

Local economic zones draw praise

by Paul Swetzof

for the Tundra Times

Local economic zones are morally justified and legally feasible. They are also necessary to assure the economic and subsistence viability of many villages, especially in the coastal regions of Alaska.

It is morally inexcusable that village residents have to watch the great majority of the resources in their immediate area be harvested by people who live far away from their village while their subsistence and economic needs remain unmet. It is time to begin the process of dismantling the Limited Entry System around coastal villages and putting in its place a system which helps to assure the continued economic existence of village Alaska.

The protection of the resource in question must of course always be the foremost priority in order that future generations will be able to survive using the resources within established

local economic zones. Having said this, there must be a priority system for the harvesting of resources within the local economic zone and that priority must be made exclusive to the people who live closest to the resource in question.

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By example, let's refer to the Aleut village of St. Paul and halibut as the resource in question. Let's assume that the difficult question of the boundaries of the local economic zone have been established.

Let's also assume that the resource limits for the halibut harvest have been biologically established and that the maximum allowable harvest for this particular halibut opening is 60 million pounds. Let's say that the villagers of St. Paul are able to harvest 30 million pounds of halibut during the time that halibut season is open in the local economic zone.

The next logical step is to extend the season until the additional 30 million

allowable pounds are harvested. The local processing plants made viable by the local economic zone would assure that villagers who didn't work on the boats would have a job and may even have some seasonal jobs for other Alaskans.

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By establishing this system the state will be able to do more to assure the economic viability of village Alaska than all of the combined development and other program schemes it can come up with. The number of people in the villages having to depend on

welfare, food stamps and make-work schemes would be drastically reduced and very likely eliminated in many villages.

The state would stand to save millions of dollars in program and capital expenditures. The state would realize a continuous infusion of funds as the result of villagers who spend their money in Alaska.

And the state could point to pride to the many villages which have a good standard of living where people used to be impoverished.

Local village governments would be healthy economic entities. All of this could be the result of this one simple common sense approach called the local economic zone.

Let's all of us apply the pressure needed to be certain that the state and other governmental entities see the benefit which all of Alaska would derive from the local economic zone.

It makes economic sense. It assures the survival of much of village Alaska. A decent standard of living is the result.

Plentiful jobs are created where none existed before. Everyone wins. And most importantly it's the right thing to do. The local economic zone. Let's do it.