

# MEMORANDUM

## State of Alaska Department of Law

TO: Kristy Tibbles Executive Director  
Alaska Board of Game

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SUBJECT: Spring '08 Bd of Game meeting

### GENERAL COMMENTS

**In general, ethics disclosures:** Before staff reports begin on any new agenda item, or, if preferred, at the very beginning of the meeting, Ethics Act disclosures and determinations must be made under AS 39.52.

**In general, record-making:** It is very important that Board members carefully explain and clearly summarize on the record the reasons for their actions and the grounds upon which the actions are based. The Alaska Supreme Court has stressed the importance of a clear record to facilitate the courts in determining that the Board's actions are within its authority and are reasonable. A clear record also assists the public in understanding the Board's rationale. If board members summarize the reasons for their actions before they vote, it will help establish the necessary record.

In considering each proposal, and the specific requirements that apply in some cases, such as with the subsistence law, it is important that the Board thoroughly discuss and summarize on the record the basis and reasons for its actions. Consistency with past approaches is another important point for discussion. If a particular action does not appear to be consistent, Board members should discuss their reasons for a different approach.

The Alaska Administrative Procedures Act requires that State agencies, including the Board of Game, "[w]hen considering the factual, substantive, and other relevant matter, ... pay special attention to the cost to private persons of the proposed regulatory action." AS 44.62.210(a). This requirement to pay special attention to costs means, at a minimum, that the Board should address any information presented about costs, or explicitly state that no such information was presented, during deliberation of any proposal likely to be adopted. In our view, this requirement does not go so far as to mandate that the Board conduct an independent investigation of potential costs, nor does it require that cost factor into the Board's decision more than, for example, conservation

concerns might. However, it does require the Board to address and “pay special attention to” costs relevant to each regulation adopted.

**In general, written findings:** If any issue is already in court, or is controversial enough that you believe it might result in litigation, or if it is complex enough that findings may be useful to the public, the department, or the Board in the future, it is important that the Board draft and adopt written findings explaining its decisions. From time to time, the Department of Law will recommend that written findings be adopted, in order to better defend the Board’s action. Such recommendations should be carefully considered, as a refusal to adopt findings, in these circumstances, could mean that the Board gets subjected to judicial oversight and second-guessing which might have been avoided. The Alaska Supreme Court has stressed the importance of an adequate decisional document, or written finding, to a determination that the Board has acted within its authority and rationally in adopting regulations, and has deferred to such findings in the past.

**In general, subsistence:** For each proposal the Board should consider whether it involves or affects identified subsistence uses of the game population or sub-population in question. If action on a proposal would affect a subsistence use, the Board must be sure that the regulations provide a reasonable opportunity for the subsistence uses, unless sustained yield would be jeopardized. If the Board has not previously done so, it should first determine whether the game population is subject to customary and traditional uses for subsistence and what amount of the harvestable portion, if any, is reasonably necessary for those uses. The current law requires that the Board have considered at least four issues in implementing the preference:

- (1) Identify game populations or portions of populations customarily and traditionally taken or used for subsistence; *see* 8 criteria at 5 AAC 99.010(b);
- (2) determine whether a portion of the game population may be harvested consistent with sustained yield;
- (3) determine the amount of the harvestable portion reasonably necessary for subsistence uses; and
- (4) adopt regulations to provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses.

Reasonable opportunity is defined to mean “an opportunity, as determined by the appropriate board, that allows a subsistence user to participate in a subsistence hunt or fishery that provides a normally diligent participant with a reasonable expectation of

success of taking of fish or game.” AS 16.05.258(f). It is not to be construed as a guarantee of success.

The amount of the harvestable portion of the game population that is reasonably necessary for subsistence uses will depend largely on the amount of the game population used for subsistence historically and the number of subsistence users expected to participate. Once the Board has determined the amount reasonably necessary for subsistence uses, the Board should by regulation provide an opportunity that allows the predicted number of normally diligent participants a reasonable expectation of success in taking the subject game. The Board may base its determination of reasonable opportunity on information regarding past subsistence harvest levels of the game population in the specific area and the bag limits, seasons, access provisions, and means and methods necessary to achieve those harvests, or on comparable information from similar areas.

If the harvestable portion of the game population is not sufficient to provide for subsistence uses and other consumptive uses, the Board is required to reduce or eliminate non-subsistence uses in order to continue to provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses. If the harvestable portion of the game population is still not sufficient to provide a reasonable opportunity for all subsistence uses, the Board is required to eliminate non-subsistence consumptive uses and distinguish among the subsistence users based on the following Tier II criteria:

- (1) The customary and direct dependence on the game population by the subsistence user for human consumption as a mainstay of livelihood; and
- (2) the ability of the subsistence user to obtain food if subsistence use is restricted or eliminated. AS 16.05.258.

**In general, intensive management:** Under AS 16.05.255 (e), (f) and (g), the Board should assure itself that the steps outlined below have been followed when acting on proposals dealing with ungulate populations.

***First*** - Determine whether the **ungulate** population is **important for high levels of human consumptive use**.

- If so, then subsequent intensive management analysis may be required.
- If not, then no further intensive management analysis is required.

***Second*** - Is the ungulate population **depleted** or will the Board be **significantly reducing the taking** of the population?

The Board must determine whether depletion or reduction of productivity, or Board action, is likely to cause a significant reduction in harvest.

- If either is true, then subsequent intensive management analysis is required.
- If not, then further intensive management analysis is not required.

***Third*** - Is intensive management appropriate?

(a) If the population is depleted, has the Board found that consumptive use of the population is a preferred use? Note that the Legislature has already found that “providing for high levels of harvest for human consumption in accordance with the sustained yield principle is the highest and best use of identified big game prey populations in most areas of the State...” In the rare cases where consumptive use is not a preferred use, then the Board need not adopt intensive management regulations.

(b) If consumptive uses are preferred, and the population is depleted or reduced in productivity so that the result may be a significant reduction in harvest, the Board must consider whether enhancement of abundance or productivity is feasibly achievable using recognized and prudent active management techniques. At this point, the Board will need information from the Department about available recognized management techniques, including feasibility. If enhancement is feasibly achievable, then the Board must adopt intensive management regulations.

(c) If the Board will be significantly reducing the taking of the population, then it must adopt, or schedule for adoption at its next meeting, regulations that provide for intensive management *unless*:

1. Intensive management would be:
  - A. Ineffective based on scientific information;
  - B. Inappropriate due to land ownership patterns; or
  - C. Against the best interests of subsistence users;

*or*

2. The Board declares that a biological emergency exists and takes immediate action to protect and maintain the population and also schedules for adoption those regulations necessary to restore the population.

## **Comments on Individual Proposals**

**Proposals 4, 5, 6, 11, 13, 23, 43, 44, 47, 54, and 57 :** Each proposal suggests action that may significantly reduce the taking of the subject population, so the Board should consider whether intensive management regulations must be adopted.

**Proposals 10, 12 and 14:** These proposals suggest that a Tier II hunt should be opened to a broader class of subsistence users. If the harvestable surplus is sufficient to at least provide a reasonable opportunity for all subsistence uses, the Board may open the hunt up.

**Proposal 24:** The Board is not authorized to have a Tier II hunt and another hunt on the same population. The Board must identify separate populations and manage them separately if different hunting regimes, based on different harvestable surpluses, are to be contemplated.

**Proposals 25, 27, 28, and 36:** Each proposal suggests limiting or eliminating an antlerless moose hunt. In each case, the Board should examine whether, in doing so, it will be able to continue to comply with the intensive management law.

**Proposal 39:** Archery hunting is already legal during normal (unrestricted) hunting seasons.

**Proposal 45:** The Board is not authorized to adopt hunting restrictions based primarily on a public safety rationale.

**Proposals 49, 50, 59 and 62:** These proposals suggest adopting hunting seasons applicable only to Native corporation lands and delegating emergency opening authority to a federal agency or a local entity. The Board is not authorized to delegated emergency opening authority to any other entity, and the suggestion to limit the season on a public resource to privately-held lands raises issues that are problematic under the common use clause of Alaska's constitution.

**Proposals 55 and 58:** The Board is not authorized to require that nonresident moose hunters be guided.

**Proposal 68:** The Board would need to define the traditional methods that would be permitted.

**Proposal 85:** As sheep are not a species for which the Board is statutorily required to prefer resident users, the Board should articulate a reasonable basis for treating residents differently from nonresidents, if it chooses to adopt this proposal.

**Proposals 95 and 96:** Both proposals suggest liberalizations of the Dalton Highway corridor hunting regulations. Any such changes may not conflict with the statutory bans on the use of ORVs and hunting with firearms within the corridor.

**Proposals 102, 106, and 113:** Each proposal suggests eliminating an existing predator control program. In considering these proposals, the Board should consider whether it will still be able to comply with the intensive management law if it does so. Also, the background recitation for proposal 106 omits or misstates several critical facts.

First, the recitation fails to mention that the original population goal adopted by the Board, and based on the intensive management worksheet, was 6,000 to 8,000, and that goal was only reduced to 3,000-3,500 as an attempted compromise with anti-control groups in an effort to get a control program underway. When the Board realized no such compromise would be effective, it returned to its original objectives.

Second, the 2003 lawsuit did not establish that there were any problems with the underlying science or data. To the contrary, the trial judge concluded that the Board had fulfilled all of its statutory obligations. The only adverse ruling was that the Board had failed to strictly follow its own regulations, which the Board quickly corrected.

Third, Board members and ADF&G staff have not agreed or admitted that there is no longer any scientific value to be gleaned from the Unit 19D-East program.

**Proposal 112:** If it elects to adopt this proposal, the Board should strictly follow 5 AAC 92.110 and .112.