



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
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Department of Fish and Game

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Subject: Advisory Committee meetings in the face of COVID-19

Dear Alaska Fish and Game Advisory Committee Members:

First, let me remark that I hope you and your family and friends are all well and had a full summer. My wife and I did not leave Juneau, but we were able to spend time around the outlying area which was fun.

While my experience so far with the pandemic is not extraordinary, it has been disconcerting. Through it I find two constants as it relates to this letter. The first thing is we find ourselves in an ever-changing landscape where rules change, practices change, what we face on a day-to-day basis change. The other observation is how differently people are reacting to the COVID-19 condition. Whether it is frustration, acceptance, fear, disinterest, compliance, defiance, (the list goes on) people have a range of emotions and behaviors which adds stress and strain for all.

Yes, the purpose of this letter is to explain how Boards Support intends to help facilitate your meeting schedules this year, but I would ask that we approach it with an expectation that things are changing daily and flexibility is needed. In addition, fostering a common respect for the feelings of our fellow advisory committee members, and the friends and neighbors we represent, will help all of us.

Planning in the Age of COVID-19

Like many of you I track the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic in Alaska. In the last few weeks Alaska's numbers are increasing to the highest levels we have seen, both in urban and rural communities. At its current rate, we may see a doubling of case counts in less than a month. When community spread is occurring at this rate it is difficult to have in-person meetings, especially in light of some AC members who have underlying health conditions.

If you have not had an opportunity to review the information Boards Support put together for the Board of Fisheries during its September 16, 2020 special meeting, you may find it helpful. The meeting site is: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fisheriesboard.meetinginfo&date=09-16-2020&meeting=tele>. Included in the meeting material is a document called "Mitigation Scenarios re: COVID-19". This document has guidance from the State's COVID-19 Unified Command on what mitigation measures need to be in place when hosting a board meeting, or really any meeting for that matter.

Among the points in that document and what was explained to the board at the meeting is when we practice 6 foot social distancing there are space limitations to meeting attendance that makes holding the meeting not logistically possible, given our commitment to having an open public process. Even if everyone agreed to implement all the safety measures and a sickness still hit attendees, those individuals would need to quarantine leading to meeting delays or closure and significant cost. And aside from all the safety measures we implement, there are still many of our long-time stakeholders who simply are not comfortable attending; some because of a pre-existing health condition that puts them at a higher risk, others because they are protecting their families and their communities. With this information and more, the board agreed to hold its work session on Zoom and postpone to the spring its December and January regulatory meetings. If you listen to the meeting recording, you will hear that the board did this reluctantly, because they value the public, in-person interaction provided by Alaskans.

In-person meetings

At this time, Boards Support is not prepared to help facilitate in-person meetings for ACs, although we are continuing to look closely at it and monitor the situation. There are differences between a board and AC meeting which can help in the decision-making. However, given the continued escalation of COVID-19 related cases in Alaska today, there is much to consider and we are not ready.

Here is our current thinking regarding in-person meetings:

- If an AC was to hold an in-person meeting, it must develop a mitigation plan consistent with the State's [Guidance for Developing and Submitting Community/Workforce Protective Plans](#). This means:
 - the room must be set up for 6 foot social distancing which requires a map of the facility with adequate spacing,
 - all participants must wear masks,
 - there should be adequate hand sanitizer and signage,
 - care should be given to allow for separate entrance and exits,
 - rooms should have adequate ventilation,
 - rooms should receive adequate cleaning, and
 - there must be some testing (COVID-19 test, temperature at the door, answering illness related questions) of participants.
- Organizers should ask what are the current local mandates in the host community? Are gatherings allowed and what, if any, are the mitigation requirements?
 - What is the current active case count in the host community? Is it on the rise, decline, at zero?
 - What are the requirements of the facility?
 - What are the chances that a meeting attendee has COVID-19? What information tells us about the potential for COVID-19 spread at an AC meeting in that host community?
- Critical to any decision to hold an in-person meeting is:
 - Who will enforce the mitigation measures?
 - What is the maximum attendance based on room size and mitigation measures, and how will the AC account for overflows?

- Does the room have adequate teleconferencing or virtual meeting (like Zoom) capacity? Will the teleconference/virtual meeting function well for those on the phone or online if in-person attendees are spread out among the room? No AC meeting can happen this year without providing remote connection services given concerns AC members and interested stakeholders may have regarding spread of the virus at large gatherings.

Again, we will continue to explore how in-person AC meetings can occur and appreciate any feedback you have for us, but these concerns remain top-of-mind.

Teleconference and Zoom meetings

Boards Support is prepared to assist ACs with teleconferences and/or Zoom meetings. We developed a guide (attached) for AC teleconferences and Zoom meetings. To be sure, holding an AC meeting remotely can be difficult, most notably holding elections, but we are working to find ways to make this possible.

Please take a moment to review these best practices. Our regional coordinators are reaching out to chairs to determine the best approach for your committee.

We thank you for your service to your local communities and neighbors, and Alaska's fish and game management system. With your help we will manage this meeting cycle.

Sincerely,



Glenn Haight
Executive Director