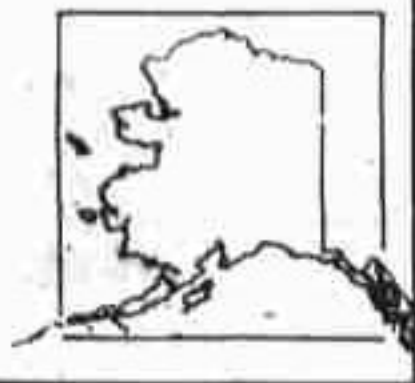


Editorial



Loophole threatens subsistence

by Martha Lee

Chukchi News and Information Service

KOTZEBUE — In years past, when Alaska Natives were living and experiencing the total, complete and pure subsistence lifestyle, all or nearly all fish and wildlife they caught were used for nourishment, clothing, shelter, transportation and heat.

Traditional laws were passed by word of mouth from generation to generation. Verbal laws included the following: do not waste, take only what is needed, show respect for nature, share with others and treat the animals with respect.

Today, Alaska's subsistence users are regulated by laws made and passed by federal and state agencies. There are limits to the amount of game that hunters can take home to feed their families.

However, the subsistence law does permit the bartering, selling and purchasing of game or parts of game within certain geographical game management units of Alaska.

Alaska regulations state that no person may purchase or sell the meat of big game identified as black, brown grizzly bear, caribou, deer, elk, mountain goat, moose, musk oxen, Dall sheep, wolf and wolverines; and no one may purchase or sell any part of bear, or unsealed beaver, land otter, lynx, wolf, wolverine or marten from game management units 1-5, 7 and 15.

The latter part of this sentence, though, does not apply to our unit in Northwest Alaska. Also, even though the skull, horns or antlers of Alaska big game cannot be sold as a whole, such as in mounted trophies, the regulation does allow the sale of naturally shed antlers, horns or an antler that has been removed from the skull.

This loophole concerns me. If people take unfair advantage of this by selling parts of animals, they will be seen as irresponsible profiteers, and this will lead to more limits and restrictions on responsible subsistence users.

There is not enough wildlife for every Alaskan to live off the land, let alone in a wasteful manner.

Wild meat, fish and naturally growing edible plants are the natural substitutes for milk products, fruits, vegetables and grains, which are popular in the Western diet. These would have to be imported into the rural areas and sold at a higher cost. Therefore, it is more cost effective for rural Alaska Natives to depend on wildlife and natural resources for existence. But this lifestyle is at risk.

The current subsistence laws were intended to be beneficial to the subsistence way of life. Is this being fulfilled by allowing the sale of parts of big game? That provision could lead to wanton waste of big game in the future. The more dead, antlerless carcasses found along migratory routes, the worse it will look for Alaska Natives to subsist in the future.