

**Alaska Board of Game Report**  
**Region IV Meeting - Dillingham - February 16-23**

by Mark Richards

- \* Board approves continuation of Unit 13  
Community Subsistence Harvest Hunt**
- \* Nonresident hunting of Nelchina caribou approved**
  - \* Youth Hunt for Nelchina caribou approved**
  - \* Unit 16B DM540 any-bull permits doubled**
- \* RHAK's Unit 9 Brown Bear proposal for a resident priority unbelievably  
results in shorter seasons for all**
- \* Teresa Sager Albaugh & Larry Van Daele  
reappointed to Board of Game**



The Central/Southwest Board of Game meeting is under wraps and here are some thoughts from the 7-day meeting and results from some proposals RHAK members may be interested in.

As you can see from the photo, the meeting was held in the gym at Dillingham High School. A big thank you to the school district and volunteers for helping to provide lunches and to everyone in Dillingham for such a welcoming experience. The Dillingham area has been experiencing warmer winters and less snow, making it hard to get around hunting and trapping in winter. Weather during the meeting was well above freezing during the day, and the bay was mostly devoid of ice. I should have brought breakup boots for the walk from hotel to the school every day!

The board spent quite a bit of time on a proposal (#148) from a local resident about using a snowmachine to position caribou for harvest, even holding a packed town hall meeting one evening to discuss the subject. In the end, the board better defined what "positioning" an animal with a snowmachine really entailed and voted 4-3 to adopt the proposal as amended. This is an excellent example of how the board can better operate with more public input and time given to a particular issue.

There were many proposals from guides to increase nonresident hunting opportunities in Unit 17, or to require a guide to hunt moose and caribou. For example, proposal 140 asked to open a new guide-required nonresident registration hunt for moose. RHAK has consistently opposed the creation of new must-be-guided species hunts by the board, as whenever these happen it ends up with higher allocations for nonresidents. The fact that proposal 140 narrowly failed by a 3-4 vote (Chairman Spraker, Vice-Chairman Turner, and Karen Linnell voted yes) is emblematic of what is going on with the board. I was once again disappointed at the comments from some members of the board who during deliberations on the many proposals from guides spoke about the Board's obligation to "provide stability" to guides and the guide industry, so they could "capture more clients," while at the same time voting against a resident hunting priority elsewhere.

Beyond that, the Board continues to pass regulations that don't seem to be legal according to our statutes (more on that below).

### **Board approves continuation of Unit 13 Community Subsistence**

**Harvest Hunt:** RHAK opposed continuation of the CSH moose and caribou hunts in the Copper Basin region, based on so many complaints from members and the public, and our view that in times of abundance (which we are at now with Nelchina caribou and Unit 13 moose) there didn't need to be any Tier hunts that discriminated against certain Alaskans over others.

Still, the Board narrowly passed continuation of the CSH hunts in the Copper Basin region by a 4-3 vote. (Members Sager-Albaugh, Lamal, and Chairman Spraker voted no) I had spoken with Cheryl Brooking, the Department of Law attorney attached to the Board, and asked her how it was legal to require CSH moose hunters on a Tier 1 hunt to apply using Tier II scoring

criteria. The Board had passed such a scheme in order to further weed out participants so "locals" in the region could meet their subsistence needs. It should be noted, however, that all of the ANS (Amount Necessary for Subsistence) goals **are** being met. Ms. Brooking informed me that indeed the CSH any-bull moose hunt was a Tier 1 hunt, which according to statute is open to all Alaskans, and that technically the board was not using Tier II scoring criteria, rather they were adding additional application scoring. Yet, during deliberations on the CSH moose hunt, several Board of Game members said on the record that they were using "Tier II scoring criteria" for a Tier I hunt. Again, Ms. Brooking informed me that anything the board passes becomes regulation until someone sues the state over it. So we are now in the realm it seems where the Board of Game is overtly subverting the law and challenging ordinary Alaskans to take them to court over it at great cost to the public and the state.

**Nonresident hunting of Nelchina caribou approved:** RHAK had opposed allowing any nonresident hunting of Nelchina caribou, even though the herd is abundant and over the population objective, until general resident hunting opportunity was allowed. There are over 30,000 applications for the DC 485 Nelchina caribou permit every year with only 5,000 permits available. Thousands of Alaskans every year apply for yet don't receive a DC 485 permit to hunt the Nelchina herd. There is absolutely no reason whatsoever to not allow a general or registration permit hunt open to all Alaskans for the Nelchina herd. The Board allocated up to 200 permits in a separate drawing pool for nonresidents to hunt the Nelchina herd, while keeping in place restrictions against thousands of Alaskans.

**Youth Hunt for Nelchina caribou approved:** Proposal 101 to establish an early-season youth hunt for caribou in Unit 13 was approved with up to 200 permits allocated in a new drawing pool. Residents only, season August 1-5. Accompanying adult must punch their tag.

**Unit 16B DM540 any-bull permits doubled:** Proposal #85 asked to lengthen the moose season in Unit 16B Remainder. The board rejected the longer season but added an additional 300 permits for the DM 540 any-bull hunt. There will now be 600 permits available.

**RHAK's Unit 9 Brown Bear proposal for a resident priority unbelievably results in shorter seasons for all:** RHAK worked with King Salmon area biologist Dave Crowley last April on a proposal to allow a five-day resident-only spring and fall season to the biennial brown bear registration hunts in Unit 9. We based our proposal on complaints from members about difficulty of accessing exclusive guide use areas on federal lands, conflicts with guides, and too much competition from nonresident guided hunters. At that time the Department had no conservation concerns for brown bears in Unit 9.

Between the time we submitted our proposal and the Board meeting nearly a year later, ADF&G concluded that bears were likely being overharvested in Unit 9, and that perhaps seasons needed to be shortened to reduce harvests. The stats presented showed that nonresident guided hunters make up 75% of all bear hunters in Unit 9 and take 80% of the overall harvest and the majority of sows. Mr. Crowley presented to the Board that most of this harvest takes place the first week of the spring and fall seasons, and that keeping the resident seasons the same, but shortening the nonresident seasons, would allow for a resident-only earlier season that would result in much less overall harvest, thus meeting the Department's new objectives to decrease harvests.

The board stated that without any definitive proof from RHAK – only “he said, he said” complaints – that residents were being denied access or having run-ins with guides on federal and state areas, they were not inclined to believe there were conflicts or too much competition negatively affecting resident bear hunters.

In my testimony, I stressed to the Board that RHAK had reviewed ADFG's new data, that we had the same conservation concerns based on that data, but clearly the vast majority of hunters and harvests were from nonresident guided hunters, and in no way should residents bear any brunt of any season restrictions, if that was to be considered by the board. The cause for the overharvests was **not** resident hunters. It was unlimited nonresident opportunity.

Sadly –and this is what continues to happen – when the Board is made aware of conservation concerns, and most of the harvest is from nonresident guided hunters, rather than restrict nonresidents to draw-only permits with a limited allocation, they vote to restrict everyone. In this case the Board voted to shorten the spring and fall brown bear seasons in Unit 9 by one week for everyone, with BOG member Tom Lamal as the only no vote.

Again, the Board of Game too often seems more concerned about providing “stability” to guides and their businesses than they are what is best for resident hunters and the resource.

**Board of Game Reappointments:** Both Teresa Sager Albaugh and Larry Van Daele were reappointed to the Board of Game by Governor Walker and confirmed by the legislature. RHAK supported both reappointments.