

Big Game Commercial Services Board - 2019 summary

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The Big Game Commercial Services Board (Board) was created by the Legislature “...for the purposes of licensing and regulating the activities of providers of commercial services to big game hunters in the interest of the state’s wildlife resources...” (AS 08.54.591(a)). The Board consists of nine members, including two active guides, two transporters, two private landowners, two members of the public, and one Board of Game member. In 2017, I was assigned to be the Board of Game liaison. One private landowner seat on the Board is currently vacant, and my appointment is scheduled to expire on March 1, 2020.

The Board’s duties include developing and administering guide examinations, overseeing guide applications and authorizations, assuring guides and transporters have appropriate permission from landowners, establishing codes of ethics, imposing appropriate disciplinary sanctions, and adopting procedural and substantive regulations (AS 08.54.600). The Board meets at least twice a year in person and periodically by teleconference – all meetings are advertised and open to the public, except for executive sessions. Funding for Board activities, including legal costs and associated support by staff from the Division of Corporations, Businesses and Professional Licenses, is provided by license fees collected from guides and transporters. There is one investigator assigned to the Board, one occupational license examiner and one Executive Administrator who is also responsible for one other professional Board.

Primary highlights during the past year included extension of the Board’s charter for another 5 years, drafting a position statement concerning the ability of convicted felons to be guide/outfitters, increased involvement of Department of Law in Board activities, and a new Executive Administrator position for the Board and the Marine Pilot Board.

A legislative audit of the Board in 2018 found that it “...served the public’s interest by conducting meetings in accordance with applicable laws, amending regulations to improve occupations under the board’s purview, and supporting changes by the Department of Law to improve the timeliness of the disciplinary process. Additionally, the board worked to eliminate the over \$1 million deficit reported in the prior 2015 sunset audit”. The audit also concluded that “...board licenses were not consistently supported by adequate documentation, a high number of investigations had unjustified periods of inactivity, and three board positions were vacant for an extended period”. Since the release of the audit’s findings, the Board has been actively addressing the noted deficiencies.

Based on the positive results of the audit, Senate Bill 43 extended the termination date of the Board from June 30, 2019 until June 30, 2024. That Bill also included a provision that significantly increased the requirements necessary to attain and hold Master Guide classification.

During the December 2019 meeting, the Board decided to develop a position statement that clarified conflicting information about the ability of convicted felons to apply for and hold

guide/outfitter licenses in Alaska. Based on Department of Law advice, it states that all applicants for any class of guide-outfitter license who indicate on the application form that they have been convicted of a felony, and any applicant who investigators discover has been convicted of a felony, be denied further consideration of their application until they can provide a valid legal document proving they may possess a firearm. This includes applicants for renewal of previously issued licenses.

Administrative changes increasing Department of Law participation and the new Executive Administrator position were made possible by a continuing positive financial balance for the program. Although the 2019 year-end balance was a \$150,523 deficit, this was not a concern because of the bi-annual nature of license receipts and a long-term positive trend and projection. The new Assistant Attorney General assigned to the Board is Megyn Weigand, and the new Executive Administrator is Renee Hoffard.

As of December 2019, there were 44 open cases being worked on by the Department's Investigators. Thirteen cases were closed since the last Board meeting, most resulting in consent agreements. At the same time, there were 32 individuals being monitored on probation.

Regulations promulgated by the Board go through a much more convoluted process than we use in the Board of Game, often taking years from the time of inception to the time of implementation. A list of regulatory changes currently in progress is provided below.

Our next meeting will be March 17-19, 2020 at the Department of Natural Resources building in Fairbanks.

Regulation	Main Topic	Initial Review by the board	Current Status
12 AAC 920(b)	Hunting, Guiding & Practical Experience	December 2016	As of December 2019: Approved by Board; back to reg specialist
12 AAC 920(c)	Hunting, Guiding & Practical Experience	December 2016	As of December 2019: Approved by Board; back to reg specialist
12 AAC 75.920(e)	Hunting, Guiding & Practical Experience	December 2016	As of December 2019: Approved by Board; back to reg specialist
12 AAC 75.260(e)	RGO Contract Requirements	December 2016	Tabled after public comments
12 AAC 75.400(e)	Transport Activity Reports	December 2016	As of December 2019: Approved by Board; back to reg specialist
12 AAC 75.230(a)	Guide Use Are Registration	July 2018	As of December 2019: Approved by Board; back to reg specialist