



PRESS RELEASE

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Alaska Legislature Passes Resolution Calling for Actions to Prevent the Spread of Diseases and Pathogens to Wildlife

(Juneau)- Alaska's legislature made a strong bipartisan statement yesterday when the Senate unanimously passed *House Concurrent Resolution 23 (HCR23)*. Anchorage Representative and Co-Chair of the House Resource Committee Andy Josephson (D) was the prime sponsor of the resolution. Anchorage Senator Cathy Giessel (R), Chair of the Senate Resource Committee, carried HCR 23 on the Senate floor.

HCR 23- "Support(s) enhanced efforts to protect wildlife and domestic animals in the state from infectious diseases, foreign pathogens, and nonendemic parasites"

Filed in the second year of a contentious legislative session, *HCR 23* was quickly identified by lawmakers as an important policy statement supporting wildlife conservation. As a result, *HCR 23* became a resource committee priority and moved quickly through the legislative process.

Representative Andy Josephson's introductory comments on the house floor capture the spirit of *HCR 23* –“(T)he impetus or real concern, came from big game hunters and guides with the concern for the health of our wildlife, specifically Dall's sheep, mountain goats and muskoxen.”

Rep. Josephson went on to reference broad public support for *HCR 23*- “I have literally received scores and scores of letters in support of this measure”- on April 13 the House voted 36-3 in support of the resolution.

The Democratic House Resource Committee Co-chair's efforts found strong support in the Republican led Senate Majority. *HCR 23* was quickly heard in Senator Cathy Giessel's Resource committee and moved to the floor less than a week later.

Known as a strong champion of wildlife conservation, Senator Giessel carried the resolution on the Senate floor. Senator Giessel's remarks on the floor referred to the recent news that a foreign pathogen *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* or *M.ovi* was discovered in wild sheep and goats in Alaska; “the risks are growing and the stakes are high.”

Alaska is home to 25% of all the wild sheep in North America along with almost 27,000 Rocky Mountain goats and 9,000 Muskoxen. Together they make up Alaska's wild Caprinae species.

Senator Giessel summed up her remarks, *"Alaska needs to be leading the way in preventing any transmission of diseases or pathogens between our wild and domestic animals.... It is always better to prevent than repair or rebuild."* The Alaska Senate subsequently passed HCR 23, 19-0.

Alaska Wild Sheep Foundation president Kevin Kehoe expressed his appreciation to the Alaska Legislature:

"Sheep hunters and wildlife enthusiasts should all be grateful for this foresighted action by the Alaska Legislature. HCR 23 is a classic example of Alaskan wildlife conservation values. In an era of divided government and polarizing politics it is refreshing to see bi-partisan support for the prevention of disease transmission to Alaska's wildlife."

Mr. Kehoe continued-

"AK WSF shares the conservation values expressed in HCR 23. We see this as a call to action, one we are already working to answer. As a non-government conservation organization, we are committed to working hard to partner, participate and help resource where ever possible consistent with the goals embodied in HCR 23."

The Alaska Wild Sheep Foundation's stated mission is to support the conservation of Alaska's wild sheep, mountain goats and muskoxen. AK WSF has launched a *"Disease Free in the North"* program that involves working with the State and domestic sheep and goat owners to test for *M.ovi* and mitigate the risk of transmission to wild populations. AK WSF proposes to pay for testing and mitigation to alleviate financial burdens to domestic owners.

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