



MEMORANDUM

TO: Alaska Board of Game Members

DATE: January 15, 2021

THROUGH:

PHONE: 465-6098

FROM: Kristy Tibbles, Ex. Director
Board of Game

SUBJECT: Options for Revised Meeting Dates
for the 2020/2021 Board Meeting Cycle

During the January 21, 2021 Work Session, the Board of Game (board) will need to reschedule the Central/ Southwest Region and Statewide Regulations meetings which were previously postponed due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the Work Session, a committee of the Board of Game and the Board of Fisheries is scheduled to meet January 19, 2021 to review the current situation of COVID-19 and its impact on board meetings for the remainder of this meeting cycle. Following the January 21 Work Session, the Board of Fisheries will meet January 25, 2021 to discuss the options for scheduling their regulatory board meetings which were also previously postponed.

An analysis for planning the 2020/2021 meetings dated January 15, 2021 has been provided to both boards to assist with their decisions for scheduling this cycle's board meetings. The memo includes detailed information about the impacts of COVID-19 around the state, meeting conditions for the communities where board meetings are expected to be located, travel considerations, and additional considerations for meetings including the need for the boards to maintain synchronized, long-term schedules and budget impacts.

Re-scheduling Board Meetings for Spring 2021

After evaluating the current conditions related to COVID-19 and consideration of the public and advisory committee comments, if the board finds the regulatory meetings can occur in-person this coming spring, options for meeting dates are provided in Table 1 for rescheduling the meetings. These options minimize overlap with the currently scheduled Board of Fisheries meetings and begin with Friday start dates to accommodate the public for providing testimony over the weekend. As mentioned above, the Board of Fisheries is scheduled to reevaluate its meeting schedule following this Work Session which may result in changes to their March and April meetings.

Table 1: Options for Meeting Dates in Spring 2021

Original BOG Meeting Dates & Locations	Options for BOG Meeting Dates Spring 2021	Current BOF Meeting Dates & Locations Spring 2021
Central/Southwest Region January 22 – 29, 2021 (8 days) Wasilla – Best Western Lake Lucille Inn Statewide Regulations March 12-19, 2021(8 days) Fairbanks – Pike’s Waterfront Lodge	1. March 19 – 26, 2021 2. April 9 – 16, 2021 3. April 23 – 30, 2021 4. April 30 – May 7, 2021	March 5 – 10, 2021- Statewide shellfish; Anchorage March 30 – April 5, 2021 – PWS; Cordova April 17 – 27, 2021 – Southeast & Yakutat; Ketchikan

Selecting options 3 and 4 for the meetings is not advisable since the dates are back-to-back and would be logistically challenging, and scheduling meetings in May 2021 is not preferred as it will impact Department of Fish and Game’s field work. Under normal circumstances, the board is advised to select meeting dates that provide four weeks between the meetings to allow time for meeting preparation and for providing 30-days public notice of any new regulatory topics the board may add to the agenda of the subsequent meeting. If the board selections two options that are less than four weeks apart, it is doable but will limit the board’s ability to add any new regulatory topics to the agenda of the second meeting.

If the board decides to schedule its meetings in March and April 2021, it is anticipated the same meeting venues in Wasilla and Fairbanks would be retained. Both locations are set in a high alert status for COVID-19 by the state, however, neither of these communities have implemented limitations for holding in-person meetings. Both venues are currently available to host the board meetings.

Another consideration for having board meetings this spring is a reduced level of staff participation to help decrease the overall number of attendees at the meeting and to protect the health and safety of employees. There may be a need to have some staff provide presentations over video or teleconference from any key staff who are not able to attend in person.

As the meetings get closer, Boards Support will continue to monitor the community health alert status and work closely with the venue managers to implement safety precautions that follows guidance issued by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to protect the health and safety of participants. Health and safety precautions will likely include the following:

- Requiring all personnel and public to wear protective face gear.
- Requiring participant registration for COVID-19 contact tracing.
- Increasing the spacing for board members and staff seated at the table to at least six feet between participants.

- Arranging the audience seating so that individuals are sitting at least six feet from each other, except for members of the same household. This may necessitate limiting the number of people who can attend in person.
- Eliminating coffee and water service to avoid unnecessary touchpoints.
- Ensuring placement and maintenance of hand sanitizer dispensers and signage throughout the meeting venue.
- Requiring separate entrance and exit doors for the meeting room.
- Equipping the “record copy” desk with a stand-up sneeze guard and positioning it so that the public is at least six feet away from staff at the table and providing signage for keeping adequate distance for the desk queue.
- Reducing physical paper material for the board members and staff to minimize touchpoints. Meeting material including from the public may need to be received electronically and will be distributed electronically. All material would be posted to the website meeting page and all board members would need to use laptops to view the material.
- Using projectors and screens throughout the room may be necessary for material to be posted for greater visibility.
- Thoroughly and regularly cleaning all areas of frequent contact, such as microphones, testimony table and chairs, and water coolers each day prior to the meeting and over the lunch hour.

Public turnout for the Board of Game Central/Southwest Region meeting in Wasilla may be 75-100 people, which is based on the number of testifiers at previous Central/Southwest Region meetings and does not include board members and agency staff. In 2015 there were 81 testifiers and 46 in 2018. To allow for six feet social distancing in the public seating section of the room, Boards Support estimates no more than 35 people will be allowed.

Public attendance for the Board of Game Statewide Regulations meeting has varied in the past depending on the agenda topics. At the 2018 Statewide Regulations meeting in Fairbanks, 115 people signed up to provide public testimony; at the 2017 meeting in Anchorage, 95 people signed up to testify. Public attendance at this meeting could be between 150-200 people.

The following table provides the dimensions of the meeting rooms, public seating capacity, and the number of doors into the meeting room, to give an idea of overall capacity for the meeting rooms and the access in and out of the room. As is the case for the Wasilla meeting venue, to allow for six feet social distancing in the public seating section of the room, Boards Support estimates no more than 35 people will be allowed.

Table 2: Meeting Venue Size

Facility	Dimensions & Size	Public Seating Capacity for Board Meetings	Number of Doors into the Meeting Room
Pike’s Waterfront Lodge - Fairbanks	80 x 35 2800 sq ft	Approx. 80 -100	2 doors between the meeting room and the lobby; 1 double door exit outside.
Best Western Lake Lucille Inn – Wasilla	72 x 43 3,096 sq ft	Approx. 80 - 100	3 doors between the meeting room and the hallways; 1 double door exit to outside.

A final consideration for holding board meetings this spring is the ability for advisory committees to meet to provide recommendations to the board. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the ability of ACs to hold in-person meetings. Due to the risks associated with gatherings, Boards Support is not facilitating in-person meetings for ACs. However, several ACs have been able to meet via web or teleconference. Many ACs are postponing elections until in-person meetings can resume while others are holding elections during teleconferences. For some ACs, meeting via web or teleconference has shown to be an advantage for increased staff and public attendance. Many rural ACs are not yet meeting because of COVID-19 but also due to the postponement of board meetings. While rural ACs are accustomed to teleconference meetings, in-person meetings are heavily relied upon for conducting business much more effectively than over a teleconference. At least two rural ACs in the western region require translation services so teleconferenced meetings are not practical.

Postponing Meetings to the 2021/2022 Cycle

If the board chooses to postpone the Central/Southwest Region and Statewide Regulations meetings to the following meeting cycle, 2021/2022, it is practical and financially feasible to postpone all meeting cycles by one year instead of combining the two meeting cycles into one meeting cycle. Options for meeting dates for scheduling the Central/Southwest Region and the Statewide Regulations meetings in the 2021/2022 cycle are listed below. The options minimize overlap with Board of Fisheries meetings that are currently scheduled, and they begin with Friday start dates. Whichever options the board chooses, the duration between meetings should be at least four weeks apart.

Table 3. Options for Meeting Dates in 2021/2022

Original BOG Meeting Dates & Locations for the 2020/2021 Cycle	Options for BOG Meeting Dates for the 2020/2021 Cycle	BOF Tentative Meeting Dates & Locations for the 2020/2021 Cycle
<p>Central/Southwest Region January 22 – 29, 2021 Wasilla – Best Western Lake Lucille Inn</p> <p>Statewide Regulations March 12-19, 2021 Fairbanks – Pike’s Waterfront Lodge</p>	<p>January 14 – 21, 2022 (Holiday 1/17)</p> <p>January 21 – 28, 2022</p> <p>January 28 – February 4, 2022</p> <p>February 4 – 11, 2022</p> <p>February 11 – 18, 2022 (1 day overlap w/BOF)</p> <p>February 25 – March 4, 2022</p> <p>March 4 – 11, 2022 (1 day overlap w/BOF)</p>	<p>Arctic/Yukon Kuskokwim January 8-12, 2022 Anchorage</p> <p>AK Peninsula, Aleutian Island & Chignik February 18-23, 2022 Anchorage</p> <p>Statewide Finfish March 11-14, 2022 Anchorage</p>

In addition to setting the meeting dates, the board will need to discuss and decide the following items:

1. The board will need to hold a web-conference meeting in spring 2020 to act on proposals having statutory requirements such as reauthorizations for antlerless moose hunts and brown bear tag-fee exemptions. There are 22 reauthorization proposals before the board this cycle. In addition to the reauthorization proposals, Proposal 194 (Agenda Change Request #5) requiring a seven-day sealing period for wolves in Unit 2 was requested by the board at the November 2020 board meeting to be scheduled with the reauthorization proposals for action this meeting cycle. The board may wish to determine if there are any proposals with critical biological and conservation issues to be added to the meeting agenda. The Department of Fish and Game has evaluated the proposals and has not identified any others needing immediate attention to address biologic or conservation concerns.
2. The board has the option to limit public input to written comment only at this special meeting, which is allowable under the Administrative Procedures Act (APA) for properly adopting regulatory changes. If the board wants to allow oral testimony, testifiers will be required to register prior to the meeting, and allowed to give comments via teleconference or video conference. Public notice of the proposed regulatory changes for the special meeting will be issued no less than 30-days prior to the meeting in accordance with the APA, and it will describe the board's preference for soliciting written comments and public testimony.
3. The board has the option of issuing a second Call for Proposals for the Central/Southwest Region and Statewide Regulations meetings. If the board chooses to do so, any new proposals will be published as a supplement to the current proposal book. Doing so will increase the number of proposals already scheduled for board action which could potentially require additional meeting days. If the board does not open the Call for Proposals, the board's agenda change request policy (5 AAC 92.005) provides an option for requesting the board to schedule additional topics for the meetings.

Holding Regulatory Meetings via Web Conference in Spring 2021

If the board explores the option for holding regulatory meetings this spring via web conference, it is possible, and Boards Support staff are up to the challenge for carrying out the technical aspects of the meeting. It will be challenging for participants, especially board members and staff for several reasons including increased workload for board members and staff and the loss of opportunity for in-person interaction among board members, the public and staff that normally occurs at board meetings. It can also be expected that technological issues will occur which will slow the meeting down.

Pre-registration will be required for public testimony in order for Boards Support to manage the participants, and for time management of the meeting. It is possible to utilize the Legislative Information Office for assistance with moderating testifiers and use of their call-in numbers depending on conflicts with the legislature.

There are some advantages for holding meetings via web conference aside from reduced travel expenses. It may provide an opportunity for oral testimony for individuals around the state, particularly rural Alaska, who do not normally attend board meetings in person. There is also flexibility with time management. For example, the board may choose to break over the weekend or schedule a longer time-period between testimony and deliberations instead of conducting meetings over eight or more consecutive days.

In conclusion, whichever option the board decides for rescheduling the Central/Southwest and Statewide Regulations meetings, the board is asked to carefully keep in mind the points made in this memo as well as the January 15, 2021 memo to the Joint Board. The most important consideration is the safety and health of all meeting participants, but also important are the need for keeping the long-term meetings cycles for the boards in sync, the impacts on department staff and budget, and the limitations on the board's budget.