



unapologetically **FOR ALASKAN RESIDENTS**

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Why We Formed and What our Goals Are

“Resident Hunters of Alaska is dedicated to enhancing and prioritizing opportunities for Alaskan resident hunters in accordance with responsible wildlife management, focused on preserving our Alaskan hunting heritage for future generations.”

– RHAK Mission Statement

RHAK is a new organization primarily focused on a clear statutory resident priority to our game resources. We largely formed over dismay at how our current Board of Game (BOG) avoids difficult allocation decisions in favor of restrictions that directly or indirectly sideline residents from the hunt.

Over many decades, numerous organizations have arisen and committed time and money, employing lobbyists and staff, all with the intent to protect nonresident guided hunting opportunities in Alaska. We have seen and felt the influence and power they have gained from their efforts. Those political efforts are how we ended up with the must-be-guided law for Dall sheep, brown/grizzly bear, and mountain goat. It’s how we ended up with a draw permit system on Kodiak that allocates 40% of the permits to nonresidents. It’s how we ended up with draw permit systems for moose in some areas that allocate 50% of the permits to nonresidents. It’s how we ended up with unlimited nonresident guided sheep hunting opportunities that result in a nonresident guided sheep harvest of 60-80% in some areas and 40% statewide. It’s how we look down the road and see lost opportunities and burdensome fees for resident DIY hunters to access the field through a Transporter, and many other policies and regulations that whittle away at resident participation, while holding sacred the non-resident allocations.

We certainly don’t fault other groups for these successful efforts even if we strongly disagree with the outcome; they are trying to protect and preserve something that means a great deal to them, whether it is the Alaskan big game guiding livelihood or nonresident hunting opportunities in Alaska. But we see a different future for Alaskans.

RHAK is unapologetically focused on preserving and protecting resident hunting traditions and opportunities as our state constitution intended. To do that and have any success we have to follow to some extent the same general blueprint of the existing organizations, including staff, lobbyists, legal counsel and a strong public website. All of this is needed to start educating the public and politicians about what has been going on for many years. In today’s world this strategy requires significant funds.

At the beginning of March, with the 2016 statewide BOG meeting in front of us and the legislative session ending shortly thereafter, we asked for 100 Founding Members to contribute \$1,000 to get RHAK financially grounded. Within two weeks, we were able to hire an Executive Director and lobbyist to start talking to the administration, legislators and the public about a system that in too many ways seemed biased against the resident hunter. The response from resident hunters has been gratifying, and for some the Founder-level contribution was an especially large financial commitment, showing how important these issues are.

In Juneau in April 2016, RHAK spoke personally with many legislators, as well as the Governor and the Boards & Commissions Director. We advocated strongly for changes to the Board of Game; more diversity and less guide industry influence, and our new fledgling membership mobilized and contacted legislators asking for the same. We supported legislation to force the BOG to follow its own policy on board-generated proposals so we didn't again end up with a subversion of the public process; we opposed the Big Game Commercial Services Board's attempts to regulate resident hunters who use commercial services to access the field, and we supported a hunting license increase bill to better fund the Division of Wildlife Conservation for the benefit of all resident hunters.

We didn't get everything we asked for. The BOG nominee we opposed was confirmed for another term, the result of a last-minute vote shift "deal" on the floor during the joint session. The Big Game Commercial Services Board is still trying to regulate resident hunters. Representative Wilson's bill to force the BOG to follow its own policy stalled in committee due to tactics initiated from Board support staff. On the positive side, the hunting license increase bill (HB 137) did move forward and we expect it to be signed by the Governor. Our exposure of the BOG's passage of proposal 51 that affected nonresident next-of-kin hunters and the relatives who take them hunting helped result in an amendment to HB 137 that will prevent that from happening.

RHAK, in its first six weeks of existence, certainly did not expect 100% success on these matters. Our main goal was to start a conversation in Juneau and in the public arena about what we see going on with wildlife management and hunting issues – and in that we succeeded. Every legislator we spoke with supported a resident preference for our game resources. Most were surprised we didn't already have something in statute to provide that. Many legislators thanked us for helping to form RHAK and for what we are trying to accomplish, committing to work with us down the line to help make a resident priority become law.

It was a huge start and had a great impact that resulted in significant pushback from organizations and individuals who, up until now, have largely controlled the dialog and have agendas contrary to our goal of a clear statutory resident priority for our game resources.

RHAK is excited to fully and formally launch on May 14, 2016 with a brand new website and tiered general membership levels starting at \$35. We will need both numbers and funding to achieve our goal of becoming an advocacy group worthy of walking side by side with the resident hunter.

To our Founding Members and all new members to come, we sincerely thank you for your support and for your participation. We anticipate a \$100,000 budget annually will be needed to step into the ring with those who are working toward opposite goals, and will rise to meet the challenge with your hard-earned dollars going directly toward those efforts.

Please help us help you and future generations of Alaskan hunters protect our resident hunting opportunities. Change is long overdue and RHAK will fight hard to make that change happen.

Thank you!

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