

**Presentation at the
“Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic”– Workshop,
February 2001**

By Eruk Williamson

I have lived in AK 17 years, having grown up in Montana.
I have a Bachelors degree in Wildlife biology from Univ. of Montana.
I have had the privilege of travelling throughout Alaska in various roles.
I have conducted guided fishing, hunting and wildlife watching trips in SW Alaska for 13 years. I am a former member of the Alaska Board of Game, as well as the AWRTA Board of directors.

When we speak of tourists, we are mostly referring to visitors from out of state. I will make repeated reference to Nonresidents- those who do not live in Alaska.
Guided, and unguided.
In AK, Guides are required for all foreign nonresident hunters.
Guide required for U.S. citizen nonresidents who hunt brown or grizzly bear, Dall sheep, and Mountain Goat.
Guides not required for a U.S. citizen nonresident to hunt moose, caribou, deer, black bear, ducks, geese, or upland birds, or fishing.
No marine mammal sporthunting: polar bear, seals, walrus.

Patterns and methods for hunting:

Unguided hunters are transported by airplane carrying groups of 2-6 to remote airstrip (wheels) or body of water (Floats.) They hunt on foot in vicinity of their camp, or float down river in an inflatable boat or canoe, ending trip at village airstrip or picked up by floatplane landing on river. Hunters sleep in tents.
In coastal areas, boats are used to transport and dropoff hunters.

Guided hunters are also transported by airplanes on floats, skis, or wheels. Typically, the guide and hunters are dropped at campsite by piper cub(carries 1 passenger.) Hunting is done on foot(walking;) or occasionally by horses, motorboat, or ATV. They sleep in tents or cabins.
Guided hunters in coastal areas sleep on a boat, going to shore to hunt in skiff.

Sportfishing: Unguided fishermen are dropped off by airplane or motorboat, then fish from a base camp or float trip.

Guided fishermen:

1. Lodge: Sleep and eat at a lodge, are transported to fishing areas by airplane(floats) or motorboat.
2. Float trip: Guests and all supplies and equipment transported by airplane to upstream part of river. They then drift down the river in inflatable boats. A guide rows each raft with oars. Tents are set up at new place each day by river. Trip

ends at a village or place on river where party can be picked up by motor boat or airplane.

Subsistence hunting and fishing

has priority over other uses of wildlife.

All Alaskans may subsistence hunt on state owned lands.

Alaskans who live adjacent to Federally owned lands in rural areas have a preference to subsistence resources.

The Alaskan Constitution and Federal U.S. Law do not agree.

Co-management of wildlife by Alaska State and U.S. Governments is awkward situation. Alaska is only state where this occurs.

Land ownership

Guided hunting and fishing operations must have permits from each landowner on whose land they use. Unguided users don't need a land use permit in most cases.

Large proportion of Alaska is **Federal ownership**.

Agency land designations:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service- National Wildlife Refuges

National Park Service- sport hunting allowed on Preserve lands surrounding park, but not within Park land.

Bureau of Land Management

U.S. Forest Service- National Forest

Hunting Guide numbers are limited on these lands.

Agency issues a prospectus and decision made on who will provide services in particular area. Criteria for decision includes history of violation of applicable laws, experience in area and guiding hunters, ability to provide adequate services. Areas are awarded for 5 -10 years. Guide has exclusive right to conduct guided hunts. However, any unguided hunter, whether Alaskan resident or nonresident, may hunt on any Federal land open to sport hunting, even within designated guide areas.

Only a few rivers flowing through US federal lands have limits on fishing guide numbers. A similar method used to decide which guides will get to conduct services.

U.S. Government lands have no limit on numbers of unguided fishermen or hunters, regardless of origin.

Alaska State lands have no limits on numbers of fishermen or hunters. There is also no limit on the number of guides on state land. This is another example of when U.S. and Alaskan laws do not agree. Guides must register to conduct hunts

within an area, but there is no procedure to limit numbers. Hunting guides are limited to 3 guide areas, however, regardless of the landowners. Land use permits allow use on any undesignated state land, basically.

The numbers of fishermen and hunters traveling to remote Alaska is increasing. This has caused local subsistence hunters and fishers to feel there is too much competition. In some cases the sport hunters and fishermen also feel they have too much competition, or their backcountry experience is degraded by encountering other people. Subsistence hunters complain about the numbers of aircraft flying and landing, causing disruption of wildlife and hunting activities. Subsistence fishermen feel that jetboats ascend rivers too far and damage salmon spawning habitat.

Some Alaskan Natives have a fundamental dislike for catch and release fishing, saying it is playing with their food.

Most Sportfishing in remote areas is based on releasing the majority of fish caught. Some species, Rainbow trout in particular, are protected. They are targeted by sport fishermen, but never killed.

Laws and Regulations

control the effects of hunters and fishers on the wildlife and fish.

the Alaska state Legislature passes laws which concern various aspects of hunting and fishing as well as management by the agency in charge, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.(ADFG)

Regulations concerning hunting and fishing seasons, bag limits, methods , and means are passed by the AK Board of Fish and the AK Board of Game. Members are appointed by Alaska's governor. These Boards take written and oral testimony from individuals and representatives of organizations. There is also a statewide system of citizen Advisory Committees whose main function is to give local input on hunting, fishing, and wildlife related issues to the Boards of Fish and Game. Special committees are also formed by the boards or agencies to explore specific topics and advise managers. Identified examples are brown bear and chum salmon management, as well as user conflicts in certain areas. These committees provide opportunities for fair representation of all stakeholders. Boards and agencies consider this input along with biological information to make decisions regarding hunting and fishing regulations and related wildlife actions.

The Federal agencies have a system of Regional Advisory Committees which provide input to a Subsistence Board of agency personnel who make hunting regulations pertaining to subsistence uses on federal lands. These regulations might mirror the state regulations, or they might override them.

Other Problems related to Hunting and Fishing Tourism

Many of the problems are not unique to these activities.

This includes camps not practicing adequate garbage disposal, fuel handling, and sanitation practices. Improper use of motorized vehicles is also an issue.

Problems more specific to hunting and fishing include handling of fish and game meat, and obeying hunting and fishing regulations.

Allowing meat or fish to spoil and go to waste is a serious offense in Alaska. Using aircraft, boats, or other motorized vehicles unlawfully to hunt is also dealt with harshly by law enforcement officers. Helicopters can not be used for transporting hunters. It is also unlawful to hunt the same day a hunter or guide flies in an airplane.

In general, those businesses who have a site permit will abide by the conditions listed on the permit as well as relevant regulations or they risk losing it. Federal land permittees tend to be exemplary because of the effort they have put forth to obtain a permit and once lost will be difficult to reobtain.

Crowding and competition has always been of particular concern. Tourists who pay the high price for a remote wilderness hunting or fishing vacation expect solitude as well as plentiful numbers of the species of animal or fish they seek. Encountering other users, or aircraft or boats not only detracts from the experience, but gives the perception that likelihood for success is diminished. The Alaska Board of Fish can only reduce the number of fish allowed to be kept or shorten the season. The Board of Game has similar measures as well as limiting the number of permits allowed to hunt a particular species. The basis for these reductions must usually concern the resource, the populations of fish and wildlife. It is problematic because of the way state laws are worded to attempt to reduce numbers of nonresident hunters or fishermen in the field.

These steps available to the Boards can hinder guide operations to the point of no longer being able to conduct their business. Permits for hunters rather than unlimited licenses make long range planning difficult. They are uncertain as to whether a hunter will get a permit or be able to use it until a month prior or even the day on which the actual hunt starts.

Actions taken to reduce harvest by nonresidents often results in a "domino effect:" hunters go to adjacent units with less stringent regulations. The result is crowding in those areas.

There is no Board to regulate guides, outfitters, and transporters, those businesses involved in commercial hunting activities. There is no regulatory body specific to fishing tourism either. There was a Big Game Commercial Services Board, which was abolished by the state legislature several years ago. It was stated that agencies could regulate these activities well enough. So hunting guides and transporters are regulated by FWP enforcement of hunting regulations, land use permits, and the Dept. of Commerce 's Division of Occupational Licensing.

Several groups have requested the Alaskan legislature to restore the BGCSB, but to no avail.

Fishing guides are regulated similarly, although there is no test required for a license.

Ethics and education

Many problems relating to hunting and fishing tourism are being addressed through adoption of professional ethics among guides and transporters. Groups such as the Alaska Professional Hunters Association encourage their members and the guiding industry to practice common sense and ethical behavior to enhance the experience of those who travel to Alaska to hunt as well as to remedy conflicts with resident hunters and other users.

Hunting groups such as Safari Club International as well as the Alaska Department of Fish and Game offer brochures, videos, and clinics to educate hunters in topics such as meat care and preparation and trophy judging as well as wildlife conservation. In this way unguided hunters are more likely to make decisions in the field which will lead to a satisfying conclusion to their hunt.

Positive aspects of Hunting and Fishing Tourism

I mentioned the problem of crowding among backcountry users. I should point out that guided hunting parties tend to be much smaller groups than for other types of tourism, tending to have a 1 guide or staff per guest ratio, and group size of 2 to 4. The percentage of nonresident hunters tends to correlate with the remoteness of an area. The more difficult and expensive the transportation to get there, the lower the proportion of Alaskan residents. From my own experience I feel that guided hunts are the least tolerant of the presence of other people, regardless of whether they are hunters.

This group of tourism businesses has been labeled the "canary" of tourism, referring to canaries carried in coal mines to detect poisonous gas.

Hunting is mostly conducted during those seasons when other forms of tourism are absent. The bulk of hunting takes place during months of April and May, and September to November.

Guided hunting operations are often long term, with several necessary permits required. Guides are limited to 3 guide areas, and must pass separate tests to get an Assistant guide license, Registered guide license, as well as separate tests for each Game Mgt. Unit in which we are allowed to conduct hunts. There are no other forms of tourism that have the level of accountability in relation to numbers of tourists as hunting guides. When there is any problem, whether social or conservation, hunting guides are the easiest target for agencies and user groups. This is an advantage in that guided hunter numbers are relatively predictable, and easy to regulate. Most other categories of tourists tend to be managed after the fact, and are more difficult to regulate. Hunting guides have complained that their small impact is being singled out, while the more significant sources of problems, such as unguided hunters, continue with no controls, or at best, all nonresident hunters being limited equally, regardless of the volume of a particular business.

Tourism \$

First is a **graph** showing relative wilderness trip costs for hunting and fishing tourism. (\$8000 for hunt, \$2000 for fishing.)These numbers are averages spent after arriving in Anchorage. I believe they would be similar for arrivals via Juneau

or Fairbanks. Hunting trips are usually planned for 10 days, whereas fishing trips will tend to be for a week.

The hunts would be for a combination of moose and caribou. Guided brown bear hunts cost more.

The **next graph** shows contribution to Alaskan wildlife management by nonresident hunters. Although they make up a small percent of the game harvested, the revenue from nonresident hunting licenses and tags, coupled with the 75% matching Federal dollars which come from taxes on hunting equipment purchases, make up about 3/4 of the 17 million dollar budget of the Alaska Department of fish and Game's Division of Wildlife Conservation. The remainder not included in this graph comes from grants and contracts, and a very small amount from the State general fund.

Fishing tourism dollars fund the ADFG Division of Sportfish in similar amount.