nonresident Second Degree Kindred (2DK) relatives, but feel it should be repealed state wide. While I feel that the current regulation is much less punitive to Alaskans who want to hunt guide required species with family members, than the numerous proposals to limit all non-residents to drawing permits of 10% and less, I think we need to readdress the 2DK issue at the next state wide meeting scheduled for fall 2017. We should start over with better information, and get it right. (Note: if all guide required species would go to 10% NR draw, it could take several years for your NR relative to draw a permit, where letting them use your resident tag, would allow them to hunt during any resident general season for that species.)

Proposals 57-61: OPPOSE – I oppose these as well. They are overly restrictive and not based on biological or conservation concerns. Let’s wait for the new sheep management plan due out by the department.

Proposal 63: SUPPORT - I strongly support this proposal to remove the restriction on aircraft for spotting sheep in Region 3, and think it should be done state wide as well. During reconsideration of a proposal to amend this restriction at the March 2016 meeting in Fairbanks, it was clear to me that a majority of the BOG didn’t like it the way it was, but couldn’t agree on whether to amend or repeal it. I’m starting to hear rumors that sheep harvest is starting to slightly shift from the NR column to the resident column, and proponents of the restriction are crediting the restriction for doing that. Even if that is true, which I don’t think it is, the harm it has done by dividing hunters, and the contempt it has caused against the board, far outweighs any small alleged shifting of the sheep harvest. Resident hunters blame the guide industry for this proposal and claims it favors them.

Sincerely,

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