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Senate Bill 297 Sponsor Statement

“An Act relating to bear predation management and the donation and sale of bear hides and skulls.”

There is no shortage of black or grizzly/brown bears in Alaska. Here, they are neither threatened nor endangered. In some Game Management Units the bear populations are many multiples of the established population objectives. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game estimates statewide black bear populations as high as 200,000 and the grizzly/brown bear population as high as 35,000.

In certain Game Management Units, estimates range from 70–90% of all the moose calves are dead before they reach two months of age due, in large part, to bear predation. As a result, fall recruitment is virtually zero and the reproductive base populations are crashing. The well publicized 2003 McGrath bear relocation experiment clearly demonstrated that a reduction in bear populations has a direct positive effect on increasing calf survivability and thus the long-term health of the resource. But relocation efforts do not solve the underlying problem.

[Senate Bill 297](#) addresses Alaska’s bear over-population problem in those places — called Intensive Management Areas — where the Board of Game has: (1) first determined that consumptive use of the big game population is a preferred use; (2) depletion of the big game population has occurred and may result in a significant reduction in the allowable human harvest of the population; and (3) enhancement of abundance or productivity of the big game prey population is feasibly achievable utilizing recognized and prudent active management techniques.

It is important to understand that the provisions in SB 297 only come into play if the Board of Game, advised by the Department of Fish and Game biologists, finds that bears are a cause of the depletion or reduction of big game productivity.

Once the above findings have been made, SB 297 allows for remediation efforts through the issuance of bear predation management permits. These special-purpose permits relax certain restrictions relative to the taking of bears in those areas where bear predation is identified as a problem. The Bill also provides guidance with respect to bear sealing as well as disposition of hides and skulls taken under this Act.

A strong point of emphasis is that this program in all reality is, and should be viewed as, a predator control program. The provisions of this Act *do not apply* to Game Management Units in which intensive management is not necessary. Furthermore, proactive measures end as soon as the bear populations are once again within the population objectives that have been set by the Board of Game.