

AFN grills Sommerville

Although he apologized if some members of the Native community might have found some of his remarks offensive, State Game Director Ron Sommerville last Friday refused to apologize for making them or for his opposition to federal oversight of fish and game management in Alaska.

At issue was a speech Sommerville made on July 25 to the Alaska Outdoor Association, a group vociferously opposed to subsistence amendments contained in D-2 legislation pending in Congress and, apparently, as set forth in current State policy.

That speech prompted Gov. Jay S. Hammond to call for an investigation of Sommerville's remarks, which the Governor called "at best inappropriate and at worst inflammatory." Sommerville made his stand before an angry meeting of the board of directors of the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) Friday afternoon.

Among other statements, Sommerville was reported saying at that meeting that efforts made on behalf of subsistence represented nothing more than a "front to cover the unholy

alliance between the Natives and the preservationists." Sommerville and his boss, Fish and Game Commissioner Ron Skoog, have since said those reports were erroneous and his comments before the association were taken out of context.

Sommerville brought to the AFN special meeting a purported transcript of his July 25 remarks, and that transcript did not contain the exact phrase that was reported. The transcript however, contained numerous deletions where (See SOMMERVILLE, Page 3)

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(continued from page 1) Sommerville's remarks were either garbled or incomplete.

Yet, even though Sommerville said the tape had not been "Nixonized," enough remained in the 13 page transcript to provoke harsh questions from Native Leaders, particularly Roger Lang, president of the Alaska Native Foundation (ANF), as to the propriety of his speech in the first

Mallot said. The former AFN president and current head of the Sealaska Corporation said that Native groups had tried very hard over the years to work positively with the State Government on the subsistence issue. "We've worked hard not to create divisiveness; Sommerville's statements did exactly that."

Throughout his presentation to the AFN board, Sommerville said he was not

groups which Lang and others at the meeting found derogatory and Sommerville was questioned closely on those. In particular, Lang wanted Sommerville to identify those Native Leaders that Sommerville had said were pushing for exclusive use of fish and game resources for the Natives.

Sommerville refused to name those he was referring to, finally saying that it was personal opinion. "It's a damned lie," Lang retorted.

Sommerville also refused to apologize for his statements that people in the villages really did not distinguish between State or Federal Management, especially since "a lot of people cannot even speak the language and can't read our regulation book."

Martin Moore of Emmonak was particularly incensed over that portion of the speech. "You're talking about a lot of people," Moore said and demanded a public apology.

"I'm not going to apologize," said Sommerville, adding that he would stand by that statement. "Some people haven't distinguished (between the State and Federal Government), I didn't refer to everybody."

"These people are not going to give up their subsistence way of life; I know this," Moore responded. "Start Making statements you're going to protect (subsistence). Many are not going to survive without subsistence."



TRIES TO EXPLAIN -- Director of Game Ron Sommerville attempts to explain position to AFN meeting.

place and the extent of his support of State policies which recognize subsistence as the priority item in Alaska's fish and game management.

Lang characterized Sommerville's July 25 speech as "heaping coals on an unholy fire" of racism and State's rights made to a group that is "predicated those issue." Carl Jack, chairman of the AFN Board called Sommerville's speech "tantamount to breaking of diplomatic relations" between the Natives and the State Government on the Subsistence issue. And Byron Mallot said Sommerville's speech did nothing more than "fan the flames of divisiveness" among the State's population.

"It was an unfortunate thing that happened,"

referring in his speech to an "unholy alliance" between Natives and environmentalists. He said it wasn't the Natives who were putting up a "front" on the subsistence issue, but the environmentalist, and, he predicted that that "front" would eventually prove more harmful to the Native position on subsistence over the long run that would state management of fish and game resources.

"I am unalterably opposed to federal control of fish and wildlife," Sommerville said. "We feel the State is in the best position and that of his department" doesn't mean that we're anti-Native; it doesn't mean we're anti-subsistence."

Yet, throughout the text of his speech are references to Natives and Native