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Comment from Alaska Professional Hunters Association

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Comment

Comment submitted on behalf of Alaska Professional Hunters Association. Please see attached document for full comment.

Attachments 1

 APHA comments on AK Hunting Guide Form (00225066x7A2C9)

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**[EXTERNAL] Comment submission: Docket No. FWS-R7-NWRS-2023-0005; OMB Control No. 1018-01411**

Megan Vail <mvail@bhb.com>

Tue 6/20/2023 5:42 PM

To:FWHQ Info\_Coll <info\_coll@fws.gov>

Cc:Jon DeVore <jdevore@bhb.com>

 1 attachments (3 MB)

APHA comments on AK Hunting Guide Form (00225066x7A2C9).pdf;

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Megan Vail

Research Director

Birch Horton Bittner & Cherot, P.C.

1150 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Ste. 350

Washington, D.C. 20036-4142

(202) 659-5800 – Phone

(202) 862-8348 – Direct

(202) 659-1027 – Fax



Birch Horton Bittner & Cherot  
*a professional corporation*

**Jon M. DeVore**

Respond to Washington, D.C. Office  
T 202.862.8362 • F 202.659.1027  
jdevore@bhbc.com

June 20, 2023

**Via regulations.gov and email**  
[Info\\_Coll@fws.gov](mailto:Info_Coll@fws.gov)

Madonna L. Baucum  
Service Information Collection Clearance Officer  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
5275 Leesburg Pike  
MS: PRB (JAO/3W)  
Falls Church, VA 22041-3803  
Info\_Coll@fws.gov

Sara Boario  
Regional Director, Alaska  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
1011 East Tudor Rd  
Anchorage, AK 99503

Martha Williams  
Director  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Alaska Professional Hunters Association's comments on FWS Notice of Information Collection; Request for Comment regarding "Agency Information Collection Activities: Alaska Guide Services"  
Docket No. FWS-R7-NWRS-2023-0005; OMB Control No. 1018-0141<sup>1</sup>

Dear Ms. Baucum, Ms. Williams and Ms. Boario,

The Alaska Professional Hunters Association ("APHA") respectfully submits these comments to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ("FWS") on the FWS Notice of Information Collection referenced above, which expressed the FWS's intent to implement a revised guide service evaluation methodology entitled "Agency Information Collection Activities: Alaska Guide Service Evaluation." published in the Federal Register on April 19, 2023 (88 Fed. Reg. 24207-

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<sup>1</sup> **NOTE: Control Number Discrepancy.** The control number listed in the heading of the Federal Register Notice is 1018-0141, but the control number listed in the body of the announcement under "Addresses" section appears to contain a typo 1018-041. Thus, we are including both control numbers here to ensure proper marking and identification of our comments.

24209). We understand this agency action to be the revision of the existing evaluation form, via the FWS replacing the old Form 3-2349 with the new Form 3-2538 “Alaska Guide Service Evaluation” (tentatively named). The FWS collects information to help evaluate the FWS services on the national wildlife refuges in the State of Alaska. The National Wildlife Refuge Administration Act of 1966, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 668dd-ee. (In turn, the FWS uses this information to directly evaluate the services provided to the public by the members of the APHA, including evaluation of the APHA members themselves in permitting processes).

APHA is Alaska’s association of hunting guides, many of whom guide recreational hunters on FWS lands in Alaska, pursuant to special permits. The issues addressed in these comments are not unique to Alaska, but apply to any situation in which a hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, mountaineering, or other guide seeks to lead recreational users on public lands that the FWS controls. APHA presumes but we do not absolutely conclude that the FWS collects similar information from commercial users of the U.S. Wildlife Refuge System. If it does not, it should.

Before providing substantive comments about the proposed revision of the information required by the FWS, allow us to relate that as of June 19, 2023, only 4 individuals provided any comments. Two of the comments were made by “Anonymous,” both of which were virtually identical to the effect that: “Please don’t allow hunting, fishing, and trapping on any of these wildlife refuge locations anymore. Please protect the animals. These killings don’t benefit these animals in any way and this killing business is unnecessary,” or “I recommend prohibiting commercial guiding on public lands. It is not necessary or appropriate. Many of them do something illegal because they have a client paying money and that alone pressures them to same day airborne, herd animals, bait, and the list goes on and on. There are plenty of hunters in Alaska if some rich fancy pants from Germany wants a trophy well he can afford to spend the time and money to learn the skill.” These types of comments are not constructive or informed opinions, but more importantly, the comments are not responsive to the request for comments at issue here. Since the comments are not responsive to the Request for Comments and they are not relevant to the issue at hand, these comments should not even be considered by the FWS.

To put the information sought by the FWS in perspective and to better appreciate the purposes for which the FWS collects the information, the guiding industry in Alaska has to be put into perspective. The APHA and other interested parties commissioned a report by the McDowell Group, a summary of which is attached to this letter for your administrative record. The report related information gathered during 2019, and subsequent information does not change its conclusions that Alaska’s guided hunting industry contributes more than \$91 million in economic activity in Alaska. Direct labor income accounts for \$40.8 million and \$51 million comes from goods and services spending. Over 13,000 big game permits were purchased by non-resident hunters. There were roughly 100,000 resident licenses purchased in Alaska during that same time. **So, the proposed Alaska Guide Service Evaluation form should set a specific goal of how best**

to gather the information it seeks in a manner that is most likely to obtain the greatest number of respondents.

**Significance of Client Evaluations:**

Client evaluations are important and highly relevant to both the service and the competing guides. **APHA understands that evaluations are available for the public to review upon request.**

Prospectus applications vary in their quality and sophistication in ways not necessarily linear to selecting the best applicant. That is to say, a high-quality, professionally written prospectus may or may not describe a high-quality hunting guide operation. Most established and professional hunting guides choose to write their own prospectuses. Because FWS concession offerings consist of 7 to 8 forms headed by a broad description of suggested criteria to be included in the prospectus, there is considerable variance in submissions. Some applicants narrate their operations, while others choose cryptic bullet points to describe their operations and business practices. Alaskan hunting guide operations are challenging to understand for career service employees who may or may not have a robust hunting or backcountry experience set. Prospectus variation in format intensifies challenges for ranking panels and refuge managers in their efforts to identify and select the hunting guide best suited for award. **APHA recommends that the FWS should be more transparent about how the Alaska Guide Service Evaluations may be used by the FWS.**

Client evaluations have the potential to be an essential tool to separate the good, the bad and the ugly during the competitive award process as well as tools for the service to more fully understand guided hunting operations. This is not a suggestion that client evaluations be the only tool used to evaluate guides, but **we do recommend that evaluations be available as a reference for the ranking panel and then used as a decision factor by the refuge manager.** Again, this is why the evaluations should be publicly available. If a guide applicant has not guided on FWS lands and is new to the process, we recommend that contracted clients listed by the guide should be surveyed even if those hunts did not occur on a refuge. Weight should not be added to client evaluations or the utility of client surveys will favor refuge incumbents over highly qualified new applicants. If an applicant has not contracted hunts, clients that they accompanied as an assistant guide should be surveyed as well as the most recent supervising guide they were employed by.

Client evaluations should be a tool to assess the veracity of a competing guide's offering that will buttress professionally-authored or self-written prospectuses evenly. That is to say, client evaluations should have the goal to assist in awarding hunting guide concessions to the best applicant even if their prospectus is complete but unpolished. The public should also have this information reasonably available to them so they can make their own independent judgement as to with whom they might elect to hunt and by whom they want to be guided. **However, if it is the**

**intent that the name and operations of individual guides are to be made public, the FWS should notify in advance the guide and operations.**

**Evaluation Factors:**

There are a few factors that we believe should be included in the evaluation forms, because these factors can impact the client's experience and feedback despite these factors being outside the control of the evaluated guide. For example, bad weather may have caused a less than optimal experience, so we recommend that the FWS take any such factors into consideration when utilizing client feedback that might be pre-disposed to be negative for reasons unrelated to the guide personally. We discuss these recommended evaluation factors below.

Visiting hunters buy a hunt knowing that they may or may not harvest an animal. However, hunts are purchased with a reasonable expectation of harvest. Outside of an accident or injury, visiting hunters' success in harvesting the target species of a hunt will have the largest single impact on how they perceive their hunt. It is critical to ask, up front, if the hunter was successful in harvesting their target species then bifurcate the evaluations into two broad categories: successful harvest and unsuccessful harvest.

Weather is the next important factor in achieving a baseline for an evaluation. Some hunts are truncated by difficult weather; it is unlikely that a hunter who loses half of his hunt to weather delays and who doesn't harvest an animal will have a very positive perspective when filling out the survey. Weather is strictly an act of god, not a reflection on the guide business in isolation, and therefore needs to be controlled for early in the survey. Some hunting guides are consistently better at satisfying client expectations through weather challenges, and this is a positive reflection on the operation. Absent control for weather and harvest success, client surveys will be inadequate and difficult to interpret. Controlling for these factors levels the playing field in guide competition, because an applicant may have a history offering hunts in a more stable climate for a more abundant species. This does not mean they are a better guide necessarily than a competitor who historically fights tough weather in search of less abundant animals. In fact, the latter of the two might be the stronger operation, even if client evaluations will likely skew in favor of the former.

Other factors are also worth including consistently. Safety, accidents or injuries is the next important factor. Once harvest and weather are controlled for, clients should evaluate their trip first and foremost on safety. From safety, we move to the integrity of the business agreement with the guide and whether the guide did a good job of setting expectations and suggesting preparations to the client for the trip. Food, sanitation and comfort should be considered – here you need to control for factors such as: back pack hunt, lodge hunt, spike camp hunt or boat-based hunt. Clients should be surveyed on these additional factors as well: meat/trophy care, assistant guide quality, interpretative experience and any conflicts in the field. Finally, the current FWS Form 3-2349 (Rev 01/12) does have a catch-all “additional details or comments” section, which is constructive.

In closing, allow me to relate some bare and more current facts that supplement the McDowell Report of 2019. In summary:

Communities surrounded by or reliant on FWS Refuges will be always hardest hit by the policies and behind-the-scenes program management. Collecting vital information and using it to form the policies and implement the program management directly impacts the entire Alaskan communities and our visitors. We suggest the FWS consider how best to incorporate these facts into the gathering of information used to evaluate Alaska guide services.

- 85% of Alaskan guide businesses are Alaskan-owned.
- Over half of the 90 million dollars of economic activity created by guiding hunters is captured in rural Alaska.
- Alaska hunting guides share 223,500 pounds of game meat in Alaska annually (2021 number).
- Conservatively, shared meat is worth 2.1 million in direct replacement in rural Alaska (2021 before pandemic driven inflation).
- In accordance with Alaska state law, any non-Alaska-resident Americans who are hunting in Alaska must hire a guide for safety purposes; American hunter use of federal public lands in Alaska is therefore reliant on guides, which demonstrates the importance of fostering high-quality hunting guide services in Alaska.

In conclusion, the FWS Alaska Guide Service Evaluation is a useful tool. However, the Federal Register is not transparent on how the information will be ultimately used. If the ultimate use of the evaluation in the internal and external uses by the FWS was clarified, comments on the proposed evaluations would be easier to put into context. The APHA is aware that the guiding industry, hunters and the FWS would benefit from compiling similar information from all areas in the United States which enjoy and benefit from the National Wildlife Refuge System. APHA encourages the FWS, while being in compliance with the Privacy Act, to compile the evaluation forms and make the information readily available to the public, other state and federal agencies, and the impacted guides. As previously noted, the privacy rights of the guides should also be taken into consideration.

Respectfully,

Alaska Professional Hunters Association, via its attorney,



Jon M. DeVore

Birch Horton Bittner & Cherot



# Alaska's Guided Hunting Industry



## Total Guide Industry Economic Output

**\$91.8 million** in total guided hunting industry economic activity including direct spending, wages and multiplier effects in 2019

**\$40.8 million**

Total Labor Income

**\$51 million**

Goods & Services (Non-Payroll) Spending

## New Dollars for Alaska's Economy



The guided hunting industry circulated **\$57.4 million** in the Alaska economy as labor income and spending for goods and services.

**3,090**

Guided Nonresident Hunters

**505**

Traveling Companions

## Guide Industry Spending with Alaska Businesses



**\$31.9 million** was spent directly with businesses in Alaska by guides and visiting hunters. Multiplier effects generated an additional **\$19.1 million** in economic activity for Alaska's support sector.

**A majority (59%) of guide spending occurs in rural areas of Alaska in the form of wages, air transportation, fuel, food, and supplies.**

## Jobs for Alaska



**1,380** people directly employed in the guided hunting industry.

**\$25.5 million** in direct wages and guide income.

Multiplier effects generated another **510 jobs** and **\$15.3 million** in wages for Alaska's support sector.

### Guided Hunting Industry Employment, 2019

**1,380** Direct Jobs

**510** Indirect Jobs

**1,890** Total Employment

**85%** of registered guides reside in Alaska. **70%** of those live outside of Alaska's major urban areas.

# Meat Sharing is a Long-Standing Tradition in Alaska

In addition to the impacts of jobs, wages, and goods and services spending, hunting guides and their clients share a significant volume of high-quality game meat with Alaska residents every year. Recipients include Native communities, elders, needy families with children, traditional food programs, and those who enjoy game meat but can no longer hunt. Game meat is nutritionally and culturally rich and is an important part of many Alaskans' diet.



An estimated **223,500 pounds** of game meat was shared with Alaskans by guides and guided hunters in 2019  
**167,600 pounds** with rural residents, **55,900** with urban residents

**\$2.3 million**

estimated value of replacing this  
game meat with beef

**\$1.8 million**

in rural communities and  
**\$447,000** in urban areas

## Game meat is a renewable resource that feeds Alaskans year after year.

*It's customary in rural areas to help others when they are in need. Meat donations really help people.*  
-Hunting guide

*I have seen patients not feeling well and grimacing in pain take a bowl of bone broth and you can see them visibly relax. It makes them feel better. Our traditional foods program is important for patients' quality of life. It has been even more important with Covid-19 when patients have little or no access to loved ones. Eating a traditional food makes them feel better. Patients have said it tastes like home.* -Chef, Alaska Native Medical Center

*Sometimes we fly significant distances to drop off meat. We typically have one contact in the village, and they distribute to the people they know need it most.* -Hunting guide

*Wild meat is important for many Alaskans both urban and rural residents. It is especially important for elders in the areas we hunt, they love it. We always try to make sure that they have meat in their freezers.* -Hunting guide

*We share meat with people that live in villages and in cities. People that do not or cannot hunt are very thankful to get fresh game meat.* -Hunting guide



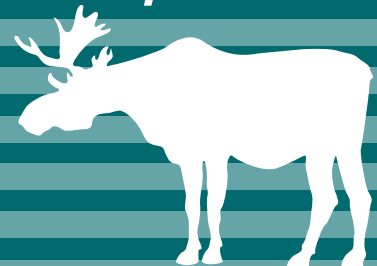
Moose meat donation to Alaska Native Medical Center traditional foods program.

### Estimated Meat Sharing by Guided Hunters, 2019

Species	Total # Shared
Deer	7,600 lbs.
Sheep	14,600 lbs.
Mt. Goat	15,500 lbs.
Caribou	19,800 lbs.

**166,000 lbs.**

Moose



Total meat shared **223,500 pounds**



# State Revenue Generated by Visiting Hunters, Guided and Unguided in 2019

**\$9.7 million** in total **ADF&G Fish and Game Wildlife Fund** revenue was generated by guided and unguided visiting hunter purchases of licenses and big game tags.



**13,893**

visiting hunters purchased Alaska hunting licenses totaling **\$2.1 million**.



**13,272**

big game tags were purchased by visiting hunters, generating **\$7.6 million** in State revenue.

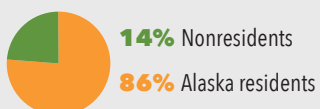
Not all hunters that purchase licenses actually hunted. Visiting hunters are required to buy licenses prior to applying for some hunts. An unknown number of hunters do not draw tags and therefore do not hunt.



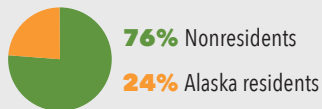
## Revenue for Wildlife Conservation in Alaska



### Hunting Licenses Issued

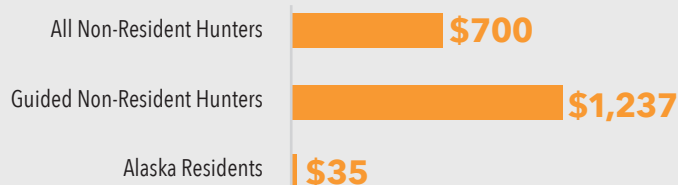


### License/Tag Revenues



**Guided nonresidents represented only 3% of total licenses, but 30% of total license/tag revenues in 2019.**

### Average Per-Person License/Tag Revenue, 2019



Nonresidents spent **\$700** on hunting licenses/tags on average, compared with **\$35** among Alaska residents. **Guided nonresident hunters generated even more on average, at \$1,237 per hunter.**

Source: ADF&G.

## ADF&G Division of Wildlife Funding

In 2019, through fees collected by the Fish and Game Fund, resident and non-resident hunters provided **\$12.8 million** (27%) of the ADF&G Division of Wildlife's **\$47.1 million** budget.

Fish and Game funds are used to leverage Pittman-Robertson funds which totaled **\$20.7 million** in 2019. Combined, Fish and Game Fund and Pittman-Robertson funds generated **71%** of Division of Wildlife expenditures in 2019.

Note: Pittman-Robertson collects excise taxes on sporting goods that is apportioned to state wildlife agencies for hunter education, shooting ranges, and wildlife conservation programs that benefit hunters and those that view wildlife. States must provide 25% non-federal matching funds for qualified projects. Stated another way, states can generate up to \$3 for every \$1 in matching funds. Alaska uses Fish and Game funds generated from the sale of licenses and game tags to match Pittman-Robertson funds.



# Summary of Guided Hunting Impacts in Alaska, 2019

## Guided Hunters

Alaska residents	133
Nonresident US citizen	2,886
Foreign nationals	204
<b>Total Guided Hunters</b>	<b>3,223</b>
Estimated number of guided hunter traveling companions	505

## Shared Meat

Pounds of meat shared by guides and their clients	223,500 lbs.
<b>Estimated value of replacing shared game meat with beef</b>	<b>\$2.3 million</b>

## Guided Hunting Industry Related Employment

Direct employment	1,380 jobs
Indirect and induced employment	510 jobs
<b>Total Employment (direct, indirect, and induced)</b>	<b>1,890 jobs</b>

## Guided Hunting Industry Related Labor Income

Direct labor income (payroll and guide income)	\$25.5 million
Indirect and induced labor income	\$15.3 million
<b>Total Labor Income (direct, indirect, and induced)</b>	<b>\$40.8 million</b>

## Guided Hunting Industry Spending with Alaska Businesses

Guide spending with Alaska-based vendors	\$28.0 million
Hunter and companion pre/post hunt spending	\$3.9 million
Indirect and induced spending	\$19.1 million
<b>Total direct, indirect, and induced non-payroll spending</b>	<b>\$51.0 million</b>

**Total Guide Industry-Related Economic Output, 2019** **\$91.8 million**

# Summary of Visiting Hunter License and Tag Expenditures, 2019

## All Nonresident Hunting License and Game Tag Spending

# of hunting licenses issued ( <b>14%</b> of all AK licenses that allow big game hunting)	13,893
License and tag revenue	\$2.1 million
# of tags purchased	13,272
Tag revenue	\$7.6 million
Fish and Game Wildlife Fund revenue generated by visiting big game hunters	\$9.7 million
<b>% of ADF&amp;G Fish and Game Fund generated by visiting hunter license and tag purchases</b>	<b>76%</b>

## Guided Nonresident Hunter License and Game Tag Spending

# of licenses issued ( <b>3%</b> of all AK licenses that allow big game hunting)	3,090
License revenue	\$590,000
# of tags purchased	4,464
Game tag revenue	\$3.2 million
Fish and Game Wildlife Fund revenue generated by guided big game hunters	\$3.8 million
<b>% of ADF&amp;G Fish and Game Fund generated by guided nonresident hunters license &amp; tag purchases</b>	<b>30%</b>

*\*Figures have been rounded.*

Information sources used in this report include: State of Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing; The Alaska Big Game Commercial Services Board, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Alaska Visitor Statistics Program 7, a McDowell Group survey of registered hunting guides conducted in 2020, and interviews with registered guides. The full study can be found at: [www.mcdowellgroup.net/publications](http://www.mcdowellgroup.net/publications).

This report was sponsored by the Alaska Professional Hunters Association, the Alaska Hunting Conservation Foundation, and Dallas Safari Club.

**McDowell**  
**GROUP**

January 2021