

Walrus for subsistence

hunters may face stiff controls

(Editor's note: the following article is reprinted from the NOME NUGGET. Response to comments made by Game Biologist Carl Grauvogel as reported by the Nugget is made in a letter to the editor on page 2.)

A week ago the Norton Sound Game advisory committee heard Carl Grauvogel, area game biologist present several proposals he thought should be enacted into law for the 1977 hunting season.

One of the more controversial subjects dealt with the issue of subsistence walrus hunting.

Grauvogel explained as follows:

During the decade of the 60s the statewide harvest of walrus remained relatively constant, averaging about 1,700 animals a year. In 1972 the Marine Mammal Protection Act transferred authority from the State to the federal government and at the same time allowed Native hunters to take as many walrus as they wanted with virtually no restrictions.

About the same time, money was pouring into the state from the pipeline and other construction projects. Native handicrafts, particularly ivory, was in demand more than ever.

In the last 20 years Eskimo hunters have derived a portion of their cash income from the sale of ivory carvings, but as more and

more cash was needed to purchase fuel, food and to meet a growing list of monthly payments, more raw ivory had to be turned into a salable product.

With a ready market for their commodity, and with no restrictions against the manner in which walrus were killed, naturally there was a corresponding increase in the annual walrus harvest.

The kill increased from 1,600 in 1973 to nearly 3,000 this year.

Biologically the population can probably withstand a harvest of this magnitude, but other factors enter the picture. As subsistence hunters sought more ivory to meet their commitment in what has fast become a total cash economy, there was a corresponding increase in the wastage of walrus meat.

It takes only a couple of walrus to supply the meat requirement of most families, and beyond this point hunters begin looking at the animals principally for their ivory, said Grauvogel.

He Continued:

To many hunters such action is regarded as a form of subsistence. By selling walrus products they are meeting their families' needs! In truth, though, such a sale is really bordering on commercialization.

As Grauvogel sees it, limited commercialization would not be so bad, if the animals could be utilized fully. He said that in this day and age when there is a world-wide shortage of protein, wasting hundreds of thousands of pounds of meat does not seem justified.

What are the solutions?

Nothing will come easy, he said, but added that there are some answers. He would like to see storage facilities so meat could be preserved in a fresh state throughout the year. Surpluses could be sold to other communities, he said, or perhaps marketed to businesses such as pet food companies.

Currently there is a freezer facility in the village of Savoonga that lack nothing more than the freezing unit itself.

Over 600 walrus were taken in a six-week period at Savoonga last spring, Grauvogel noted, adding, considering the amount of meat that could be salvaged, the modest cost of making the freezer operable would seem to be a good investment.

These ideas, he said, were brought before the Regional corporation and the Village Council but to date little progress has been made.

It is argued that there is no current market for walrus meat and therefore hunters have no incentive to salvage any excess.

That is not entirely true. Northern Commercial Co. has periodically bought limited quantities, and the Nome Merc. has offered to purchase all they can get at 50 cents a pound, plus freight. The market also is limited but has never been entirely saturated.

Based on recent trends, Grauvogel thinks the walrus harvest will continue to increase, and lacking controls there will undoubtedly be an increase in the amount of meat that is wasted.

Control of walrus was returned to State management in April of this year and several hunting restrictions were imposed, including a limit on cows and the requirement of a minimum caliber rifle.

But, current regulations do not make it illegal to waste marine mammal meat.

"Perhaps it is now time to begin thinking along these lines," Grauvogel said. "It is a sensitive issue and hunters may be very disturbed over such a regulation unless there are other options available for the use of excess meat."

"However in the next few years it is likely that such a regulation will be forthcoming and hunters should be thinking ahead."

In the meantime the Department of Fish & Game is looking at ways of holding the present harvest within acceptable limits. One proposal is to place a bag limit of 15 walrus per hunter within a maximum quota established for each village.

Quotas would be based on past harvest records and not necessarily on population, Grauvogel said.

For instance, St. Lawrence Island may receive quota of 800 animals while Nome might only obtain 300.

The entire state quota probably would not exceed 3,000 animals.

Grauvogel continued:

Waste aside, just obtaining walrus has its problems. For every animal retrieved, two are lost in the process. This is readily evident for anyone who takes a close look at our beaches during the summer.

Some carcasses are the result of "headhunting" but many come ashore after the animal dies from wounds.

Through the years the department lobbied for hunters to make a voluntary effort to reduce this loss rate. Little was accomplished, Grauvogel said and finally the minimum caliber regulations are the answer.

"It's going to take 'awareness' on the hunters' part; an awareness that the game is not unlimited," he said, "and that every animal has to be utilized to its full potential in a wise manner. This means developing respect for the animal."

Grauvogel said all hunters need to evolve a new philosophy toward game. He noted that every walrus which is not retrieved is one less that is available for future use and for future generations. Grauvogel welcomed comment.

"If anyone has ideas on how some of these game problems can be solved they are invited to present their views at the next meeting of the Norton Sound Advisory board, the date of which will be announced later."

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The Federal Communications Commission has notified U.S. Senator Ted Stevens that is re-examining newly established regulations covering the use of examinations by mail for applicants for amateur radio licenses who reside in rural Alaska.

Stevens had contacted the Commission after learning that the new regulations had been adopted restricting the future availability of amateur radio service operator examinations by mail. The regulation requires that all Alaskans desiring any class of amateur radio license must travel to FCC field offices to be tested.

In a letter to FCC Chairman Richard Wiley, Stevens pointed out the great hardship this presents for rural Alaskans. "The great distances involved, and the great expense of travel, all of which must be done by air, present an unfair and unworkable situation in Alaska," Stevens said.

The Commission has now advised Stevens that they are now actively examining new ways of dealing with the unique situation Alaska presents. Among the possibilities are the establishment of additional testing sites in rural Alaska and the creation of a special amateur license available by mail but valid only in Alaska. A Commission spokesman said that until action is taken by the full Commission, the FCC will extend special consideration to residents of rural Alaska on a case-by-case basis.

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SALARY: DOE

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New man in Canadian Native Affairs

From INUIT TODAY

There's a new man running the federal department of Indian affairs and northern development, as the result of some changes in the federal cabinet made recently by the Prime Minister Trudeau.

The new minister of Indian and northern affairs is Warren Allmand, from Montreal. He replaces Judd Buchanan, who has now taken over the department of public works.

Warren Allmand is 44 years old. He has been a member of parliament since 1965, and from 1972 until this fall he was the solicitor-general of Canada, in charge of such things as law enforcement, the RCMP and federal penitentiaries.

Of course it is too early to tell whether our dealings with DIAND will change in any significant way with a new minister in charge. But the indications are that Mr. Allmand's heart is in the right place, and his record in the federal government suggests that he will make an honest and sincere effort to be a good minister.

He is a small, slightly-built man and gives the impression of being mild-mannered as well. But don't be fooled by appearances. On past performance, he has shown he can be as tough as they come, and he fights hard for what he believes in. Just as a couple of examples, he has been a strong crusader for prison reform, and he was a leader of the political struggle in parliament to do away with the death penalty for murder.

Warren Allmand says his new job is a "great challenge." The day after his appointment, he was interviewed by Ken Mason, ITC's information director, for the CBC radio program "Our Native Land," and he said his first job will be to find out what is going on in the huge department he has inherited.

"For many years I've been upset by the many injustices suffered by our Native People in Canada—and in fact they are still suffering injustices," he said. "And to have the opportunity to work with the Native People in righting these wrongs and helping them achieve their rightful place in Canada, I think is a very important job and I really look forward to it." He said that "if we can settle some of these problems and help our native people to be self-determined in this country, then to me it will be worth the effort."

Mr. Allmand was asked about outstanding Inuit and Indian land claims in the Northwest Territories, the Yukon and British Columbia. It was pointed out that two previous ministers, Jean Chretien and Judd Buchanan, had been dealing with these claims. Is he hopeful that they'll be settled while he is the minister?

"I hope so," he replied. "I will give these tasks as much dedication and as much effort as I did the projects I worked on as solicitor-general—I'll be fully committed to reaching a just settlement."

The day after that brief interview, Warren Allmand was off on his first trip to the north as minister of Indian and Northern affairs. Among his stops was a visit to Tuktoyaktuk and a first-hand look at the offshore drilling operation in the Beaufort Sea.

James Arvaluk, president of ITC, and John Amagoalik, director of land claims, sent letters to Mr. Allmand congratulating him on his appointment and saying they look forward to working with him in the months ahead.

To that we can add two words, "Good Luck."