



Alaska Department of Fish & Game – Division of Sport Fish

Guide Licensing and Logbook Meetings – Fairbanks Meeting Summary

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Sport Fish (division) held a public meeting November 12, 2015 in Fairbanks. 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 7 freshwater and 2 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 Fairbanks.

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. License fee revenues will remain with the division and be spent to fully fund the administration of the guide licensing and logbook programs, which currently costs approximately \$383,000. Initially HB 41 provided a graduated fee system if the program had been implemented in 2015, but the bill was amended in committee to implement the full fee immediately in January of the year following its adoption.

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 need for the \$100,000 minimum insurance coverage per incident described in HB 41, as it does not cover gross negligence and it was thought that guides could only be held accountable for gross negligence. Additionally, stakeholders expressed concerns over requiring First Aid certification because most first aid training is not adequate for remote sport fish guiding operations.

There was mixed support for the Guide Licensing program among attendees. Some questioned why nonresidents were allowed to guide in Alaska and thought that the industry should be residents only. Those in support indicated they thought the program created a basic framework for sport fishing guides to operate in and benefitted anglers, while those in opposition disagreed that the licensing requirements protected guided anglers and validated the guiding industry and indicated concern that the license and logbook requirements were just another layer of bureaucracy and unnecessary north of the Alaska range.

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



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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.

There was discussion on the necessity of the logbook program for all sport fishing guides and the reporting requirement timeline. Some stakeholders stated that since there is no management concern north or west of the Alaska Range, voluntary reporting is all that is necessary for freshwater guides in the region. They indicated that the weekly reporting requirement is difficult to meet in rural Alaska and sometimes even in Valdez. Some stakeholders suggested that because most fisheries in the state do not require a timely report for management; the 1-week submission requirement should only apply to fisheries that need timely reporting. A request was made for monthly reporting, or every 10 days or 2 weeks for freshwater guides. Additionally, they requested that the completion requirement for logbook sheets in remote camps should be within 24 hours of trip completion and expressed that requiring multiple logbook sheets for a single day (multiple trips in a single day) based on the current definition of a trip is impractical.

The importance of recording the number of hours fished, specific to saltwater logbooks was also discussed. The information is used for Southeast Alaska estimates of catch-per-unit effort (CPUE) for king salmon. Some stakeholders expressed concern that anglers fishing with a guide are subject to different rules and regulations than private anglers. Primarily, these differences are in the halibut sport fishery managed by federal entities. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council established separate regulations in 2003 for guided and unguided halibut anglers as a means to limit halibut harvest in the sport fishery.

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.

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 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

A stakeholder asked if the department can determine if individual anglers have exceeded an annual limit through the logbook data. Specific to halibut, the department sends the logbook data to federal staff, since the logbooks collect data by individual angler; it is possible to verify whether an angler has exceeded their annual limit. Some stakeholders requested additional enforcement efforts, particularly directed at individuals operating without a registration, and that a portion of license fee funds be directed



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at enforcement of unlicensed operators and increased penalties for this violation. Under big game guiding regulations it is a felony to operate without a license, under the provisions of HB 41 it is a Class A misdemeanor. The department works with Alaska Wildlife Troopers to follow up on reported violations.